

## THE ROMANIAN MAYOR – PRESENT AND FUTURE IMAGE

C. COMAN<sup>1</sup>

A. BRICIU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Starting from the legislative aspects regarding the function of mayor, a five category scale was drawn (honesty and ethics, incorruptibility, competence, transparency and efficiency) and used within the communicational content of three daily newspapers (“Libertatea”, Jurnalul Naţional, Adevărul). The research emphasized the manner in which the image of Romanian mayor’s dimensions are being presented by written media and highlighted which are the specificities when it comes to presenting each of the features according to the corresponding newspaper’s nature. The data analysis led to the conclusion that the image of Romanian mayor is reflected by the written media is highly negative and implies three dimensions with great visibility.*

**Key words:** *high life, lawfulness, morality.*

### 1. Introduction

The study aims at identifying the Romanian mayor’s image presented by the national written media, starting from the assumption that it is mainly negative and, by exposing this image, the citizens are losing faith in the mayor’s institution. The mayor’s function has been legally set since 1864 by the law, in the same way that law set the provisions regarding the relationships between mayor-media [15] and mayor-citizens [12].

### 2. Conceptual framework

The word image was used with the meaning of product, political party or politician representation. It is the synthesis of all that is written by the press (whether

true or false) about the subject of the research and it stands at the basis of the citizens created image, in the sense of mental representation, global vision on people or objects. It is heterogenic, like a mosaic with elements in movement. It is recreated from the fragmentary images that we are capable to reunite at the time when we are being asked to name the person or the representation object. For a politician, it relates to the Party he belongs to, or the function that he possesses, of his strenghts and weaknesses, or the physical perception we have about him [9, p. 81-82].

The institution of the media has a public nature, dealing with issues on which there exists a public opinion or that opinion may be created. It does not deal with personal and private issues or with those generally

---

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Sociology and Communication, *Transilvania* University of Brasov.

subject to scientific reasoning. But, once that written press became more and more tabloid, this nature is no longer valid since the so-called evasion press oscillates between two extremes: fiction and reality. Media are being active in various sectors of the social life and may accomplish, in one field or another, one or more of its specific functions: informational (feeding the public with news or information about social events, public affairs and political life), interpretative (judgments on events and daily facts), expressive (various social groups can make their opinion known and gain a cultural, political, social identity), critical (traditional role of “guardian” of public’s opinion, the investigation or highlight of abnormal situations and aspects occurring in social life, the confrontation of certain different opinion currents occurring through the means of the media), educational and cultural (information broadcast, cultural scientific knowledge), social connectors (generating a social solidarity mechanism in case of natural catastrophes, special personal situations which claim for the help of other members of the community), entertainment (means to spend spare time that media provides to the public) [10, p. 825].

### 3. Methodology

As a research technique it was chosen the analysis of communication content for all the articles published during January 1st and March 31, 2010 in the online editions of “Libertatea”, *Adevărul* and *Jurnalul Național*”, which included the word “mayor” with the following themes-dimensions: actors involved in communication, debated situations, type of published information, communication

sources, organization of the media space in written press. As a context unit, the analysis focused on the following journalism genres: news, opinion articles, leading articles, headings, news columns. For the analysis the XSight research programme was used.

A category-based scale was used, deriving from the legal settlements of the mayor’s function. Honesty and morality (if mayors are presented as being honest, credible, word keepers, with clean reputation or on the contrary, immoral and involved in scandals), incorruptibility or observance of the rules (if presented mayors are those who implement the laws and insure their observance or on the contrary, they break themselves laws and social rules), competence (if they fulfill their duties and if they have experience and educational support.

Attributes such as professionalism and passion for work were taken into account – they love their work as well as the community, they are altruistic, aware of people’s problems or they are insensitive and not interested), transparency (if they provide the access to public information and involve people in the process of decision-making) and efficiency (if, by their function as mayors, they contribute to the welfare and development of the town by implementing projects). The analysis was more likely based on quality, observing the themes published within the identified articles, the features they refer to, their intensity and orientation (positive, negative, neutral).

### 4. Contextual factors

From an administrative point of view the surveyed period of time was marked by

cancel motions against the ministers of health, labor, education, economy. After the installment of the new Government and the decreasing of the ministries' number, the administration's representatives started their activity.

This one was affected by the application of Law no. 330/2009 regarding the unitary payment of the personnel paid with public funds during 2010, fact that created tensions and discontent.

From a legislative point of view, a number of important laws was adopted or motioned regarding the whole population: the conditions for works standing idle were set, legislative projects occurred regarding the unitary system of public pensions and the law of national education. In March, president Traian Băsescu convened the parties to a set of discussions in order to modify the Constitution. As far as the administration is concerned, the most notable achievements were related to the decentralization process – new cost standards appeared for social and educational services and progress was made for the decentralization in the health system.

Among the issues which preoccupied media there are also political ones. During the first 3 month of 2010 changes have occurred within the main political parties, which culminated with the intention to revoke Mircea Geoană's function of President of the Senate and certain resignations from the party. Other important events consisted in registering the cases of A/H1N1 pandemic virus and the arrest of Senator Cătălin Voicu, which brought to the forefront corruption and lack of confidence in leaders. At the same time three municipality mayors in the country were arrested Mircea Gutău, Antonie Solomon and Cristian Anghel.

## 5. Results and discussions

### 5.1. Freedom – High life, obscenities, criminal offences

From among the chosen publications, "Libertatea" has the largest circulation, 213000 copies and the largest number of broadcasts, 155000. Its online alternative has the biggest figures of audience and traffic:

Table 1

Period	Visits	Posts	Unique clients
March 2010	8.898.985	48.054.953	1.664.521
February 2010	8.159.035	44.536.180	1.596.683
January 2010	8.228.865	45.322.924	1.550.987

During January – March 2010, the most read daily newspaper in the country; "Libertatea" has published on its own webpage a number of 26 articles in reference to mayors. From among them, only one is offering a positive image of the mayor by presenting a local elected person with 18 years of mandate in the service of the community. From among the articles,

we considered as neutral those presenting the death of a mayor during a working visit in Bulgaria or the theft of a mayor's goods. All the other articles written during the surveyed period of time contribute to a negative image of the mayor and present two types of facts: illegal/immoral and social high life/obscene.

In the first category it is situated the arrest of the former mayor Dumitru Sechelariu on the grounds of having committed actions of corruption, the arrest of mayor Antonie Solomon for corruption and the arrest of Mircea Gurau for the same criminal offence. The first two of the previously mentioned cases were presented several times. The Solomon case was the most covered by the media which also wrote about the meeting organized by the citizens in order to support him. Other cases of illegal or immoral facts are: a mayor sued himself, a case of illegal sales, a mayor who pays for the asphalt up to 4 times more expensive than usual by not observing the contract. A special situation is that of the mayor of the capital city who by attempting to create a positive image, choosing to lie the citizens, succeeded in fact to achieve the opposite effect. In Bucharest the mayor and the former mayors are being accused to have built villas with the money earned under suspect circumstances. Regarding to the high life-obscene category, in this category we may include Mayor Radu Mazare and the former mayor Viorel Lis. Viorel Lis appears in an article where he speaks about his sex life and the manner in which his wife is doing striptease. Radu Mazare appears several times, speaking about the loss of his own virginity, the doubtful

morality of women involved in politics, and even about the beauty of women in Brasil. None of the articles related to the mayor of Constanta is related to his activity as a mayor, but with his high life.

The negative image is also built by means of the chosen titles. This respects the tabloid style and presents mayors who are preoccupied with other problems than those related to town hall and local public administration: “Mayor Poteras claims for the legalization of sex in specially planned public spaces”, “The Mayor of the capital city has built himself million euros palaces”, “Oprescu, are you mocking of us?”, Mazare “I didn’t know where to hit the women I lost my virginity with”, “Video/Viorel Lis “At my age I can sleep while having sex”, “Video/Mazare All bitches started governing”.

## 5.2. Jurnalul Național – “clans and imprisoned”

“Jurnalul Național” has an average circulation of 92000 copies and an average number of broadcasts of 67000 copies. The online edition presents the articles published in the written edition as well as news made by the online department. Traffic data and audience for this site are presented below:

Table 2

Period of time	Visits	Posts	Unique clients
March 2010	2.536.378	8.042.834	897.750
February 2010	2.687.570	9.376.486	936.093
January 2010	3.120.683	11.152.689	1.078.797

Between January 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup> 2010 in the “Jurnalul Național” 50 articles referring to mayors were identified. From

among these, neutral were considered those referring to the function of mayor, mayors who ran for top positions within

political parties and those which included declarations of the mayors regarding the lead towns. In the category of neutral articles were also introduced two other articles presenting the victory of the former mayor from Sfântu Gheorghe during a CEDO suit regarding an incident occurred during his activity as a mayor.

Most of the articles draw a negative image of the mayor, presenting cases of law infringement, lack of morality and indifference. Regarding incorruptibility and compliance, these are not considered among the features of the mayor presented in the “Jurnalul Național”.

The articles present arrested mayors or mayors who are investigated for offences such as corruption, bribe, and attempt to fraud European funds, execution of illegal payments, intellectual forgery and forgery use, fraud of public tenders, abuse, false in declarations, abandonment of the accident place. For these offences, mayors are being adjoined to other criminals (transgressors, killers and burglars) and all this situations are harmful for the image.

The cases most covered by the media are those of mayors Mircea Gutau and Antonie Solomon as well as that of the former mayor Dumitru Sechelariu. The case of Mayor Cristian Anghel is only mentioned in the frames of an article related to other arrested mayors. About the arrested mayors there are also a few positive words (career success, citizen’s support), but they tend to lose their value in the context – corruption accusations, arrest, image degradation.

As far as honesty and morality are concerned, Mayor Klaus Iohannis is accused of incompatibility, where as his colleagues are presented to be involved in controversial affairs, favouring

acquaintances and family. “Jurnalul Național” presents at the same time cases of mayors who, either practice political travel, or sued themselves for benefits, or are indifferent to the destiny of the community members they lead. Some mayors are being presented as incompetent or in conflict with employees and colleagues. In the context of a certain conflict, a mayor was suffered an intentional car accident by the vice mayor, while other mayors attack each other “Mr. Mayor general, stop behaving like an actor staring in political administrative soap operas while attempting to Bucharest’s people common sense”. In reference with transparency, the only references show that mayors communicate with the press only when the issue is not related to controversial subjects. And, sometimes, transparency is replaced with the attempt to manipulate media and the citizens in order to obtain a favorable image. The only article referring to efficiency presents a mayor whose activity proves to be unsatisfactory to the inhabitants.

In some of the situations mayors do not behave appropriately and make use of a vocabulary which proves to be inadequate to their official function. When it comes to language, the daily newspaper’s journalists as well make use of judgments and inadequate vocabulary, with negative connotation and impact on the image of the Romanian mayor. Examples in this respect are the following titles and fragments: “clan makes the cash”, “solve the riddle: how many corrupt politicians rotted in jail?”, “Colibasi – the mayor’s jail”, “the penal mayor”, “Slowly, slowly, to the pokey”, “At the top of the democrat liberal party, criminals and handcuffs are trendy”, “in pokey”, “Distinction for the arrested

one – Gutau, honor citizen!” There are articles where journalists seem to take judgment values to the extremes: “Antonie Solomon has taken over the waste land. The arrogant mayor forces through his decisions the exile of Craiova University to Turnu Severin (...) boorishness could not give so much power to the local dictator, (...) Cleanly dirty, Antonie”

### 5.3. Adevărul – “the penal mayor”

The daily newspaper “Adevărul” has an average circulation of 180 000 copies and an average of 160 000 broadcasts. For the online edition, audience and traffic data, for the selected period, are the following:

Table 3

Period	Visits	Posts	Unique clients
March 2010	3.302.579	12.042.188	1.209.547
February 2010	2.779.685	10.045.405	1.067.031
January 2010	2.887.000	11.007.342	1.137.264

In “Adevărul”, during the period of time studied, a number of 338 articles referring to Romanian mayors were identified. About 2/3 of the presented themes are negative, the rest being positive or neutral. Thereby, positive oriented issues were passion for work, longevity in public positions (sign that the electors appreciate the mayor’s work), and mayor’s achievements related to the improvement of inhabitants life, the support and appreciation of the members of the community. As to the issues considered as neutral, these referred to the mayors of the youth (functions which are not legally set, bearing a weak representation at a national level and having no impact on the entire population), to the mayors declarations regarding community’s concerns, death, illnesses, accidents, family problems. These were considered neutral because of the reduced number of posts and also due to the fact that they do not have a major contribution on the mayor’s image, being peripheral characteristics of the image. Also, because of the extremely reduced number of posts, references to mayors’ hobbies such as the collection of guns, motorcycles, horticulture were considered neutral.

Most of the themes have a negative orientation, referring to morality, observance of the laws, incorruptibility and professionalism, central elements of the mayor’s image. During 3 month Adevărul presents 23 cases of mayors and former mayors being investigated or arrested. Some of these cases were intensely covered – Case of mayor Gutau, Solomon and Anghel. These three cases were continuously surveyed by the media, a large number of articles being drafted and modifications being made.

Surprising and contributing to the formation of a negative image is the large spectrum of the criminal offences committed by mayors: abuse, bribe, violence, corruption, forgery, fraud, conflict of interests, negligence, incomplete declarations regarding the value of fortune, embezzlement, destruction, infringement of the law regarding the update of the electors list, attempt to influence public officers.

To these illegal facts we add the immoral ones such as supporting those persons suspected of having committed antisocial actions and of lying. At the same time, it is shown that some mayors sued themselves for benefits or granted the employees illegal or immoral benefits. As to the

incompetence level, there are mayors rather ignorant with respect to the dispositions of the law or are being accused of bad management of the public services. In other cases, mayors make use of improper vocabulary: “This impression of yours expresses two things 1. The level of your education is, of course, very low, 2. Very envious personalities. You have the impression of being something special, which is, definitely an illusion”, excerpt from an official address sealed and signed by the mayor of the commune Dragotești, Dolj, on his name Dumitru Dinca. It is also shown that certain mayors manifest lack of interest and do not fulfill their tasks and do not participate to compulsory training for the proper management of the emergencies and being absent from duty whenever such a situation occurs. Because of two mayors refusing to issue authorizations and thus lacking to fulfill their duties, local authorities are being fined (fines paid from the public budget).

From among the themes which contribute to a negative image, we should also mention that of favoring certain citizens, earning fortunes under suspect conditions, the political travel, the involvement in scandals “(...) Antonie Solomon is the weakest mayor of the Bania and represents a big prejudice to this town (...)”

“He builds streets at costs similar to those necessary for highways” (...) He is not playing with money, but with fire, I’m telling you! He borrowed money to cultivate his personality. The administration of the town is catastrophic. Solomon is bad for this town!”

Two special situations are those of fashionable mayors, more preoccupied with entertainment than with professional issues, as well as that of the mayor strongly preoccupied with their image. The attention paid to the image is a positive feature, but, in the nowadays context, it

leads to a negative image – public funds are invested on favoring a company to promote a positive image of the mayor in one of the cases, while the other mayor is trying to create himself an image on the bases of false information. “In a tape record of a discussion with road constructors, the mayor of the capital city speaks about plumbing the asphalt in terms of an image operation (...) “I cannot achieve this image changes all by myself”, he stated in the beginning of the speech about his asphalt plumbing campaign started after a series of failures in his capacity as a mayor. At less than 2 years from the date he took over the mandate, the doctor is known by people in Bucharest as the mayor who registered Bucharest in the Book of Records with the largest number of Santa, the longest sausage and the heaviest birthday cake. In last year’s spring, the mayor decided that boulevards should be shampooed while the fact is that, after every rain fall the capital city is flooded and, in the city’s suburbs there are still certain neighborhoods lacking sewage systems and people circulate in gum boots. In point of transparency, there is no reference to the citizens implication in the decision making process, but there are cases when a refusal to communicate with the media or the citizens occurs.

An important contribution to the creation of a negative image of the mayor is provided by journalist’s use of a vocabulary bearing negative connotations or which makes reference to social groups that are incompatible with the mayor’s function: “We hate corruption but we love corrupted people”, “jail”, “the bribe’s movie”, “behind bars”, “corrupt mayors”, “fortune flourished”, “the swamp is being orchestrated by the mayor”, “the league of elected criminals”, “mayor sent in pokey” “mayors wash their hands”, “mayor’s arrogance”, “party at the town hall”, “suspect affairs”, “theft of public funds”,

“Xerox benefits for the mayor suffering of brain radiation”, “the penal mayor”, “bribe sent him to jail”, “Mazare’s clan”, “mayors, repeaters at classes compulsory to attend regarding the management of emergencies”, “Mayor Gutau, good for slammer”. About the mayor of Constanta, journalists write “Some people state that our mayor is a clown. We do not realize whether he is a clown in point of clothes or behavior. He is either upset with the DNA (National department against corruption) and speaks in slang, or he is in a good mood and speaks nonsense. His relaxed and indifferent attitude in gaining fans during every demonstration”.

## 6. Conclusions

The image of the Romanian mayor as reflected by the national written media during the first three month of 2010 is a negative one, being determined by a large number of articles related to high life, lawfulness, morality. To this image mainly contribute controversial mayors, accused or condemned for having committed immoral/illegal actions, while the rest of the mayors are absent from public life. The negative image extends over them as well, because among the accused ones there are also present members of the mayor’s so called elite.

During the surveyed period, 1st of January – March 31, 2010, most of the references to mayors are posted in “Adevărul”, followed by the “Jurnalul Național” and “Libertatea”. The positive features of the mayor are few and repeat themselves: longevity in function, passion for work, achievements and the degree of support received from the community. Negative references occupy the largest amount in the case of each daily newspaper, differences consisting in the journalistic style and the type of the presented negative features. Although, all

daily newspapers use sometimes an improper vocabulary, in some of the articles regarding mayors, “Libertatea” affirms its tabloid characteristics by the means of the vocabulary usage, unlike the information media. The critical function (investigations, disclosures, accusations) is more accentuated in the “Jurnalul Național” and “Libertatea”. “Jurnalul Național” also accomplishes the interpretative function, journalists uttering judgments concerning the presented issues. As far as approached issues are concerned, the tabloid “Libertatea” tends to focus more on high life issues, while Jurnalul Național as well as “Adevărul” prefers issues related to morality, ethics and lawfulness.

The most visible dimensions of the mayor’s image are honesty and morality, non-corruption, the respect of the rules and competence. Transparency and efficiency are the least approached issues. As to honesty and morality, mayors presented in the surveyed publications have bad reputation, being most of the times immoral, corrupt and involved in scandals. Most of the articles deal with the issue of incorruptibility and law observance, presenting a corrupt mayor who does not observe laws and rules and tries to serve best his own interest due to indifference or ignorance.

Articles referring to competence mostly present mayors who do not fulfill their duties or they are lacking concern about training. Few references are made about mayors involved and passionate about their activity, while more cases present mayors being indifferent about the community’s destiny and that of project implemented in local public administration. Whenever there are presented successfully implemented projects, these are accompanied by controversies, criminal investigations, accusations and sometimes arresting.

In point of education, in only one case we deal with a mayor who was about to pass the doctorate exam, prevailing cases with mayors who are not familiar with the law, commit grammatical errors and make use of improper language. Few references with regards to transparency present the image of a mayor who communicates with media only when the approached issue is not subject to controversies or even tries to manipulate media in order to create himself a positive effect. From among the articles it is revealed that a small number of mayors contributed to the town's development or welfare by implementing projects and some of them are no longer mayors (death, election of another mayor, arrest).

In order to prevent the degradation of the Romanian mayor's image and for a favorable future image, more suited to the status of mayor, this category first needs to observe the ethic behavior and the legislation. Once with the diminishment of the number of mayors being accused, investigated, arrested, there is also necessary that mayors take control of their image and get involved in promoting the activity of proficient mayors, as well as institutions and teams. Only this way, citizens will have access to information about those who are dedicated to their towns, working hard for their welfare. At the same time, it is necessary for citizens and the media to be aware of the responsibilities, advantages and limits of the mayor. At a local level, but at a national level even more, positive examples must be visible and not only the negative ones.

## References

1. Agabrian, M.: *Analiza de conținut (Content Analysis)*. Iași. Polirom Publishing House, 2006.
2. Codreanu, I., Dobre, G., Novac, S., Orlescu, L., Zamfirescu, I.: *Mediatizarea alegerilor locale (Local election's media coverage)*, Analysis report 2-31 of May 2008. Bucharest. Press Monitoring Agency, 2009.
3. Drăgan, I.: *Comunicarea, paradigme și teorii (Communication, Theories and Paradigm)*. Bucharest. Editura RAO, 2007.
4. Frigioiu, N.: *Imaginea publică a liderilor și instituțiilor (The public image of institutions and leaders)*. Bucharest. Comunicare.ro, 2004.
5. Gerstle, J.: *Comunicarea politică (Political Communication)*. Iași. Institutul European Publishing House, 2002.
6. Mcquail, D.: *Mass Communication Theory*. Sage Publications, 2005.
7. Stanciugelu, I., Tran, V.: *Teoria comunicării (The theory of communication)*. Bucharest. Comunicare.ro, 2003.
8. Teodorescu, B. (ed.): *Marketing politic și electoral (Political and electoral Marketing)*. Bucharest. SNSPA, 2001.
9. Thoveron, G.: *Comunicarea politică azi (Political communication today)*. Bucharest. Antet Publishing House, 1996.
10. Tremayne, M., Schmitz Weiss, A., Calmon Alves, R.: *From Product to Service: the Diffusion of Dynamic Content in Online Newspapers*. In *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* **84** (2007), Issue 4, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.
11. Vattimo, G.: *Societatea Transparentă (The transparent Society)*. Constanta. Pontica Publishing House, 1995.
12. \*\*\* Law no. 52/2003 regarding decisional transparency in public administration
13. \*\*\* Law no. 215/2001 of local public administration.

14. \*\*\* Law no .393/2004 regarding the Statute of local elected.
15. \*\*\* Law no. 544/2001 of the free access to public interest information.
16. \*\*\* Media sustainability index 2010 – Romania, International Research & Exchanges Board, Washington Dc. Available at: [www.irex.org/programs/msi\\_eur/2010/EE\\_MSI\\_2010\\_Romania.pdf](http://www.irex.org/programs/msi_eur/2010/EE_MSI_2010_Romania.pdf). Accessed: 26.11.2013.
17. \*\*\* Romania's Constitution.
18. [www."Adevărul".ro](http://www.Adevărul.ro). Accessed: April 2010.
19. [www.jurnalul.ro](http://www.jurnalul.ro). Accessed: April 2010.
20. [www."Libertatea".ro](http://www.). Accessed: April 2010.
21. [www.sna.ro/index.php?page=detalii\\_livrari&id=92](http://www.sna.ro/index.php?page=detalii_livrari&id=92). Accessed: 25 mai 2010.
22. [www.brat.ro/index.php?page=publicatii](http://www.brat.ro/index.php?page=publicatii). Accessed: 25 mai 2010.
23. [www.sati.ro/index.php?page=memברי](http://www.sati.ro/index.php?page=memברי). Accessed: 25 mai 2010.