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## The Persuasive Effects of the Information: Framing and Priming. Drama from the Club „Colectiv” and the Fall of Ponta Government

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### Abstract

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The paper that we propose aims a constructivist analysis about persuasive effects that media can cause in the public space by interpreting and reconstructing of the social events. The analysis is based on a triangular grille, where the structural, communicational and interactional dimensions contribute to illustrate the ways in which media facilitate the formation of social representations, creating certain types of behaviour and determining specific actions. Moreover talk about a media representation of certain events that generate criteria to assess situations, determine judgments to be applied to these events and contribute to create collective action. The applied part of the paper aims to analyse the social context in which had held the fall of Ponta Government, on November 4, 2015, in the context in which a few days had gone from the drama which happened in the Club “Colectiv”, on October 30, 2015. The analysis focuses on the effects of framing and those of priming on the means of mass communication have produced by the coverage of events related to this collective drama.

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**Keywords:** Framing; priming; the collective drama; sociology of media; persuasive effects.

## **1. Media public space - expression of public culture**

In the new global context of communication, determined by the rapid evolution of technology of communications and information, which has the merit of having turned the entire world into a "global village" (McLuhan, 1997, p. 107) or in an informational society, understanding the concept of public space acquires new meanings, being replaced by itself for a new reality. On the one hand, these changes of meaning are evolutions caused by public attitudes.

Public space conceptualized by Jürgen Habermas (2005), which is understood as a place of mediation between civil society and state, which are formed and freely express public opinion, an argumentative public space, consensual, based on rational-critical debate, shall be reconfigured. As the German author himself claimed, the idea of public space is experiencing of a profound degradation, leading to its "re-feudalization" and its confiscation by the mechanisms geared to the new opportunities of expression and civic and political participation for citizens. Moreover, the public space is identified with a conflictual battlefield, contested of power and for power.

Changes such as the expansion of new technologies of communication and information, globalization of public space and the crisis of the modern nation state, media marketing and segmentation of audiences, the emergence of new political and social movements, causes of conflictual and emotional public sphere, based on negotiation, commonly associated with social and political movements. All areas of conflictual public sphere reconstruct the new public space where one is out of disinterested public - oriented to consensus, but a diversity of publics, mobilized by their interest and in conflict with the interests of other publics. Public space can be understood as "a variety of public spaces, formed by a dynamic of events, policies, media and institutional practices" (Beciu, 2011, p. 89) or how thought Bastien and Neveu, in a study conducted in 1999, as an expression of "patchwork identity" or "fragmented identity" between different social worlds (Beciu, 2011, p. 89).

In the new public space is not important rational argumentation, which involves the belief opponents by using the "best argument" and reaching the necessary consensus to achieve the common good, but reason and emotions are intertwined. We are talking about an "emotional reflexivity", due to the fact that rationality is reworded by including of some emotional issues, and instead of consensus is seeking a compromise. In this context, public space consists of all media practices, able to highlight the importance to society of events and topics that be debated at a time. So, the way of mode of media coverage creates a new public space. It is a media public space, which is the expression of all the rules, practices and symbols that are active at a time in a social group or into a society that means a public culture.

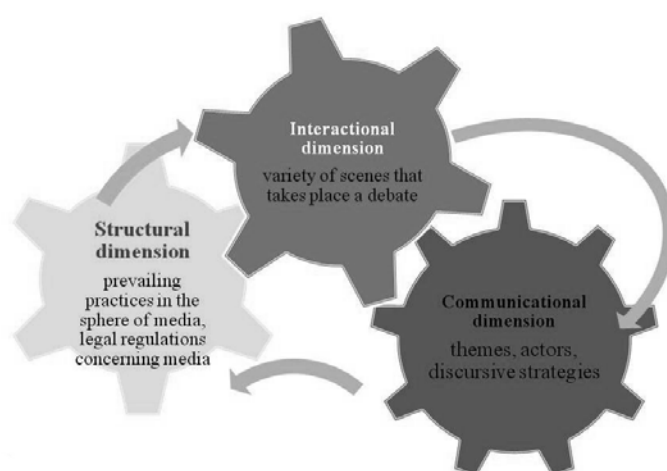
## **2. Dimensions of media public space**

Generally, the concept of "public space", according to P. Dahlgren, refers to the processes of structuring of public opinion (Dahlgren, 1993). In forming and shaping public opinion media play a crucial role: they can provide support to citizens concerned about the general problems of the present, can provide an environment for public debate of opinions formed and can influence the public in taking decisions based on the processing of some viable information; thus, media public space requires the

participation of three stakeholders: media class, public opinion and the public (Beciu, 2000). Media class can access and participate in the public space through the symbolic capital which it holds: expertise, prestige, popularity. Regarding public opinion, it is a collective psychosocial product and constitutes as an evaluation of a problematic situation, based on a mix of rational and emotional elements and motivated by certain values. Invoking the public opinion should be treated with some caution, as often journalists, politicians or other public persons can set up in the exponents of public opinion to gain representativeness and to legitimize their views. Thus, the minority public opinion, unrepresentative, may become representative and can even become majority when it is about the "spiral of silence" and occurs the affiliation to current opinion most widely publicized. Like the public opinion, the public is a social construction, based on media practices or quantitative market research. Being built by the media through coverage of facts on various social groups or individuals, the public can become a collective actor with a social "biography", which can be associated with certain items related to the consumption of media, or may become a target group with some sociological profile.

Media public space can be analyzed by reference to the following variables: *public issues* and *public interaction*. To relate to *public issues*, is to understand how a public issue can become a relevant event to society through the use of certain rhetorical strategies. On the other hand, the variable *public interactions*, requires reporting to a various forms of communication and debate used in institutional and media-political spheres. An constructivist analysis of the public space involves identifying the access of stakeholders in the public space, the kinds of information, themes and strategies which form public knowledge, interaction and forms of socialization developed in relation of the journalist with the public and the sources, public culture and media environment.

In a study published in 2005, Peter Dahlgren identifies and describes three dimensions of media public space, namely: interactional dimension, structural dimension and communicative dimension. While the interactional dimension aims the variety of scenes that take place a debate, structural dimension refers to the prevailing practices in the sphere of media and to the legal regulations concerning media and the communicative dimension has as reference approached themes, stakeholders involved and discourse strategies used.



**Fig. 1.** Dimensions of media public space (Peter Dahlgren, 2005)

The three dimensions theorized by Peter Dahlgren and variables identified as the basis of a constructivist analysis constitute the elements of a model an constructivist model of analysis to the social context in which there was the fall of Ponta Government of Romania, on 4 November 2015 closely connected with the drama which took place on 30 October 2015 in the "Colectiv" Club, in Bucharest, capital of Romania.

### 3. The influence of mass media: framing and priming

Measuring the impact of media on behaviors of public receiver and surprise of the cognitive effects as well as its influence on perceptions and representations can be achieved by tracking the framing and the priming that mass-media products. Framing an event involves selecting of certain aspects and playing its more evident size. Thus, journalists choose to treat a problem from a particular angle, in this way they orient representations of the public and influences public opinion which is formed about a topic. Priming involves changing the criteria for judgment of the public under the effect of an information which is temporarily accessible (Bregman & Missika, 1986). Thus, media representation of certain events and their powerful visibility influence criteria for the assessment of certain situations, and information what was transmitted triggers an interpretation of events.

The concept of frame was used for the first time in sociology by Erving Goffman, where he was later taken over and applied in communication sciences and media studies. For Goffman, frame was referring to the issue that is the subject of communication and how individuals define the situation in which they communicate. Defining the situation of communication involves highlighting aspects that are considered most important and activation of some emotional contexts about them, as well as the rules and rituals of interpretation (Beciu, 2011). Thus, through communication it is realizing highlighting that the fact that the subject matter and the interaction itself can be defined by certain attributes or characteristics, some of which are 'red lines' for interpretation and understanding. According to Goffman's conception, it creates some "barriers of perception" of the theme and of the interaction for the interlocutor. "The frame is an "organizing principle" of the event, which guide the interlocutor *to interpret* in a certain way events addressed by some *predominant attribute* of the event" (Beciu, 2011, p. 138). T Gitlin (2003) considers *frames* as "patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, selection, emphasis and exclusion", namely structuring models of the main elements that make up a media discourse. From the perspective of media studies, R. E. Entman and S. Iyengar define the concept of frame, by reference to the idea of influence. For R. E. Entman (2003, p. 417), the frame is a mechanism to influence the interlocutor and for influencing public opinion, which involves selecting certain aspects of specific events or themes and introducing connections between them, leading to an interpretation or evaluation. S. Iyengar believes the frame as a principle organizer of the event, guiding interlocutors to interpret events addressed by some attributes considered prevalent and defines frame as "how opinions on a topic can be influenced by emphasizing or ignoring at some aspects of the theme concerned"(2005, p. 5).

Priming involves privileging certain issues by the media and the selective use of information by the public when his forming an opinion. Priming involves how media changing the standards that people use to make political evaluations. Theory of media priming is grounded in cognitive psychology and it

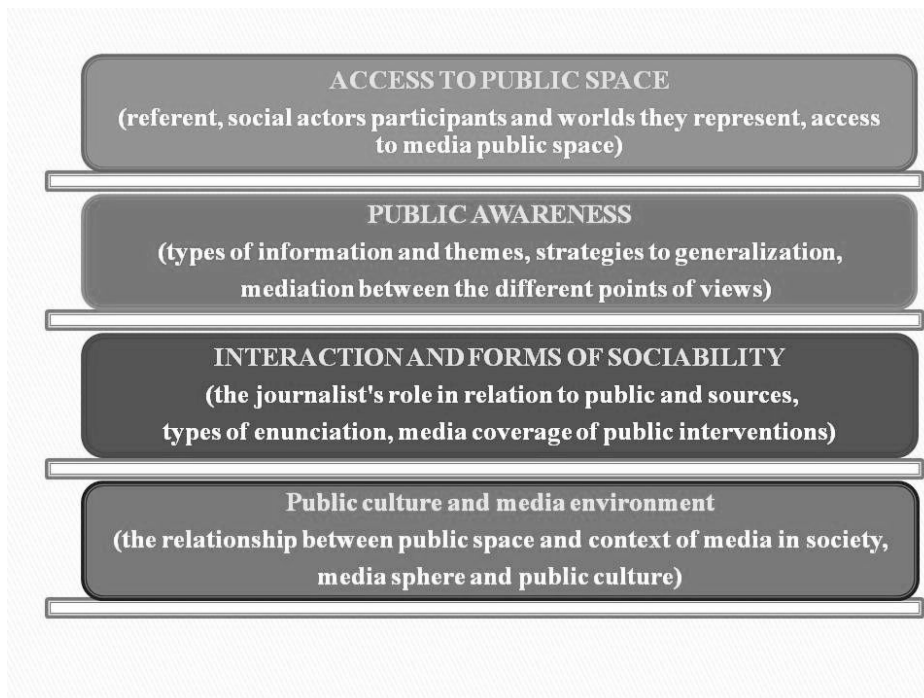
is derived from the associative network model of human memory, in which an idea or concept is stored as a node in the network and is related to other ideas or concepts by semantic paths. Priming refers to the activation of a node in this network, which may serve as a filter, an interpretive frame, or a premise for further information processing or judgment formation. The theory was developed by Iyengar and Kinder (1982), who considers that priming, requires some topics that are privileged by media. The theory is based on an idea of experimental psychology, according to which the judgment that a person emits about others or about certain facts were not based on all available information on them, but on the information that it has available. Iyengar and Kinder describe how certain value judgments can be influenced by the media during election campaigns, meaning that voters does not undertake a systematic research on the entire volume of information that exists, but selective uses the available information. (Jäckel, 2008).

#### **4. Drama from the Club „Colectiv”and the fall of Ponta Government**

On the night of Friday, October 30, 2015, inside a club located in Sector 4 of Bucharest (Romania's capital) and operate in a former warehouse of a factory, it has triggered a fire during a free concert backed by a rock band. According to research by the fire was caused by fireworks used during the concert, fireworks that ignited the polyurethane sponge (highly flammable) used for soundproofing on a pillar of the building. The fire was classified as the most serious fire in Romania in a nightclub and the worst accident in the country after 1989, recording 27 people killed in the night of the accident and 64 people were killed in total (of the wounded admitted to hospitals in Romania and abroad). On 1 November 2015 in Piața Universității [University Square] in the capital was organized a march commemorating the victims of the fire in the club “Collective”, which was attended by 8,000 people, who were directed to the site of the tragedy where there were another 2,000 people coming to bring a final tribute to those who died (Alexa, 2015). It turned on November 3, 2015 in a rally for dismissal of the primary of district 4, Cristian Popescu Piedone, who declared that he has nothing to reproach about the tragedy happened and that from his point of view the club „Colectiv” work legally (HotNews, 2015). The rally in Bucharest started at 18:00 and gathered until conclusion, at 1:30 the next day, 25,000 people who chanted slogans and demanded dismissal of primary of District 4, Cristian Popescu Piedone, the dismissal of Prime Minister, Victor Ponta and the dismissal of Minister of Internal Affairs, Gabriel Oprea (Mediafax, 2015). Following street protests, which have expanded in Bucharest and in other cities of Romania, such as: Brașov, Constanța, Iași, Cluj, Sibiu, Ploiești, Arad, Alba Iulia, Miercurea Ciuc) in the morning of November 4, 2015 Prime Minister of Romania has resigned.

The study conducted in this regard, is a constructivist approach, achieved through qualitative and quantitative analysis of materials media, broadcast on the main TV channels of news from Romania (national channel of news - TVR 1 and other news channels: Romania TV, Realitatea TV, Digi24 , B1TV and Antena 3), during 30 October - 4 November 2015. Analysis covers the framing and the priming on the means of mass communication have produced the coverage of events related to the tragedy of the club „Colectiv”. Such analysis allows constructivist can capture some significant issues of social discursive imaginary that feeds media system (televised) and also the evaluation of the impact and the control exercised through the TV storyboarding of devices visual and verbal on the public

receiver. The variables used to structure the content of media materials that were found on the websites of national television news - TVR 1, as well as the other 5 television of news in Romania were: access to public space, public awareness, interaction and forms of sociability and public culture and media environment. They allowed structuring of the information that was broadcast by television of news in Romania and their interpretation in terms of the effect they have generated.



**Fig. 2.** The model of constructivist analysis of public space

The access to public space involved identifying of the referent, of social actors participants and the worlds they represented, and access to media public space. Identifying of the referent was made after the communication model proposed by Harold Laswell and adapted in 1948 as a linear model of communication: *Who Says, What to whom, through which channel, with what effect.* (Laswell, 1948). To the pole *Who Says* identify journalists, politicians and other public persons who have expressed views, via the six channels of news from Romania analyzed, on the drama in club „Colectiv” and street demonstrations that it has caused, generating certain social effects. *What to whom* refers to the main topics addressed in connection with drama of fire and then with the mobilization of the public in Romania first in a march of commemorating the victims of the fire, which later turned into a protest against those considered guilty for the tragedy that occurred. *Through which channel* the six channels of news from Romania which were analyzed. *With what effect* refers to the effects that it has generated in the social the presentation of certain views by certain journalists (like Cristian Tudor Popescu and Radu Banciu) or certain politicians (like the President of Romania - Klaus Johannis, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Valeriu Zgonea, or the former President of Romania, Traian Băsescu) in connection with the reported situation.

The social actors participating in this context are different, and the worlds they represent are varied. We encounter as a participants social actors: individuals who were present at the event which was held in the club „Colectiv”; relatives of these individuals, we find after the accident at its production and

later in hospitals or in the street; citizens who took part in the march of commemorating of the victims of the fire, but also at the protest rally against those considered guilty for the tragedy that happened. Participants may be considered and representatives of some institutions responsible for managing of the phenomenon (Secretary of State in MAI - Raed Arafat or Minister of Health, Nicolae Băncicioiu).

If we relate to access to media public space, the analysis of informative content running from 30 October to 4 November 2015 on the six channels of news from Romania, two aspects are attractive. The first issue is that the television station TVR 1, which is national news station, has sent just after 8 hours of the tragedy, information about it. In this regard, the journalist Cătălin Tolontan note on his blog: "The biggest television kept silent in the face of the largest tragedies. Last night, TVR does not transmit anything from the fire of the club „Colectiv” in Bucharest, even an hour after it had taken place. Each television was how he fared. Digi24, Antena 3, RealitateaTV and RomaniaTV have entered into breaking news. B1TV he not had the resources" (Popa, 2015). The second aspect is related to remark that makes the journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu in the Digi24 TV studio, on 3 November 2015, regarding the fact that a reporter Digi24 would reveal to a person who had dedicated a question about the situation in Romania regarding the language used against the political class in Romania, and the station Digi 24 had stopped broadcasting, but what journalist currently in the Digi24 studio denies (Popescu, 2015).

Regarding public awareness was to identify the types of information and topics submitted and some strategies of generalization used by media representatives but also political actors and mediation between the different views expressed. The information submitted and the themes were very varied and they can be grouped according to the three fundamental components of public space: social actors, political actors and journalists and the three dimensions of public space: interactional, structural and communicative. The scenes that were held debates were many: from the social scene, formed by participation of citizens in certain forms of organization in order to showing solidarity with the victims of the tragedy, but also to protest about irregularities present in different social or formed physicians who have submitted information about the status of those who arrived from the club „Colectiv” as patients, to politics that there have been political actors brought to debate issues such as corruption and the need for fundamental changes within certain social structures. Both the representatives of the media and political actors have used strategies of generalization, expressed either by reference to the collective opinion about the phenomenon of tragedy and how understanding this at the level of society, either through the use of common places, invested symbolic, such as Piața Universității [University Square], Piața Revoluției [Revolution Square], the town hall of the District 4 or the „Colectiv” club, where there has the tragedy. For example, on all of television stations analyzed the views of either the media representatives either of politicians or citizens was focused around blaming corruption in the country and the need to reform the political class. The journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu construed the *collective protest* as a *moral revolution* and a *mature movement* (Popescu, 2015); Valeriu Zgonea, Chamber of Deputies President believes that "the time has come for the political class to understand that not go with half measures" ("Memoria tinerilor morți în", 2015) and a citizen for 26 years, located in protest in Piața Victoriei [Victoria Square], being interviewed on the street, by a reporter Digi24, on 3 November 2015 states: "... the clubs are not safe, hospitals are not safe, schools are not safe, this

country is not safe! I would like to be; but I can't force me to leave these stinking! ... " ("Jurnal ora 19.00", 2015). In addition, the comments to reporters that carried to the spot, especially on 3 November 2015, the day of the protest, they are centered on the two ideas: legislation that leaves room for interpretation allowed the tragedy and the authorities turn a blind eye to corruption and bureaucracy. Summarizing, the media have used various mechanisms to highlight what the public had to know about the phenomenon of tragedy and the implications that it has produced on the social level. Journalists have mediated between the different views expressed by various politicians, by certain media representatives who have become leaders and by some representatives of civil society. All these viewpoints have had in common the expression of the widespread corruption in Romania, the responsible authorities that maintain it and the need for resignations from some persons who by the function that they are responsible for the tragedy produced: mayor of District 4, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Prime Minister of Romania.

Regarding interaction and sociability forms, identify the role of journalists in relation with the public and the sources, types of enunciation used and actions of coverage of public interventions. Thus, redefining of the problem during the discursive exchange, according to the evolution of the phenomenon - from the event, to the march commemorating the victims and later to protest against corrupt authorities in Romania; media value judgments and regulatory proposals on the tragedy phenomenon and its evolution through the reactions of citizens; positioning of the citizens participating in the rally, as well as some journalists and some politicians concerning this phenomenon and its implications products are the most relevant issues in this regard. C. T. Popescu believes that "Ponta and others are thinking about how to fool the street" (Popescu, 2015), "Ponta despises those now in the street" (Popescu, 2015) or "are people who still are not poisoned by the system" (Popescu, 2015). R. Banciu expresses that: "I think this time something will happen" (Banciu, 2015), "a drama like this is necessarily longer change things" (Banciu, 2015). The creator of shows from RealitateaTV, Octavian Hoandră, in the issuance *Romanian Reality*, dated in 31 October 2015, talks about the fact that "we live very close to death in this country," a country that "not give two shakes on our lives" and "does not respect the life of its citizens" (Hoandră, 2015).

Romanian President Klaus Johannis speaks about incompetence of certain authorities and the corruption that can even kill: "In these moments we have a duty to learn a lesson unfortunately paid with so many lives, with such suffering. We must no longer tolerate incompetence of authorities, the inefficiency of some institutions and we can't let corruption kill up to stretch. We have to take each fully active and engaged role of citizens who know how to act together because they care about society and country where they live. To be united and ask the authorities to be responsible for such tragedies do not happen again" (Costache, 2015). Subsequently, he stresses the need for assuming responsibility of the political class in the context of the tragedy that took place in „Colectiv” Club: "I am impressed by the events of this evening. Is a street movement that comes from the desire of people to have respected their dignity and provided. I understand that is required and expected, rightly anyone to assume the political responsibility. The next step must be of the politicians who can't ignore this feeling of revolt" (Stan, 2015). Deputy of National Liberal Party, Ludovic Orban, commenting on the decision taken by Prime Minister Victor Ponta to resign, said: "It's zero tolerance for corruption,



political clientelism and political migration. It's a new start and I think the political parties, people who are involved in public life, it must understand that it is not working and that must change radically, because people no longer accept that politics should be conducted as before today" ("Prima reacție din PNL la demisia lui", 2015).

Using variable of public culture and media environment involved customizing the relationship between public space and media environment and reporting to the sphere of media and public culture. We talk on the one hand, about the exploitation of symbols, through mechanisms such as symbolic negotiation of some representations from the perspective of a principle of generality or of a system of justification of general interest or mediating of some form of commitment to the public and therefore a "moral distance" to Romanian citizens, especially to those who were directly connected with the tragedy of the club „Colectiv”. Thus, in the context of the tragedy that happened in the club „Colectiv”, after Romanian Prime Minister arrived emergency from Mexico, the Romanian Government has decreed three days of national mourning. Or C. P. Piedone, the primary of Sector 4 of Bucharest, after initially asserted that there was authorization for the operation of the club that happened the tragedy of presenting documents to relieve from all responsibility, proposes marking the place where the tragedy occurred, by creating a monument in memory of victims of the club Collective - "The monument of innocent", a place where families of the missing to be able to recollect, to light candles and cry their pain ("Primarul Piedone vrea să ridice", 2015). Such as symbolic operation in order to form social representations, have remained without reactions. For example, Aurelian Pavelescu, the President of PNȚCD, speaks of national mourning is not justified, since this is not an act of heroism for the country, but a tragedy, an accident fueled by a series of errors and legal violations („Mesaj revoltător al unui important lider politic”, 2015). Or the President of Chamber of Deputies, Valeriu Zgonea, believes that young people dead in the „Colectiv” do not need monuments, but just ("Memoria tinerilor morți în”, 2015), while at the Journal from 19.00, on 3 November 2015, are critical comments of the communique of Primary of District 4, in terms of achieving a monument that commemorating the victims of the tragedy in „Colectiv”, considering it an irony, a reaction which demonstrates that C. P. Piedone demonstrates that "he does not have the correct measure neither pain and no uprising" ("Miting pentru demisia primarului sectorului 4”, 2015).

On the other hand, messages appeared on strips used during TV transmissions in connection with the tragedy of the club Collective and consequences arising later and slogans that citizens have expressed on the street, contributed to the imposition of patterns of visibility and debate about the topic, taking consider access to public space and televised public knowledge set of devices from October 30 to November 4, 2015. The slogans: "Do not leave until you leave!"; "Solidarity, down corruption"; "It's just the beginning, we want resignation"; " The resignation of all those responsible!" "Shame, Shame on you!", "Thieves!", " You do not have column than official" or even the title of the rally announced on the social network Facebook, for November 3, 2015: "The resignation of Piedone, his subordinates and all those responsible", they are illustrative in this respect. Regarding messages appeared on strips used during TV broadcasts, for instance, during the journal at 19.00, broadcast on Digi24 TV, have appeared messages such as "Bucharest's center, blocked at the protesters" or " The protesters demand resignation of Primary C. P. Piedone and of Minister G. Oprea" or "The protesters

marched to Government. It demands resignation of Prime Minister V. Ponta" ("Miting pentru demisia primarului sectorului 4", 2015). B1 TV, during the broadcast *World of Banciu*, dated November 3, 2015, shows messages such as: "A world of bribery and corruption" and "Johannis: I am impressed by the events of this evening. Politicians can't ignore this feeling of revolt" (Banciu, 2015). On national television TVR 1, in a live broadcast, on 1 November 2015, starting at 12.06, appears the message "Dossier for murder" ("Proteste și Comemorări în țară", 2015) and during the program *Nation Status*, aired on November 3, 2015, appears the message: "Cristian Popescu Piedone, 2 tons of responsibility" (Pătraru, 2015). The news station Antena 3 also, in a live broadcast on the evening of November 3, 2015, on support stockings display the message: "25 000 Romanian in the street asking for the resignation for the 32 angels burned" ("Peste 25.000 de români au protestat în București", 2015). Thus, the exposure of citizens to such messages contributed to the sharing of common ideas and common behavior patterns, mobilizing them to act together according with a general interest.

## 5. Conclusions

Media play an important role in social, contributing to organize of information, to guide social perceptions of various phenomena and to mobilizing of social groups to the action. Media content is the result of a suite of selections as to what acts are to be published and in what form, in what sizes, all guided by their own assessment, and not by *objective standards*. Thus, the media contribute to the interpretation and reconstruction of social events through grids appraiser that they propose to the public receiver. Such talk about the media representation of certain events that generate criteria to assess situations, determine judgments to be applied to these events and contribute to create collective action.

The applicative part of the work aimed to analyze the social context in which took place on November 4, 2015 the fall of Ponta Government, in the context in which a few days had gone from the drama which happened in the Club "Colectiv", on October 30, 2015. It was performed an analysis of media content disseminated by main channels of news from Romania (national channel news TVR 1 and other news channels: Romania TV, Realitatea TV, Digi24, B1TV and Antena 3), during October, 30 - November, 4 2015, having as a starting point the triangular model of the dimensions of public space proposed by P. Dahlgren in 2005 and the four variables of a constructivist analysis, such as: access to public space, public awareness, interaction and forms of sociability and public culture and media environment.

The analysis also covered the effects of framing and priming that mass produced them through media events related to collective drama produced by the fire at the club "Colectiv". It was found that the theme has been used strategically in the public space, generating positioning, diaries and street movements that led to radical consequences, such as the three resignations: Primary of Sector 4 in Bucharest, the Minister of Internal Affairs and Prime Minister of Romania. Having as its starting point this analysis we can conclude that the effects of *framing* and effects of *priming* contributes to creating representations for the public receiver, generates evaluation criteria of case causes judgments to be applied to events and contribute to create collective action.

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