

INDEPENDENT “STARDOM” AND ROMANIAN SHOWBIZ

Elena-Lidia DINU¹

Abstract: *The article investigates consumerism and manufactured needs. Since the advent of digital technology, fans have had the opportunity to connect and communicate more easily. Media effects on the society and on individuals are mostly negative resulting in depreciation of headwork, stereotypes prevalence and vulgarity. The celebrities creation process and the subsequent exploitation of (the supposed) stars' attitudes, behaviours and popularity with the public are key-factors for the rise of a mass entertainment industry. Even if the Romanian society is dealing with serious social and, above all, political issues, it continues to be dominated by the power of media and the influence of artificially made models on the masses is huge. As a matter of fact, it is no wonder that celebrities such as Mihaela Rădulescu, Andreea Marin Bănică, Andreea Esca and other members of the Romanian showbiz have got much attention from the tabloids. The article offers a critical review of Stardom, with particular regard to the dominant frame of the supposed celebrities.*

Key words: *television, newspapers, media constructs, fan communities, business, celebrity magazine industry.*

1. Introduction to “Stardom”

Although it is difficult to define, “stardom” can be easily recognized in actors and pop stars[18]. As a whole, a real star should have specific qualities in order to meet the public's and showbiz's expectations.

The Sociologist Edgar Morin approves this idea, remarking that “female and male stars hold essential qualities, whereby the process of idealization and deification will naturally develop”; moreover, “such qualities are missing in a special – and not negligible – category of stars: comedians”[23].

Whereas, Barbie Zelizer notes that stardom is today “the outcome of technological

advances and results from media publicity coupled with repeated media appearances”[21]. Moreover, Sherwin Rosen believes that “stardom” is the elite sector of the society in which a relatively small number of people earn enormous amounts of money[24]. In order to explain this phenomenon, he points out that “stardom” means vocation, and it appears “whenever consumption requires knowledge” [24]. “Stardom” occurs only whenever the quality (of a certain product or service) is acknowledged by the public and rewarded with attention and goods consumption. On the other hand, this leads to, perhaps, the most distinctive feature of a star: power.

¹ Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest, Romania.

Stardom has had a great contribution to the social-economic setting of the American society. For Hollywood major studios, stars have always been key-elements of their business.

The two essential factors which have had a positive impact on the economic stability of the American film industry have been:

- the huge success of most films in the domestic market;

- the conquest of cinema screens abroad, as Charles Ford said [11]. To that effect, the audience is the only subject who carries out a selection process in a society considered to be consumeristic and characterized by education, work, politics, and entertainment. Otherwise, Francesco Alberoni pointed out the following: “The Star System thus never creates the star, but it proposes the candidate for the election, and helps keep the support/appreciation by the electors” [2].

Focusing on the dimension of motion picture industry, seen as a huge business, Lucian Pricop carried out an economic analysis of the elements that make up the movie market [26]:

- a) movies as products of creativity;
- b) simultaneous assessment of demand and supply;
- c) the features of the audience that influence sales.

In the analysis above, Lucian Pricop took into account the effects of TV show; in his opinion, productivity consists of low costs, high chances of show broadcast through digital technical procedures and accessibility to the public. Indeed, productivity is the most important factor in the emerging motion picture industry”. In such a context, the display of stars (who have become primary targets for paparazzi and also source of sensational news for the public) - both as they appear in public events and in their private lives - widely helps to spread the culture of celebrity everywhere. Media coverage mostly has a negative impact on stars' promotion and popularity. In this regard, the Headlines and

the full texts of the articles published in Romanian tabloids are a clear evidence of that trend.

In Romania, entertainment has become a commodity/good for sale in the showbiz. But as long as the public is free to choose their leisure, then entertainment remains – as well as other TV programs - an offer potentially aimed at satisfying their needs as spectators.

2. Making of media products: celebrities

For media companies, show productions as means of entertainment for the people are a prosperous business. Many Romanian TV channels have reached economic success through their own “stardom” products (see Andrea Esca from PRO TV Channel, or Mihaela Rădulescu from Antena 1 TV Channel) whilst developing the cult of celebrity at the same time.

The concept of “celebrity” is different from the “star” one and is usually considered to be a product of a particular type of media (e.g. the Hollywood film industry) [14]. Over the course of the 20th century, “the most prominent contributor to fame” was Hollywood, which allowed the development of a certain type of celebrity [12]. However, celebrity is to be regarded as a phenomenon born under the post modernity conditions, based on image over-production, which leads to some particular faces and bodies being more recognizable than others [14].

Although there are subtle differences between stars and celebrities from the creation process point of view, their goals are similar [14]. Celebrities behave “as signs or media texts ... they provide a way through which media consumers can benefit from and work by articulating personal subjectivity. They enact the possibility of a popular representation of private or common problems, in a sphere dominated by old-fashioned models of politeness” [14].

Celebrities are individuals who have become important persons, with a fake public

image/identity, created by the media. The contrast between public and private, between ordinary and extraordinary is made available through a large amount of data, which, except for movies, can be found in newspapers, fanzines, television shows, rumors and information exchanges among fans [13]. A remarkable example is the following statement released by Monica Bârlădeanu, who, striving for a career in the movie business, took the way to Hollywood: "I'm not interested in fame, I would like to become a very good actress" [25].

Generally, celebrities are recognized by their notoriety. Mihaela Constantinescu [6] noted that, unlike heroes (who are famous for their actions/achievements), celebrities are artificially made, created by the media. They are simply names that, once they are created by news, are making themselves the subsequent news [4].

By the end of 1995, with the advent of Pro TV Channel and the western star system, the media industry has begun to pay more attention to the people's private dimension"[5]. At present, we are witnessing a total confusion of values, as too much attention is being paid to people who stand out of the ordinary mass only for their "eccentric behaviors", rather than to those who make outstanding personal or professional achievements – the latter ones being, on the contrary, completely ignored"[16]. About this issue, Iulian Comănescu tried to understand what kind of mechanism actually hides behind the success of the two most popular TV shows, that seem to have a huge impact on the public" – "*Acces direct*" and "*Un show păcătos*" - launched by Antena 3 (popular TV Channel). In his view, on these shows appear "bizarre and noisy characters, without a clear specialization, but with a high level of notoriety, such as Nikita, Stelian Ogiță, Naomi transgender (and others)"[5]. In this respect, Maurice Barrès remarked: "some celebrities have only notoriety: which is what almost all Parisians

(journalists, novelists, playwrights, actors, and criminals) strive for. Other celebrities are held in high regard: these are the members of the academic world [30].

3. Tabloids and gossip magazines industry

Just like what happened in the TV business, the proliferation of newspapers and magazines and their transformation, respectively, into tabloids and gossip-focused magazines ("*OK!*", "*Hello!*", "*Hola!*", "*Confidențial*" and others) have led to a widespread diffusion of news about the stars' fashion preferences, their family photos and gossip about their private life. Hence, agents, media personalities and photographers have chosen to work together as a proficient way to overload this type of magazines with news. Such a collaboration allows stars to keep some control over the choice of forthcoming pictures. At a certain stage, the expert Max Clifford [29] pointed out: "People are now famous for things that 15 years ago they would have tried hard to hide from the media".

This model of business, based on collaboration, in Romania has been characterized by a massive appearing on magazines and tabloids. The adaptation to the western tabloid (journalism) model has taken place relatively late [5]. "*Libertatea* and *Click!* (popular Romanian newspapers) are quite similar..", beside their format and marketing mechanisms, especially in their focus on gossip and celebrities news.

Since April 2007 (one month after the tabloid *Click!* was first released) *Cancan* (another tabloid newspaper very popular in Romania) has caught TARO's (Transmedia Audit Romanian Office) attention for its extraordinary selling performances, ranking best selling tabloid in business for the year 2009 (with a peak of over 100,000 copies sold per day in December 2008). Unlike *Click!*, *Cancan* - a local product - is richer in exclusive news, reserving two specific

columns for celebrities news (“National Showbiz” and “International Showbiz”) in which a lot of famous persons hit the headlines.

Well-known for their dependence on anonymous sources, tabloid newspapers have access to strictly private moments and vow to reveal the hidden truth. Today, news about celebrities fills the front covers of Romanian tabloids, providing a number of reports on weddings (among others, Melinda and Puya, Bianca Bădoi and Cornel Păsat, Ana Maria Prodan and Laurențiu Reghecampf), drug dealing (Natalia Mateuț), sex (Ioana Vișan, Daniela Crudu, Mariana Moculescu), pregnancies (Daniela Gyorfı, Elena Gheorghiu), infidelities (Ramona Gabor, Marcel Toader, Remus Truică) etc. The reason why tabloids are so popular is that they give the public what they want to know, creating “a space for escapist pleasure and resistance to elite news content about the political system... As a consequence of that, the public is more and more alienated”[22].

Tabloid journalism's origins can be traced, in the USA, back to the early 1920's and, in the UK, back to the first decade of the 20th century. Tabloid journalism style has developed new techniques to gather information, mainly relying on the single reporter's skills and on interviews. Despite their reputation as “scandal sheets”, it is clear that these celebrity magazines, which focus on sensationalism, have prefigured the after-tabloids pursuits (USA: - 1960: *National Enquirer*, *The Sun* – 1964 Great Britain: *Daily Express*, *Weekly Worlds News* - 1980, *Star* - 1990).

The best known case in the world is Princess Diana. Before her death, the British tabloids (*The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Star*, *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sun*) were involved in a fierce competition for the most “exclusive” stories and pictures showing her together with her fiancée [20]. Therefore, we can define celebrity as a product, depending on the media's need for making money.

When some individuals reach the highest level of popularity, translated into public visibility, they also benefit from economic success. In Richard Dyer's opinion, stars are “faces and bodies in magazines, newspapers, posters and many announcements”[27]. In this case, reputation is based on the production of figures with a strong appeal, supported by media interventions: “Reputation is a capital which, like a good wine, improves with time, has a cost and raises a competition among producers”[3].

Accustomed to frequent public appearances, many local celebrities do not understand why they should stay away from their image, since they can make money from it. Unfortunately, the celebrity magazine industry encourages this behavior, as they directly profit from producing and selling those pictures.

Sometimes, celebrities get away from the frenzy of paparazzi, especially when looking forward to major events in their lives (for instance, a wedding, the birth of a child, or the death of a famous person) and negotiate deals with celebrity magazines to provide (for a huge fee, of course) exclusive photos from those events. However, experts remark that many ethical, legal and family issues may arise from this type of business. On this line, Pierre Morgan, (back at that time editor at *The Daily Mirror*, one of the most popular British tabloids) recognized, in Princess Diana's death case, that “editors didn't do enough for healing the freelancers' abuse”[20].

Taking an interest in tabloids, Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks [8] observed that tabloids reports overcome the boundaries of what can and can't be legitimately discussed in public, because they bring materials/information (considered to be private by the public authorities) to the reader's attention.

Another showbiz development method is very common among local stars: they invest a lot of money to start and run their own businesses (i.e. a school of music, a dance and acting school, or even a restaurant with

specific types of food). Currently, the celebrity status increasingly depends on self-existence.

People who want to become celebrities also need the notoriety that is related to public appearances, to their presence on the media, on entertainment shows/programs etc. James Lull is absolutely convinced that the final decision (about getting notoriety) belongs to the public: "people choose, combine and put on media representations and other cultural forms in their daily communicative interactions.. by doing so, they produce relevance and popularity.." [19]. An example of well-established historical popularity is the pop-star Madonna whose appreciation level by her fans (whether young or old people, straight or gay/lesbian/transsexual, black or white, educated or uneducated etc.) has led her to overall fame, popularity and richness worldwide. In this specific case, success is "made by fans only, not by stars themselves" [19], the sociologist James Lull said.

Thus, fans can get access to new human models that are produced within the masses in order to satisfy their needs. In the end, we can say, a real star is the one that has a huge number of admirers and fans, being the others just pseudo-stars, whose reputation is "artificially created just to sell the newspapers or make the audience" [16].

4. Mass entertainment industry

Privacy has become the main theme for Romanian TV channels and newspapers today. Currently, the need for entertainment is a priority for the Romanian media in order to maintain a certain level of audience, the public being keen on news/reports/pictures about private affairs.

Although easy entertainment currently fills and rules TV programs, the cultural offer has been diversifying itself more and more. In this context, we can recall Kellners' words about the existence of a "frenzied leisure" [17].

What happens to a celebrity's image after he/she has been off the spotlight for a while? Has any substantial change (in one way or another) taken place in his/her life? If the answer is "yes", how has he/she changed?

Therefore, notoriety (or fame), beauty, charisma and sexuality are the basic attributes that the public is attracted to, fascinated by and temporarily conquered by, and that a "star", in general, should have. A practical example of stardom construction is (the above mentioned) Diana Spencer, who became Princess of Wales by marrying Prince Charles (in the media, she was known as Lady Di). Nevertheless, from simple notoriety to the firmament full of stars there's still a long way to go.

Not a few surveys all over the world have been conducted in order to investigate/assess the popularity level of a certain politician during an election campaign as well as the popularity level of his election campaign itself by the increased presence of celebrities (TV stars, actors, as well as doctors and scientists) endorsing him. The results achieved in those studies have showed so far substantial differences between politicians, in terms of frequency of TV appearances for well-known candidates and, for those less known, in terms of coverage on newspapers, audience's perceptions, attitudes, confidence, general trends etc. For instance, through the survey conducted on the national political elections in Belgium, researchers discovered "that media attention is crucial for their electoral success and future career...". According to the results of that study, the more politicians appeared on the TV news, the higher was the number of preferential votes they got" [1]. Another study analyzed the positive contributions by the media to politics in Czech Republic, particularly in relation to voters' characteristics [28].

Consequently, it is really interesting to note how an image/profile can be built nowadays and how such a process actually works. Therefore, as Stephen Hinerman pointed out:

“fame depends mostly on audience nowadays”[15].

“Beings of consumption” [7], media personalities are oversized auto-culture. It may be noted that, within the Stardom system creation and maintenance process, the marketing research allows an impressive sales increase or decrease of a certain product in competition with others. Therefore, we should not forget that the most important organization committed to cultural production, Hollywood, has been and will remain in Stardom history, even if nowadays the media have developed new mechanisms for this kind of production.

After 1948, as the Star System started a competition with Television (following its advent) for the same business, salary became, in the American society, a key-factor that differentiated the positions of Hollywood stars. For most of them, it was higher than any of the producers'. Along these lines, the French sociologist E. Morin, focusing (more specifically) on the French movie business, in his reference work (*Stars: an historical, sociological and aesthetical overview on cinema star* – 3rd edition, 1977) considered some relevant examples: French movie stars, such as Jean Gabin, Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jeanne Moreau, who earned between 20 and 40 million French Francs by acting in movies in 1960 [16]. Others (Catherine Deneuve, Brigitte Bardot, and Alain Delon) used to make higher profits (between 130 and 200 million French Francs) by playing just one character in a single movie [23].

In the American movie business, stars had become “a marketing strategy, whose function was one of transit from the creation to a narrative image”, noted John Ellis[9].

Therefore, the success of a movie was exclusively built on the stars' popularity. Charles Ford noticed that, for the producers, a movie was a business treated as a commodity, and cinema had become a trade: “With or without celebrities, with or without ongoing fancies and figurative scenarios, the main goal

was the business functioning” [11]. From my point of view, quantity (production and consumption) was in the first place for prevalent economic reasons and easily replaced quality as a priority.

5. Conclusions

Today, there is no TV show in Romania that does not have, at least, a guest star. The same thing happens for news programs as well.

Beside the cases in which stars appear as testimonials of certain products (shampoos, make-up, food etc.) or services (IT/tlc companies etc.) in advertising campaigns or business magazines, in nowadays journalism the tendency towards the assistance provided by advisors/specialists to stars hosting popular TV shows has expanded lately (a typical example of this trend is “Ce se întâmplă, doctore?”, popular show on the Romanian TV hosted by Oana Cuzino).

So, the star system has been built as an institution, whose purpose is, basically, to create figures or show pictures on TV, in accordance with anthropological needs that are deep into the human nature and, in the past, were expressed through myths and religions [23].

Currently, the expression “star system” has broadened its meaning: from ordinary persons' image building on TV and stars' (whose lives used to be intensely disclosed in the past) image promotion to the designation of a common behavior, specific to the individuals' society [10].

About the article

The materials on which this article is based on are taken from my Ph.D. thesis, entitled “The construction of the Star System in the Romanian media industry”.

This article is a descriptive research where I tried to analyze step by step how the celebrity of certain people was built by the media over six years (July 2005 - July 2011) in Romania.

The analysis revealed interesting cases of celebrities in Romania and quotes about Stardom. The used research method was the quantitative content analysis.

Referring to future research directions, this article may well deserve as a source of inspiration and useful tips for those specialists who are willing to make significant contributions to the field of media studies.

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