

Neo-Nazis Sympathizers on the Forums of the Romanian Online Publications

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Abstract: The research aims to highlight how the forums of the Romanian online publications may often become spaces for right-wing extremist propaganda. The case study includes about 1.000 comments of the readers, expressed on the articles about a protest of several intellectuals against a TV program of the Romanian public Television (TVR), where Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Iron Guard, a Nazi organization created in 1927, was presented as a romantic hero. The results of the content analysis of comments revealed the stigmatizing themes, the stereotypes and the extremist ideas identified on the forums of these articles. In addition, the comparison between the electronic platforms of the publications showed the importance of their features and of the characteristics of audiences regarding the content of the comments.

Keywords: extremism; propaganda; stereotypes; online publications

1. Introduction

Since 1990 the Internet has gradually experienced an increase in the number of users. If in 2004 about 41% of Europeans used the Internet, in 2011 the percentage climbed to 73%. In Romania, the percentage increased from 6% in 2004 to 47% in 2011 (Eurostat 2012). This development of the internet provides new spaces for communication and facilitates the emergence of the new virtual communities. Furthermore, it expands the public sphere by creating novel ways of collective mobilization, of criticism regarding political, social and cultural issues, of spreading ideas and information and of political action (Cardon 2010; Flichy 2010: 44).

Studying the use of the Internet by extremist groups is a new topic of research in Romania, which gives originality to this paper. However several international studies showed the increasing incidence of right-wing extremism and marginally approached the issues of the use of virtual space for propaganda. Using the Internet, the extremist groups around the world have the possibility to spread more easily propaganda materials, but also to create a community, regardless of a country's borders, in order to coordinate political actions. Thus, “the Internet represents a previously undreamed of possibility for both, propagating racism and allowing racists to access each other's ideas and resources” (Wine 2005: 207).

The results of the content analysis of some extremist websites showed that most of them contained external links to other pages on the same nature, a series of films, photos or music, racist visual symbols, and a third of them allowed access to extremist literature. The conclusion of the researchers was that the Internet is a mean by which one can create connections between such groups, reaching an international audience where they could gain partisans (Gerstenfeld, Grant & Chiang 2003). Another study indicated the emergence of an online type of anti-Semitism in the Serbian virtual space (Radenović 2004). The researchers also emphasized the importance of anonymity in the emergence of violent texts and their release for a large audience without the person writing them being held accountable for his/her comments (Baumrin 2011).

Furthermore, the German press highlighted the importance of the cyberspace as a platform for propaganda and as a source of inspiration for extremists after the Oslo attempt, whose author was the Christian fundamentalist, Anders Behring Breivik (Totok 2011). Moreover the researchers have become increasingly interested in this phenomenon. A recent study in France, conducted by a research institute specialized in analyzing and mapping the social Web – Linkfluence, revealed a progression of the presence of the extreme right in the French blogosphere after 2007 (Mestre & Monnot 2011). Holocaust denial, rehabilitation of war criminals and sustaining xenophobic anti-Semitic, chauvinistic and racist ideologies attract the political support of a new generation of young people who share such ideas and who are very familiar with new technologies of information and communication. Furthermore, the Foundation “Friedrich Ebert” draws attention, by publishing a survey conducted in 2012, on the increasing phenomenon of right-wing extremism in the Eastern Germany and on the decreasing of age of those persons who have these views, mainly young people aged between 14 and 30 years (Totok 2012).

There are not yet established global measures on the spread of extremism on the Internet. If in countries such as Germany, this type of online activity is punished by law, in Romania there is not a clear policy in this regard. The Foundation for the Protection of Citizens against State Abuses (FACIAS) required, in November 2012, through an open letter, the suspension of the websites that make anti-Semitic, fascist and legionnaire propaganda (FACIAS 2012a). The National Council of Audiovisual (NCA) response was that together with Ministry of Internal Affairs, they will proceed to identify the providers of these websites and if they are under Romanian jurisdiction, they will apply the legal measures (FACIAS 2012b).

This phenomenon does not appear only on extremist websites, but also in the forums of the Romanian online publications. In addition to individuals who deliberately make propaganda, some of the readers who do not know the historical facts spread involuntarily such ideas, but also verbal attacks on public or anonymous persons and on national, religious and sexual minorities. The general themes of these articles, which are similar with the ones of this case study, attract stigmatizing comments in a large number. Therefore, the study aims to identify the themes of the comments on the

selected articles, to establish their frequency and to present the main extremist ideas. Secondly, we are interested in the context of the emergence of these themes, focusing on the characteristics of the readers and of the publications. Nevertheless, before presenting the method and the results of the study, we are proposing a review of the anti-Semitic themes existent in the public discourse of the `90s and of the general population views on various minority groups in Romania.

2. Anti-Semitic Themes in the Romanian Public Discourse of the `90s

The anti-Semitic comments in the forums include a series of stereotypes found in the international radical literature, which Erner (2005) labelled as “odious literature”, the Jews being sent to abattoir and transformed into scapegoats for everything that is bad. These stereotypes are also interpreted in a series of antidemocratic publications, such as those of Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Nae Ionescu, rediscovered and reprinted after 1990, now running out of control on the Internet. The nationalist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic “new ideology”, established in Romania after 1989, is facilitated by the political instability and the economic insecurity and it comes as a result of the nationalism and extreme right legitimacy “in the name of the «anti-totalitarian» resistance and/or of cultural performance”. This is itself an effect of the collective and undifferentiated rehabilitation of the old exile. These works are written in the Romanian protochronism paradigm, which represents a cultural theory from the late 1970s, which claims the priority of the national culture in relation to the universal culture (Gheorghiu 2007: 328).

Therefore, we have considered that it is important to provide a comparison between the results of our case study and G. Voicu’s observations (2000) about the anti-Semitic stereotypes in the Romanian public discourse after the collapse of communism. While his studies focused on the literature and press in the `90s, our study is an analysis of the discourse in the forums in the years 2000. Thus, we intent to reveal which of the themes can still be found today on the forums and how they are reproduced here. G. Voicu has identified eight major anti-Semitic themes, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. The Anti-Semitic Themes in the Romanian Public Discourse of '90 (Voicu, 2000)

Theme	Stereotypes
The Jews brought the communism in Romania and in world.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communism is seen as a "Jewish business". 2. The Jews came to Romania "riding on the red army tanks". 3. The Jews were the torturers of the Romanians in the communist prisons.
Jewish world conspiracy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a New World Order, led by Jews. 2. The Jews are running everything from the shadows along with the Masons.
The denial and the minimization of the Holocaust and the rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Holocaust is a Jewish business. 2. In the extermination camps it was found no chemical evidence for the existence of cyanide, which means that the "final solution" would still be just on the status of ideology. 3. There was no Holocaust in Romania, or it is justified by the fact that Jews were communists and they conducted the real Holocaust against the Romanian people. 4. Ion Antonescu is a hero of the nation. 5. He is a saviour of Jews, who opposed Hitler's requirements to send them to extermination.
The exculpation of the legionnaires	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The legionnaires were not guilty of the murders in the rebellion. The Legion has not been convicted or declared fascist at the Nuremberg Tribunal. 2. The political assassinations committed by the Legion are blamed on corruption and injustice in the country. 3. The assassinations were perpetrated by some groups infiltrated the Legion.
The demonization of Jews	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Jews killed Jesus and they are against Christianity. 2. The Jews are the source of all evil and that they have a criminal nature.
The anti-Romanian character of Jews, Jews demolished the communism and Jews are the profiteers of the new political order	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Jews organized "the 1989 coup" to return to power and to gain the Romanian properties by privatization. 2. They had the Americans' help, whose undercover agents they have been since those times.

We focus on three stigmatizing themes that are also very often found in the readers' comments: "the denial and the minimization of the Holocaust", "the rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu" and "the exculpation of the legionnaires". The General Ion Antonescu came to power through a coup in 1940, amid a national tragedy, namely the loss of

Bessarabia, the northern Bukovina and the northern Transylvania (Friling, Ioanid, Ionescu 2004: 10). He was Hitler's ally and he helped invading the Soviet Union. According to the Final Report of the International Commission for the Study of Holocaust in Romania, "Elie Wiesel", although he delayed the deportation of the Romanian Jews in the autumn of 1942, his responsibility "for the killing of Jews in Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transnistria is indisputable" (Friling et al. 2004: 247). Thus, during the Holocaust in Romania, over 400.000 Jews and 30.000 Roma have been killed. The Holocaust deniers consider that it is a Jewish business, plotted to blame then Germany and other countries, including Romania. They say that in the extermination camps there was found no chemical evidence for the existence of cyanide, which means that the "final solution" would still be just on the status of ideology. On the other hand, Antonescu is seen as a hero of the nation, as a saviour of Jews, who opposed Hitler's requirements to send them to extermination.

Furthermore, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, briefly called the Iron Guard Movement or the Legionary Movement, was a Nazi organization, created on June 24, 1927 by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. The organization had a religious-mystical, a violent anti-communist, an anti-Semitic and an anti-Masonic character. In the pogroms of 1941, during the legionnaire rebellion, thousands of Jews died (Friling et al. 2004: 10). However, the neo-Nazis sympathizers affirm that the legionnaires were not guilty of the murders in the rebellion and that it was a set-up of Jews, communists and Antonescu. Moreover, anti-Semitic crimes were against the ideology and the high moral of the legionnaires.

3. General Population Views Regarding the Minority Groups in Romania

Concerning the general population views on the stereotypes mentioned above, it is important to note the results of two surveys conducted by the National Council for Combating Discrimination. Thus, the results showed that only 46% of the respondents believe that it was Holocaust in Romania and only 47% of them recognize the existence of the pogroms. In their opinion, the responsible for the Holocaust of Jews in Romania is: Nazi Germany – 86%, Ion Antonescu's Government – 43%, Soviet Union – 30%, Romanian people – 8%, Jews – 8%. Moreover, Ion Antonescu is seen as a great patriot – 46%, a great strategist – 39%, the one who made the Great Romania – 16%, a democrat leader – 13%, a saviour of the Jews -10% and he must be rehabilitated for what he did for Romania – 26%. On the other hand, he is considered responsible for the crimes against the Roma people – 34% and against Jews – 26%, a dictator – 28%, a war criminal – 20% and the one who led Romania to disaster – 17% (National Council for Combating Discrimination, 2012a).

According with the findings of the second study, the respondents would agree that a Jew can be a family member – 12%, or a member of the group of friends – 21%, or a member of the work group – 19%, or a neighbour – 16%, or he can live in Romania –

15%, or he can visit Romania – 6% and only 3% say that he should not come in Romania. 41% of the respondents have no good or bad opinion about the Romanian Jews, 37% have a positive opinion and 8% have a negative one. The first three qualities of Jews are unity – 18%, their peaceful nature – 17%, hard-work - 16% and the first three shortcomings refer to avarice – 29%, intolerance – 11% and deceitfulness - 7% (National Council for Combating Discrimination, 2012b).

The transformation of the public sphere, due to the new reality of cyberspace, favoured the fast spread of the discriminatory opinions, which should not be ignored by the researchers. To this end, we chose to present the following case study and the results of the content analysis of the comments expressed and collected on the forums of several Romanian publications.

4. Internet Users Versus the Intellectuals' Protest Letter against a TVR Program. A Case Study

4.1. Method

The case study we propose was based on approximately 1000 comments on the articles about the controversy related to a TV program aired on November 13, 2010 on the national television station. Here, the journalist Ion Cristoiu presented Corneliu Zelea Codreanu as a romantic figure, insisting on his morality and on the Legionary Movement, and ignoring the fascist and terrorist character of this group. Thus, several intellectuals from Romania and abroad have signed a letter of protest, in which they drew the attention to these issues and to the lack of reaction of the TV show moderator, Eugenia Voda, demanding a sanction for those responsible. A few days later, ten other intellectuals signed an open letter, denouncing the National Council of Audiovisual (NCA) for the sanctioning of TVR, appealing to the conformist spirit of decision in the direction of political correctness and the fact that other programs, in which it was encouraged the nostalgia for the communist regime, were not penalized.

The debate continued during several weeks, but we selected only those articles with more than 15 comments. Therefore, we collected the comments in the forums of four national newspapers: *Adevarul* – 3 articles with a total of 152 opinions of 128 commentators (Bunea 2010; Chiujdeia & Delcea 2010; Manolescu 2010), *Evenimentul Zilei* – 2 articles with a total of 511 opinions of 284 commentators (Lupu 2010; Mihaieş 2010), *România Libera* – 1 article with 32 opinions of 32 commentators (Fati 2010), *Cotidianul* – 1 article with 68 opinions of 50 commentators (Cupola 2010); of the site of one TV station: *Realitatea.net* – 2 articles with a total of 115 opinions of 70 commentators (Teodorescu 2010a, 2010b) of two cultural magazines: *Historia* – 1 article with 41 opinions (Historia 2010), *Observatorul Cultural* – 1 article with 22 opinions of 22 commentators (Şimonca 2010) and of the specialised extremist platform *Altermedia* - 1 article with 28 opinions of 12 commentators (Altermedia 2010). The number of commentators represents the

number readers' pseudonyms, who have expressed their ideas on the forums. Because on the forum of the magazine *Historia* the pseudonym is automatically chosen as "Anonymous", I could not identify how many readers have commented.

After the collection of the opinions, we processed them in a content analysis that we performed using the software of qualitative discourse analysis, MaxQDA. Therefore, for the content analysis we used the for the anti-Semitic opinions key themes from the model proposed by George Voicu, presented above. We also added some new themes that have emerged during the analysis. It is important to note that in one comment one can identify more themes.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. The Themes in the Online Comments in the Romanian Online Publications' Forums

The content analysis of the comments outlines nine major themes, which we will discuss in this section.

Table 2. Themes of the Online Comments of the Readers

Themes	Percentage of the overall number of themes
Legionary propaganda	9%
Anti-Semitism	21%
Opinions against the legionnaires	9%
Communism	4%
Opinions about the protest	5%
Opinions about the TV program of Eugenia Voda, about the 10 intellectuals' letter in her defence and about Ion Cristoiu	22%
Opinions about the NCA	8%
The infringement of the freedom of expression	10%
Opinions about Romania and Romanians	4%
Other themes (political topics regarding the then Government and Opposition, the politicians in general or the monarchy, criticism of the media, Romanian Orthodox Church, Revolution of 1989, nationalism, xenophobia and racism)	8%

A part of the discourse on the forums refers to the authors of the articles, to the newspapers or to other Internet users. Regarding the authors, the readers express their

agreement and sympathy (22) or their disagreement (29) through personal attacks (35), serious accusations of manipulation of the public (42) and insults (75). Equally, the commentators post remarks in which they praise and support the newspaper (2) or they criticize it (10), sometimes in an omniscient manner (31). The discussions between the Internet users also contain agreement, support, or friendly remarks (54), remarks about the grammar errors (9) or disagreement (93), sometimes in an omniscient manner (26), through personal attacks (53) and insults (109).

4.2.1.1 Legionary Propaganda

The legionary propaganda includes the messages that make the apology of the Legion and of its founder Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (138), in which it is argued that Romanian intellectuals of that time joined the Legion (25), or there are cited or made references to the writings of some legionnaires (22) or legionary slogans are mentioned (3).

The apology of the Legionary Movement and of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu is illustrated by the opinions where Corneliu Codreanu is seen as a hero of Romanians and the Legion as a group with a high level of morality, which promoted the Orthodox Christian values and fought against the communist “plague”. Thus, one of the readers considers that “The Captain [Zelea Codreanu] was truly a Jesus Christ of Romania, because no one has suffered more for the Romanian people than the Captain. Christ suffered for all mankind, a few days, but the Captain [...] suffered from early youth for the Romanian Land” (Guian 2010). The comments refer also to the writers, philosophers, intellectuals, who joined the Legion, thereby justifying its high moral character, among them being Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Nichifor Crainic, Nae Ionescu, Petre Tuțea etc. Other comments focused not only on the readers’ admiration for Codreanu, but also on their commitment to the Legion, citing fragments from the legionary writings, providing a full bibliographic list with legionary literature or posting legionary slogans.

4.2.1.2 Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is represented by a variety of themes, such as the exculpation of the legionnaires (168), the denial and the minimization of the Holocaust and the rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu (66), the Jews as bringers of communism (53), the anti-Romanian character of Jews (39), the Jewish world conspiracy (34), the demonization of Jews (31), the accusations of killing of Arabs and comparisons with the Holocaust (14), the Jews as profiteers of the new political order (4) and the violent imaginary, menaces and insults (43).

Regarding the exculpation of the legionnaires, the readers deny or justify both: the killing of the Jews (37) and the political assassinations committed by them (47) or they claim the falsification of the history (84). In the first category of comments, the argument of those who claim the innocence of the legionnaires is that the Legion has not been convicted or declared fascist at the Nuremberg Tribunal, as illustrated in this

comment: “The Legion did bad things, but not pogroms like in Tsarist Russia or genocide or holocaust like in others. At Nuremberg, it has not been convicted and there was no reason to do it” (Donovan 2010). In the second category of comments, the political assassinations are blamed on the corruption and the “misery” in the country, on the injustice, or on the fact that “the country’s wealth was devoured by a few worthless”, and the legionnaires being actually “the Romania’s justice fighters while the state was bugged up! They were patriots!” (xnet 2010). In another variant, the assassinations were perpetrated by some groups infiltrated the Legion. Finally, in other messages the main point is that the communists, and implicitly the Jews falsified the history and that the Legion was not fascist or criminal.

The themes of the Jews as bringers of communism and of the anti-Romanian character of Jews combine in the comments of the readers, who claim that the Jews have brought the communism in Romania, hating everything that is Romanian and killing all the intellectuals of those times.

The theme of Jewish world conspiracy is exemplified by the opinions in which the Internet users say that the Jews are masters of the world, holding the world finances and the media, together with the Masons (28) and governing the United States of America and the European Union (6). Moreover, other commentators compare the conflict in Palestine with the Holocaust, suggesting that the Jews are committing at present a real Holocaust with the Arabs.

4.2.1.3 Opinions against the Legionnaires

In addition to these comments, there are readers who stand on the other side of the barricade, posting opinions stating clearly against the Legion, either in a pertinent manner (43), either accusing and insulting. In the second category there can be included the comments against the legionnaires in general (67), personal attacks and insults with accusations that they are some criminals (57) or some opportunists who switched later to communists (13). There are also comments that resort only to invective, slander or insults, generally focused on the legionnaires, or their supporters on the forum (28).

4.2.1.4 Opinions about the Communist Regime

The opinions included in the thematic category “communism” debate upon the idea of condemning the communism, the readers complaining that this thing has not been achieved and that the communists still lead Romania (34), comparing the inappropriate Legionary regime with communism (13) or lancing messages against it (20). On the other hand, some commentators praise communism, appreciating in a nostalgic way that for Romanians life was better in those times than nowadays (10).

4.2.1.5 Opinions about the Protest

In other opinions, the commentators express their disagreement with the protest regarding the TV broadcast “Profesioniștii” [“The Professionals” in English], considering that it is not justified (17). In addition, the number of personal attacks is very high with a variety of accusations (54) or even with menaces and insults (22). Because some of the signers are Jews, the readers believe that these are the bearers of the Jewish interests (12) and they are highlighting their anti-Romanian character (12). Only four persons say directly that the protest is justified and needed.

4.2.1.6 Opinions about the TV program of Eugenia Voda, about the 10 Intellectuals’ Letter in Her Defence and about Ion Cristoiu

Most of the opinions regarding Eugenia Voda are positive, the readers express their appreciation for her TV program and she is viewed as a professional, receiving encouragement and messages of support (117). Other Internet users find that Eugenia Voda is responsible for the fail of the broadcasts, because she did not react properly in opposition to Ion Cristoiu’s statements and she did not cut the accusing sentences, given that the show was not live (46) or they accuse that the broadcast is politicized (5). There are also several personal attacks (10) and insults against her (3).

Furthermore, the opinions about Ion Cristoiu are divided. A part of the commentators considers him a professional journalist and historian and supports his statements (78). Another part of readers disagrees (24) or sees him as an amateur, releasing personal attacks and accusing him of being a “servant” of the Romanian Government of that time and of the president Traian Basescu or of bringing and creating the boulevard press in Romania (49), which attracts various insults and names-calling (37). With regard to the ten intellectuals who signed a letter in defence of Eugenia Voda, some Internet users welcome this initiative and declare their adherence to it (22), other persons show their disagreement (16) and even attack them, blaming some personal aspects (47) or insult them (22).

4.2.1.7 Opinions about the Sanction Imposed by the National Council of Audiovisual

The opinions about the NCA can be divided into five categories: those in which the readers find the sanction of the National Television being justified and needed (4); those in which they argue more or less pertinent why they disagree with the decision of NCA (40); those in which there are highlighted other TV programs that should be punished and not that directed by Eugenia Voda (40); those in which the commentators accuse the members of the council of being anti-Romanians and that they have Jewish interests and even that they are “servants” of Jews or of the Government of that time and of the president Traian Basescu (33) and those in which they attack (35), insult and address all kinds of invective and name-calling to the members of NCA (36).

4.2.1.8 The Infringement of the Freedom of Expression

The Internet users confuse Cristoiu's statements with the freedom of expression, they militate in favour of it and of a free discussion regarding the historical past (57) or they accuse its overall failure, claiming the censorship through the protest and the decision made by the NCA (86), referring also to the Jewish involvement in this (27).

4.2.1.9 Opinions about Romania and Romanians

The last category of the main themes includes five types of comments. There are opinions about the degradation of the Romanian society and the failure of several systems: social, political, educational and legal (40), getting to the apocalyptic and phobic visions of a future destruction of the Romanian people (13). Other readers insult the Romanian intellectuals and accuse them of being "servants" of the political correctness (20). Finally, it is often invoked the positive stereotype according to which Romanians are the most tolerant and most welcoming people and they never were anti-Semites (14), but there are also some negative stereotypes and insults against Romanians (4).

4.2.1.10. Other Themes

A part of the readers declares their sympathy and support or criticizes and insults the Government (38) or the Opposition (6) of that time, the politicians in general (28) or the monarchy (9). Other commentators criticize the Romanian mass media, saying that it is manipulated by different powers, by the Jews as well, or that it wants to manipulate the public (22). Another topic of discussion is the Romanian Orthodox Church, which opens a polemic on the forums, some persons say that it supported the legionnaires (4), others that it was against them (5) and others expose messages against it (6). Other Internet users like to compare in a conspiratorial manner the 1989 Romanian Revolution with a coup implying the influence of a foreign political power, fact that insults the memory of the victims (6). The gallery of the messages is completed with the nationalistic (5), xenophobic (34) and anti-Roma remarks (3).

It is important to note that there are some pertinent opinions that pertain to an opposite register, trying to highlight the evil of the dictatorships, leftist or rightist, and of their leaders or to bring arguments against the negative stereotypes regarding the Jews (10) and against the praise and the rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu as a Romanian hero (4).

4.2.2. A Comparison between the Content of the Different Forums

Another purpose of the research was to identify if there are differences in terms of dynamic of the opinions in the forums depending on the type of online publication (see Table 3)

Table 3. Themes of the Comments Depending on the Digital Support of Publication

Theme	Online publication							
	A	C	Evz	RL	R	OC	H	AM
Legionary propaganda	9%	9%	7%	5%	12%	2%	8%	44%
Anti-Semitism	16%	38%	18%	17%	21%	5%	45%	14%
Opinions against the legionnaires	4%	5%	15%	6%	10%	6%	4%	6%
Communism	3%	1%	4%	7%	3%	2%	5%	2%
Opinions about the protest	5%	16%	2%	3%	4%	14%	4%	0%
Opinions about the TV program of Eugenia Voda, about the 10 intellectuals' letter in her defence and about Ion Cristoiu	16%	13%	29%	32%	19%	43%	2%	13%
Opinions about the NCA	21%	1%	8%	15%	10%	2%	0%	0%
The infringement of the freedom of expression	14%	7%	6%	3%	10%	17%	8%	0%
Opinions about Romania and Romanians	5%	3%	4%	8%	3%	6%	8%	0%
Other themes	7%	7%	7%	4%	8%	3%	16%	21%

A=*Adevarul*; C=*Cotidianul*; Evz=*Evenimentul Zilei*; RL=*România Libera*; R=*Realitatea.net*; OC=*Observatorul Cultural*; H=*Historia*; AM=*Altermedia*

Therefore, on the forum of the newspaper *Adevarul* the most frequent themes of the comments are: the National Council of Audiovisual and its decision (21%), the reaction and the TV show of Eugenia Voda, the statements of Ion Cristoiu and the ten intellectuals' letter (16%), the anti-Semitic themes (16%) and the freedom of expression (14%). In *Cotidianul*, most of the comments contain anti-Semitic stereotypes (38%), 16% of the readers discuss about the protest and 13% about the polemic created around the Eugenia Voda's TV show. The most frequent themes on the forum of *Evenimentul Zilei* are: the polemic created around the Eugenia Voda's TV show (29%), the remarks against the legionnaires (15%) and the anti-Semitic stereotypes (18%). A similar discourse is to be found on the forum of *Romania Libera*: the polemic created around the Eugenia Voda's TV show (32%), anti-Semitic stereotypes (17%) and National Council of Audiovisual (15%).

On the forum of the platform *Realitatea.net*, there are emphasized the anti-Semitic themes (21%), the opinions about the polemic created around the Eugenia Voda's TV show (19%), the legionary propaganda (12%), the decision of the NCA (10%) and the infringement of the freedom of expression (10%).

The comments on the forum of the magazine *Observatorul Cultural* are different in terms of style, but also in content, from those on the other digital supports, the main

themes are the polemic created around the Eugenia Voda's TV show (43%), the claim for the freedom of expression (17%) and the protest against the Ion Cristoiu's statements (14%). The two main themes on the forum of *Historia* are related to the anti-Semitism (45%) and to other themes with a lower proportion (16%).

On the extremist platform *Altermedia*, the forum supports legionary propaganda (44%) and anti-Semitism (14%). There are also discussions on various themes with a lower proportion (21%) and opinions about the polemic created around the Eugenia Voda's TV show (13%).

Thus, one can observe that the legionary propaganda and the anti-Semitic themes represent about 30% of the overall discourse of the comments: *Adevarul* – 25%, *Evenimentul Zilei* – 25%, *România Libera* – 22%; the discourse on the forum of the newspaper *Cotidianul* and of the magazine *Historia* is quite the same with the one on the extremist platform *Altermedia* (over 50% is legionary propaganda and anti-Semitism) only that on the extremist platform predominates the legionary propaganda, while on the forum of *Cotidianul* and *Historia* predominates the anti-Semitism; at the same time, the percentage of the extremist discourse is high on the forum of the platform *Realitatea.net* – 33%; the opposite is the magazine *Observatorul Cultural* with only 7% of this type of themes.

The high percentage of the anti-Semitic themes on the forum of the newspaper *Cotidianul* can be explained by the fact that there are a large number of posts in which the readers are denying the Holocaust in Romania (21). The most diligent of them is Robert Horvath, who says that he is a filmmaker in New York and he posts on forum not less than 12 comments, denying the Holocaust in Romania and glorifying the Marshal Ion Antonescu. He asserts that "the Romanians have not sent the Jews in the Holocaust ... but they have saved them from the Holocaust!" (Horvath 2010). As the magazine *Historia* is concerned, the high percentage of anti-Semitism may be due to the topic of the article. The author wonders if certain historical figures, including Ion Antonescu, can be considered as taboos, which attracts several anti-Semitic remarks (58), of which 20 are of Holocaust denial and Antonescu's glorification. Another factor is the affordability of the forum, in that although it specifies that the comments are moderated, to post here there is no need to provide an email address as it happens in other cases.

The affordability of the forum can also explain the high percentage of the extremist discourse on the platform *Realitatea.net*. Although there are required an email address and a verification code, the website assumes no responsibility for the content of the forum, the commentator being "the solely responsible for the opinions posted on this site and he assumes full legal consequences of any damage caused, by default, in case of a legal action against to what is stated" (Realitatea.net 2012).

On the other hand, on the forum of *Observatorul Cultural*, most of the opinions are expressed in a civilized manner and with strict reference to the debate topic and with a

low percentage of extremist views, because it is a cultural magazine, usually with an intellectual audience, the readers assuming their identity. Therefore, the differences occurred between the digital supports in terms of the opinions' themes can equally be explained by the different structure of the audiences who read these publications.

5. Discussions

The case study reveals a wide range of comments, from the pertinent opinions to the legionnaire propaganda and the delirium of invectives and insults against some public persons and not only. On these forums, there are often violated the limits and the rules of normal and democratic communication, through verbal attacks, apparently insignificant, to some persons or groups. For this reason, in both cases, all the opinions to almost all the articles from *Evenimentul Zilei* were removed and the comments to one article from *Adevarul* were partially deleted, but that happened only a few months after the articles were published.

The forums represents a platform for legionary propaganda with the apology of Codreanu and the Legion, with fragments from the legionary writing, with the justification or the denial of the crimes, and even with the accusation of falsifying the history and of course with a salient anti-Semitic discourse. Therefore, these forums represent a kind of public sphere that Kierkegaard saw as being “destined to become a detached world in which everyone had an opinion about and commented on all public matters without needing any first-hand experience and without having or wanting any responsibility” (Kierkegaard, in Dreyfus 2001: 76).

However, the results showed that the characteristics of the publication, of its audience and of the forum affordability, but also the theme and the focus of the article could influence the quality and the content of the opinions expressed by readers on these platforms.

In conclusion, the freedom of expression, the pluralism of opinion, the appearance and the access to the Internet is undoubtedly a positive factor for the Romanian society. However, there is a reverse of the coin, meaning that without some limits imposed to the comments on forums and, without policies to stop the discrimination in the virtual environment, extremist ideas proliferate, contaminating some of the readers and thus developing an alternative to the public discourse.

My future research will focus on problems regarding the stigma of the ethnical, religious and sexual minorities on the Romanian online platforms. I will focus on the main rhetoric proprieties of these “virtual” discourses, trying to analyse the reasons and the mechanism of the emergence of such opinions, and the characteristics of its authors.

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