

## ASPECTS OF MEDIA “MASS-ENTERTAINMENT” IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

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*In this article we analyze and discuss the Romanian entertainment industry, which has recently led – and for a good reason – to a public space reorganization. Whilst playing a main role in people’s lives, it has managed to change the behaviour, life choices and ways of living of each individual.*

*By taking a huge interest in entertainment, Romanian stars intend to show the society what they have achieved so far and what kind of projects they have, sharing the most important events in their lives with the general public on TV, in the newspapers and in the magazines. At the same time they expose themselves to the risk of misrepresentation and distortion of facts due to oversized mediatization.*

**Keywords:** *media culture, consumership, celebrities, infotainment, characters’ intimacy.*

### INTRODUCTION

The development of the information society has represented a central lever in drawing the dividing line between entertainment and information. At the end of the nineteenth century, the entertainment revolution linked to the advent of vinyl discs and movies takes place. It is based on the premise that movies are essentially entertainment. In this regard, Georges Sadoul (1948: 8), in one of his books, remarks that movies “are, at the same time, entertainment, culture tools, art, industry, trade, technique”.

Whilst analysing cultural phenomena, D. Kellner (2001: 5) focuses on the American media culture that “lead to colonization of leisure, impregnating and dominating routine, stimulating it by the priority of televisual consumption”. In particular, he observes that “individuals are subjected to a flow of images and sounds that get in, which new virtual worlds of entertainment, information, sex, politics are reordering space and time to individuals, annihilating the distinction between reality and media image and producing, in the same time, new forms of experience and subjectiveness” (Kellner, 2001: 29).

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As Dawn Dobni (2007: 7) points out in one of his articles (*Entertainment Value: The Concept and Its Dimensions*), the entertainment industry has been one of the fastest growing businesses in Northern America, producing a larger number of new jobs, as well as new options for entertainment. Words such as "infotainment", "edutainment", "eatertainment", "agritainment", "advertainment", "shoppertainment" and "retailtainment" indicate a trend in which entertainment contents are incorporated in non-entertainment offers.

In 1895 another type of entertainment was invented: Filmmaking. Soon a related industry/business also developed. Since then it has allowed us, on one hand, to develop a new subject to study (Film History) and, on the other, to set significant landmarks following the advent of motion pictures.

Prior to 1927, the major film studios were getting into the business and the producers were trying to develop the idea of creating great stars, at first, through advertising and then through fame, in order to profit from these hugely popular characters all over the world. In fact, they took great screenplays and hired celebrities from theatres and then put them on the screen (Gomery, 2005: 206). That happened in the cases of shows performed in theatres (such as musicals) which became big hits not only in Hollywood, but all over the world. The public was fascinated and consciously conquered by this huge money-making industry. Thus, from that moment on, TV appearances would go hand-in-hand with movie and theatre appearances.

Back in 1895, being a form of mass entertainment was considered to be the movies' most powerful feature. In the following decades major changes (the disappearance of silent films and the advent of sound films, the transition from black and white to colour, the advent of plasma TV sets etc.) were made, which have lately allowed – amongst other things – the introduction of another type of visual products, called "hyper-movies" (thanks to the digital format, 3D graphics, the possibility to watch movies in download from the Internet and so on). Two sociologists, Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy (2008: 14), specifically refer to this "hypermovies-era" in their frame of reference. These authors identify (amongst many other things) four phases in Filmmaking history:

- the first phase corresponds to the silent film era, which marked a "primitive modernity";
- the second one is the phase of classical modernity (1930–1950), in which stars were "inventions of the studios";
- the third phase developed between the 1950's/60's and 1970 and illustrated a "modernistic and emancipative modernity";
- the fourth one is the hyper-modern phase, characterized by deep transformations in many areas (creation, production, starting-up, distribution, consumption).

Lately, a confusion process between entertainment and information has taken place, as "media entertainment can turn unpleasant information into an attractive one", sociologist Claude-Jean Bertrand points out. This author asserts that media

entertainment should be kept separated from serious information without being marginalized and deformed (Bertrand, 2001: 218).

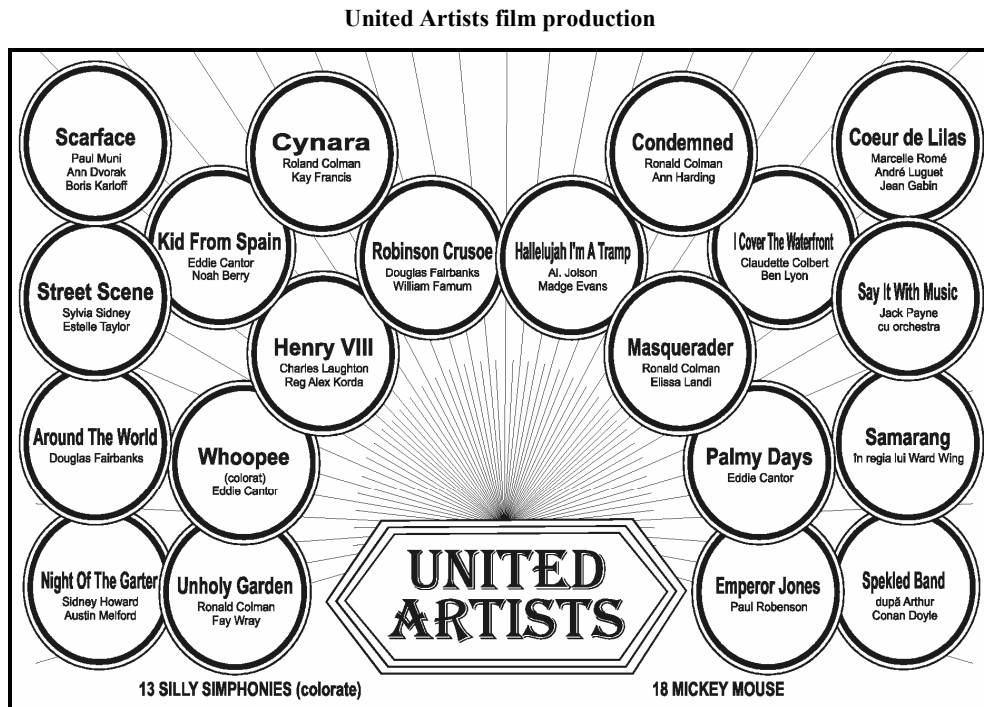
In the entertainment and media industry certain stories (such as a celebrity marriage, a plane crash and so on) are emphasized more than others every day, while other news/stories are almost unknown to the general public. Moreover most people are eager to get spicy/scandalous details (possibly, enriched by explicit pictures as well). Although the interference between news and entertainment is unavoidable, this feature has deeply influenced the form and structure of print media (newspapers and magazines) since the beginning of regular publishing. Moreover the pressure caused by the endless need for new stories to publish (24/7 and not just once a week, as it used to be in the past) has led to a further consequence: “not always news reports can totally fill the pages, therefore the empty spaces are being filled with entertainment contents and pure fantasy stories, artificially made up by editors, or with “sensational stories”, explains Alina Bărgăoanu (2006: 40). The same phenomenon can be observed in print media (with a specific reference to tabloid journalism), where the editors’ main aim is to provide information in an easy and entertaining form, addressing a specific type of readers within the general public.

#### **STAR SYSTEM: FROM THE OUTSET OF HOLLYWOOD TO NOWADAYS**

The Romanian entertainment industry has given rise to businesses of all types, one of them being the invention of celebrity, which originally comes from Hollywood.

Between 1932 and 1934, European stars used to go to Hollywood to sign long term-deals with the American major film studios like Paramount, Fox-Film, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, United Artists and Universal Studios (which, at the time, were exclusively owned by Carl Laemmle, the businessman who invented the Star System in 1912). The actors and actresses who were under contract with Fox Studios in 1933 were carefully selected on the basis of certain features (language, look etc.). In a Romanian newspaper of the time (*Hollywood: organ cinematografic ilustrat*, directed by George Theodorescu) a list of Fox first-rate stars (Lilian Harvey, Janet Gaynor, Clara Bow, Sally Eilers, John Boles, Henri Garat, James Dunn, Warner Baxter, Spencer Tracey and Will Rogers), then second-rate stars (Marion Nixon, Herbert Mundin, El Brendel, Boots Malory, Miriam Jordan, Norman Foster, Victor Jory, Ralph Morgan, Henrietta Grosman, Genevieve Tobin, Alexander Kirkland) and, finally, third-rate stars (who were still under audition) was published (*Hollywood: organ cinematografic ilustrat*, February 11<sup>st</sup>, no. 22, 1933, 22, p. 4). Actually, at first they got minor roles, which helped them receive further offers. Then, they got main roles and most American movies certified their success. The figure below (*Figure 1*) shows the movie titles by which the names of actors and actresses working for United Artists in 1933 became very popular:

Figure 1



Source: *Hollywood: organ cinematografic ilustrat*, no. 31, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1933: 1.

The main goal of the star system was the exploitation of popular characters, as stars were an ultimate capital for the major studios in order to maintain their hegemony in the movie business. In the light of this situation, the confession of a Hollywood star, Dorothea Wieck (who, in the American people's eyes, embodied the spiritual beauty-type), offers a remarkable first-hand description of the star system from the inside: "Hollywood is the work Citadel. Work in the first place (...). The Hollywood star is a simple worker like any other. They give you the screenplay with a respective role, a few weeks to learn it and a scheduled time to report at the studio" (*Hollywood: organ cinematografic ilustrat*, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, no. 7, 1934: 4). Helen Twelvetrees, one of the greatest theatre stars in New York, who had moved to Hollywood (to work in the film industry), said: "Hollywood is totally different from what I expected. Life is quieter than in a farm in Texas. Since I have been working for Paramount Studios, I have done nothing but go from home to the studio. Work, work, work and again work. Incomparably more tiring than theatre" (*Hollywood: organ cinematografic ilustrat*, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, no. 7, 1934: 4).

Some Romanian movie stars also went to Hollywood with high ambitions to become international movie stars. But most of them didn't get any role in Hollywood movies and wasted one, two or even more years of their lives until they

realized they couldn't make it. That's Monica Gabor (ex-Columbeanu)'s case, for instance. The relationship with Mr. Pink in 2013 has brought her on the front pages of tabloid newspapers and on the covers of gossip magazines. Thanks to him, she had the great opportunity to meet famous stars (La Toya Jackson, Lindsay Lohan, Mario Lopez, David Arquette, Kimora Lee Simmons, etc.) in different locations and on different occasions (especially at official events, such as the launching of Mr. Pink's energy drink in the USA and Dubai – in this regard, *Agenția de presă mondenă*, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013). Moreover, she was photographed alongside some of them and looked rejoicing in such special moments which had come in her life. This couple, constantly in the media spotlight, has become subject of endless discussions and disputes for the general public.

On the other hand, there are also a few happy cases of successful Romanian movie stars who managed to get some roles in movies at Hollywood. Striving for a career in the American film industry, Monica Bârlădeanu took the way to Hollywood. One of the most popular Romanian newspapers, *Libertatea*, dedicated the front page headlines to her in 2005: “one year ago, the Americans stole Monica Bârlădeanu. One of the sexiest women in Romania chose to move to Los Angeles in order to take her chance in the Movie City” (*Libertatea*, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2005: 4–5). In most cases, Romanian movie stars (including Monica Bârlădeanu) have risen from initial small roles to the rank of celebrity. They took the first steps in career in the American film industry by playing minor roles and, subsequently, have become some of the most appreciated international stars, with the chance to play in other (more important) movies. But another type of Star System mechanism has been created by the way in which some actresses and models planned to test the notoriety previously achieved in their country on great stages in the USA. That's the way another Romanian star, Maria Dinulescu, chose to follow. After countless meetings and training courses in acting, accent reduction, screenwriting and auditions, she managed to find her place within the American film industry. Over there, she did not expect that her previous career and the success achieved in Romania would work as a sort of launching pad for future achievements (and, hopefully, success) in the American movie business. “Romania or being an Eastern-European actress will be always my reality. I could not stand to spend my whole life playing roles of Eastern-European women who make short appearances in movies. It is frustrating, you are not feeling creative, you do not get to grow in terms of character development”, says Maria Dinulescu. Forced to deal with the strict requirements and the high standards set by Hollywood, Maria had to work hard and wait for a long time in order to show her vocation (*OK!*, June 13<sup>rd</sup>, 2016). As a result, she managed to make only a few appearances in movies playing minor roles (with low salaries), from which she couldn't benefit. Unfortunately, she failed to achieve the same high reputation she used to have in Romania. This failure pushed her to come back home.

It's very interesting to notice how easily and gladly popular people like her accept to appear on numerous TV shows and release interviews unveiling delicate

details of their own personal stories, or make charity gestures and arrangements, in an attempt to achieve celebrity gradually. Thus, we have focussed our analysis on the phenomenon by which the star-system has developed until today, switching from the original model in Hollywood to a more flexible and slippery one through a relentless birth/re-birth of stars process.

### DEGENERATION OF MASS CULTURE

By comparing Culture with games Dutch sociologist Johan Huizinga (2007: 102), asserts that (social/collective) games are a type of entertainment, whose basic factors (fight/competition, show, challenge, exhibitionistic ostentation, simulation and restricted rule) can be found in wildlife as well. In contrast to such a position, games, on TV, are mostly associated with images in motion. Therefore, Huizinga highlights the importance of games by taking many examples regarding: games for animals, kids and adults; handiness/handicraft games; power and intelligence games; gambles; acting performances and various types of show. Subsequently he analyzes this phenomenon.

Beside dedicated channels (specifically, music, sports or movies), "entertainment is not only in commercial TV shows and programs (identified as "entertainment products" indeed in the light of their content and purpose), but also in those formally belonging to the "official" news/information system, as accurate surveys and analysis conducted on news programs and political talk-shows" (Drăgan, tome 2, 2007: 109).

Romanian TV Channels have launched a number of successful television shows based exactly on the same formats as "Who Wants to be a Millionaire", "Big Brother", "Kids Say the Darndest Things", "Cheaters", "Survivor" and others. Through these new TV formats, a rough entertainment, which has seemed mostly boring and conventional so far, is being offered to the public.

Unlike J. Huizinga, sociologist Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg (1995: 277) highlights the playful dimension of politics (politics as games). Basically, "games and politics are sometimes mixed as it is often told about the political games". In his studies, he focuses on a type of political entertainment, which usually captures the public's attention. To this end he analyzes deeds and gestures made by political leaders, who are considered (by the author) to be like actors with background roles able to replace movie stars (Schwartzberg, 1995: 279). "A leader should transform into a perfect entertainer", in order to compete with professional showmen/entertainers in a more effective way and to keep a certain audience level (Schwartzberg, 1995: 277).

Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg endorses the principle according to which "politicians need to be converted into stars saved from the public's disinterest and adapted to mass culture" (Schwartzberg, 1995: 277). As it has just been pointed out, the approach adopted by politicians, as it's seen from a playful perspective, does nothing but apply the strategies of public persuasion and manipulation, imposing an ideological control.

Through its specific feature of addressing a manifold public, TV is a source of entertainment, as some viewers not only seek information, but also wish to show their lives off. This increasing trend in the Romanian postmodern society involves a metamorphosis of information, which is currently leaning towards entertainment, as both consumers and TV channels (along with the newspapers) demand that, all of them being in a constant competition.

Books and contemporary magazines have increasingly begun offering entertainment contents: so we can now identify a phenomenon called “infotainment” or “entertainment in the form of information” (Constantinescu, 2001: 213).

English sociologist Robert E. Park, representative of the (so called) Chicago School, is among the first experts to analyze the entertainment function of the press. Park draws the conclusion that the most prominent personalities of the American media industry (such as newspaper publishers W. R. Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer) built their businesses starting from the new demographic realities of the US as well as by the principle according to which “the newspaper does not carry out the main primary function to educate, but to entertain” (Bărgăoanu, 2006: 40).

Whilst observing a degeneration of mass culture, H. Arendt remarks that “mass society (...) does not seek culture, but entertainment and the reports offered by the entertainment industry are consumed just in the same way as all the other consumption goods”. “This does not mean culture distribution among the mass public, but culture crash in order to provide entertainment” (Rieffel, 2008: 103). Furthermore, Romanian TV channels have launched shows (i.e. WOWbiz Show from Kanal D) which are, from time to time, filled with (alleged) exclusive stories (in particular, interviews with important characters of the Romanian showbiz or sensational news about them) provided by the gossip industry. Such commercial programmes have quickly and massively spread all over the Romanian TV and are feeding the general public with manipulated materials about the so-called “stars”, as the people are supposed to be demanding amusement. Consequently, we all have been witnessing the spreading of the cult of celebrity across the Romanian society. “Stars” have achieved economic success through a massive production of gossip news and pictures and also through advertising campaigns where popular stars appear as testimonials in commercials, broadcasted by producers during advertising spaces within TV programmes.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ordinary people feel the desire to speak out about celebrity itself, and especially about the influence exercised on the society by celebrities who often appear on TV and in gossip magazines. Undoubtedly, TV shows impose them models (“stars”/ celebrities indeed) to identify with and urge them to try to follow those careers. Moreover that generates also a sort of “idolatry”, a true “celebrity-addiction” in term of qualifications, as commoners feel pushed to imitate “stars” in every respect (look, attitude, language etc.).

In the review most specialists usually talk about entertainment as TV consumption, focusing on this type of social field (Silverstone, 1999; Constantinescu, 2001; Drăgan, 2007; Bakker, 2007). As an example of this phenomenon, we can recall the cases of famous athletes and artists who take drugs: such stories always get the media's attention and fill the newspapers headlines. No surprise that breaking news and special reports on celebrities nowadays are the most in-demand products in the media industry all over the world.

Some researchers studied and then summarized media functions (among which, the entertainment one). Currently, in the media the need for entertainment is a priority, in order to maintain a certain level of audience, the public being eager not only for a fair, objective and independent information, but also for sensationalism as well. Usually, stars apply all sorts of strategies in order to capture the general public's attention as much as possible (and to keep it as long as possible). But, through their pictures and stories, they become more "accessible" for their fan communities. Therefore, the growing popularity is related to the audience and thus the popularity level of each star rises and the fan communities get larger by the day within the entertainment industry worldwide.

Anyone who has a film-making/TV entertainment background – whether they are international film producers or film-makers – has the same interests everywhere. After long negotiations, they invest a lot of money in stars, in order to have them at their disposal whenever the opportunity to propose the creation of a new TV show format arises. On the other hand, they are using and controlling them, by having them exclusively engaged for business, in order to sell better products in the market.

A few Romanian actresses and fashion models have made a name for themselves within the Hollywood film industry. Marcel Iureș, Dragoș Bucur, Maia Morgenstern, Oana Pellea and Emil Hoștină are outstanding actors, whose talent and appeal helped them get roles in Hollywood movies, playing alongside very famous Hollywood movie stars. For some of them the source of celebrity consists, maybe, less of their own talent for acting and more of their connections with other famous "stars" (the cases of Monica Gabor, on one hand, and Maria Dinulescu and Monica Bârlădeanu – who both studied acting in the USA – on the other, offer clear examples in this regard).

Usually, "when we speak or read or write about celebrities, our emphasis on their marital relationships and sexual habits, on their tastes in smoking, drinking, dressing, sports cars, and interior decoration is our desperate effort to distinguish among the indistinguishable", says Daniel J. Boorstin (1985: 65). Anyway, reputed people have given up their privacy in exchange for fame, as the media have created a space in which they have become a form of entertainment due to their high visibility/popularity level. In this regard, the people who are involved in politics have a particular relevance: they are in the spotlight more than celebrities, as they use TV as a key-tool in order to influence the public opinion to their advantage. That's why politicians wish to appear as much as possible on TV screen: the aim is



to strengthen their popularity among the general public. To this effect they employ a variety of “strategic” resources: surveys, spin doctors, political analysts etc. The fact of the matter is that tabloid newspapers and TV channels keep publishing and emphasizing such stories.

### ABOUT THE ARTICLE

The article has proposed to discuss entertainment under the scheme currently displayed in the Romanian society by incorporating it firmly by applying social theories (in particular, the field theories elaborated by J. Huizinga, I. Drăgan, H. Arendt and D. Kellner). By extending field theories with examples taken from current media, we managed to catch and analyze the media effects on individuals. In this regard, this subject has been inspired by (and has represented a further development of) my PhD thesis (“The construction of Star System in the Romanian media industry”), which aimed at describing and analyzing the link between the star-system phenomenon in Hollywood and the current Romanian one. It emphasized the whole process by which some ordinary people were turned into stars and the way it took place in Hollywood at the beginning. Subsequently it described the situation in the Romanian society (even by referring to the exemplary cases of famous people who left the country in order to pursue their dream of building prestigious careers overseas).

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- \*\*\* *Impresii de la Hollywood*, in "Hollywood: organ cinematografic ilustrat", no. 7, 1934, p. 4.
- \*\*\* *Vedetele Fox 1933*, in "Hollywood: organ cinematografic ilustrat", no. 22, 1933, p. 4.

*În acest articol analizăm și discutăm cu privire la divertismentul românesc ca industrie, care a condus recent – și pe bună dreptate – la reorganizarea spațiului public. În timp ce deține un rol esențial în viețile oamenilor, acesta a reușit să modifice comportamentul, alegerile și modurile de viață ale fiecărui individ.*

*Îndrăgind divertismentul, vedetele urmăresc să arate societății ceea ce au realizat până în prezent și ce tip de proiecte au, împărtășind cele mai importante evenimente din viețile lor cu publicul la televizor, în ziare și în reviste. În același timp, ele însele se expun riscului de denaturare și distorsionare a faptelor, cauzat de mediatizarea supradimensionată.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *cultura media, consum, celebrități, infotainment, intimitatea persoanelor publice din zona divertismentului.*