

**POST-COMMUNIST PATTERNS OF MEDIA USE AND MEDIA-RELATED
COMMUNICATION AT HOUSEHOLD LEVEL:
ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES IN ROMANIA**

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The general socio-political changes that took place in Romania after the downfall of communism (1989) included the emergence of a new social actor: the mass media. The monocentric media system, centrally controlled by the political power, was gradually replaced by a demonopolized system. The printed press was fast and almost completely demonopolized, reaching a peak of 1800 titles in 1994. The number of audiovisual stations increased dramatically in 1997 to 189 private local stations, 119 local television stations and 1053 cable operators, which competed for audience shares with the public broadcasting stations.

A legitimate question is whether the media's rapid expansion after 1989 was externally induced or reflected changes in the audience.

According to the finding of the CURS panel study (conducted in 1994-1997),¹ the general audience of the public radio and TV services decreased from 88,5% (TVR1—channel 1 of the national public television) and 65% (Radio Romania Actualitati—national public news station), respectively, in 1990 to 54,5% (TVR1) and 54% (Radio Romania Actualitati) seven years later. The same study reported a rise in the number of viewers and listeners of private broadcasting stations (the average value for both radio and television was 29%). But the CURS study considered the numeric aspect of media consumption and did not address the role played by the mass media in directing human actions and the effects of mediated messages on the receivers' opinions, attitudes and judgments. We can call this a mechanistic approach to media consumption, which, paired with the magic bullet view of media effects, accounts for the primitive design of political communication during the first decade of free elections in Central-Eastern Europe.

The fact that mass media had an important influence on human action was taken for granted. In Romania, a country with a short history of democratic processes, this perspective involved the danger of an authoritarian relation between the media and the rest of society, including politics. Citizens were treated like passive receivers of messages directed to them

¹ ***CURS. *Sondaj National de Opinie*, 9-15 October 1997. Romanian Journal of Sociology, X, 1-2, Bucharest, 1999.