FRAMING EAST ASIA IN ROMANIAN MASS MEDIA: THE CASE OF REPRESENTING SOUTH KOREA AND NORTH KOREA

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the way in which Romanian online media covers information about South and North Korea. For this aim a content analysis of the news published in 2014 in two online aggregate sites of news was made (Hotnews.com and Ziare.com).
The results stressed the fact that Romanian journalists are more interested to present news on North Korea related to international sanctions, military exercises, nuclear weapons and/or information about the North-Korean leaders. The news regarding South Korea refers to the international events in which South Korea took part, to the products of the electronic industry and to South-Korean investments in Romania.

Keywords: media coverage, South Korea, North Korea, online media.

1. Introduction

After the event of 1989, as a country entering a new democratic system of government and adopting a free-market economy, Romania was more interested to develop economic, political and cultural relations with South Korea than with North Korea. Romania has had constant diplomatic relations with North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) since the 26th of October 1948 (Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 2017). Tthe relations between Romania and Norh Korea after 1990 were maintained at a minimum level, despite the fact that there are diplomatic representatives of North Korea in Romania (Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 2017). Regarding Romania's relations with South Korea (the Republic of Korea), they followed an upward trend after the 30th of March 1990, when the first diplomatic contacts were established (Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 2017). The diplomatic relations between South Korea and Romania have been maintained through official visits, as authorities in both countries have contributed to the consolidation of political, economic and cultural relations. At the time of conducting this study, South Korea is known both as an investor in various sectors of the Romanian economy (243 South Korean organizations) and as an outlet market for some Romanian products (Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 2017).

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Media representation of South Korea

South Korea has been mostly represented in international media by association with the cultural products that it has managed to promote globally. The international success that the products of South Korean popular culture have had mainly after the 1990s and which was called by specialists the *Korean Wave* is still experienced today in various regions of the world (Dal, 2012). The Soft Power strategies that the South Korean government adopted in order to capture and maintain interest in the South Korean culture facilitated South Korea's representation in international media by associating it more with cultural products and less with the problems or malfunctions of the Korean society. Lee and Craig (1992) showed that the American press included South Korea in "our" sphere of influence. In order to support this statement, they brought forward as arguments the results of an analysis regarding the way the American media presented the labor strikes in South Korea and Poland. On this occasion, the authors noticed the fact that the labor strikes in Poland were directly connected to political issues and 'the Polish case was regarded as an example of the general malaise of the Soviet bloc' (Lee and Craig, 1992:348). Labor strikes in South Korea were presented as "economic problems" which the Korean government was able to handle. Moreover, one of the topics presented in the media was the "successful industrial development which South Korea experiences" (Lee and Craig, 1992:348).

After the South Korean movies and the music promoted by K-pop groups entered the Chinese (1997) and Japanese (2003) markets (Korea.net, 2017), the academics' interest in South Korea focused on the analysis of the way the South Korean cultural products (K-drama, K-pop. K-movies) leaded in various regions of the world. Also, due to the fact that media (printed media, TV and radio) had an important role in disseminating the Korean popular culture, researchers from Europe (Marinescu and Balica, 2013; Kida, 2014; Balmain, 2014), Latin America (Iadevito, 2014), North America (Howard, 2015; Anderson 2014), Asia and Australia carried out evaluations of the media channels that focused on this topic.

International media coverage of North Korea

The analysis of North Korea's representation in the international media highlighted the fact that articles regarding this country discuss a few major topics: the nuclear programme, the leader Kim Jong Un, the leader Kim Jong Il, the participation of North Korean athletes in the Olympics. Among these, the most widely covered topic is the nuclear programme that North Korea initiated and developed. The entire information regarding bilateral negotiations (between USA and North Korea) and international negotiations (e.g. *The Six Party Talks*[3]) were centered on this topic. North Korea was differently presented by journalists based on the interests held by the states which were represented by the media (Dalton et al, 2015; Won et al, 2015; Kim, 2014; Dai and Hyun, 2010; Lim and Seo, 2009). The American media continued to divide the countries in "for" and "against", based on their policies towards the USA. North Korea was presented by the American media as a country "against" America and it was frequently associated with Iran (Kim, 2014:20). Moreover, North Korea was presented 'as a threat to the international community and to world peace' (Kim, 2014:20).

Within the analysis carried out by Guterson (2008) regarding how the USA media presented the issues generated by *The Agreed Framework*[4], North Korea was associated with some stereotypes:

Whichever newspaper one reads, ''the story'' is roughly the same: North Korea is a backward, isolated country run by a tyrant with comically eccentric, excessive tastes. His regime consistently lies and cheats and is driven by a childish narcissism, while the United States, which must manage the international system, behaves with the steady consistency of a father figure. (Guterson, 2008: 29)

Furthermore, Guterson noticed that journalists presented North Korea either as "a child who needs attention" or as a state which adopts "a blackmail strategy in which North Korea uses its nuclear program to extort aid" (31-32). The North Korean leader Kim Jong Il was also used by the American

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[3]*The Six Party Talks*is the name given to the international meetings which took place between 2003 and 2007 in order to discuss the issue of North Korea's nuclear programme. The six participant countries were: South Korea, North Korea, USA, China, Japan and Russia (Michishita, 2009:139)

[4]*The Agreed Framework* is a document which was negotiated and signed in 1994 by the delegations of the governments of the United States of America and North Korea. With this document one tried the blocking of the North Korea nuclear programme. More information http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/aptagframe.pdf who tried? Please rephrase.

journalists in outlining North Korea's profile. He represented the 'eccentric leadership' under whose lead North Korea acts 'as a country that lies and cheats' (35).

Another topic which was intensively tackled by journalists referred to the international negotiations related to North Korea's nuclear programme. Also known as *The Six Party Talks*, these negotiations were presented differently by the media in the countries that participated in the discussions (Seo 2009; Seo 2007; Rich 2012). Won et al (2015) analyzed how journalists from China and North Korea covered these negotiations and reached the conclusion that the Chinese press was 'focused on issue/common interest frames with the USA and North Korea in the Korean Peninsula' (49). For this reason, the Chinese press had a flexible attitude towards North Korea (both positive and negative depending on the moment of negotiation) which analysts considered 'reflected the national interests of nation' (Won et al, 2015: 48). The same attitude of the press, meaning to reflect an event related to North Korea depending on the national interest was also identified by Dai and Hyun (2010) when they analyzed the way American (Associated Press), Chinese (Xinhua) and South Korean (Yonhap) press agencies covered the nuclear test of North Korea.

Moreover, Dai and Hyun's study highlighted the fact that all three press agencies presented the nuclear tests from the 'threat frame' perspective. Also, the press agencies had different positions. 'Associated Press' linked the nuclear tests with the 'War and Terror' frame, while 'Xinhua' promoted the 'reconciliation of the conflict frame'. 'Yonhap', the South Korean press agency presented North Korea as an 'old enemy' (Dai and Hyun, 2010: 313).

Few studies from the European zone analyzed how the media presented South Korea and North Korea. Until the present moment, specialists from the region were rather concerned with the analysis of the consumption of cultural products promoted through the Korean Wave. The current study is the first one which tries to analyze the manner in which the Romanian media covered South Korea and North Korea. In our opinion the study is relevant both from the perspective of media analysis and, on the other hand, of the international relations.

2. Methodology
The analysis aimed to identify the events selected for media coverage and the reasons for their selection. We conducted a content analysis of the news published in 2014 in two online aggregate sites of news: Hotnews.com and Ziare.com. We chose to analyze articles published in 2014 because this was a year with no particular events in either of the two countries, events which could have distorted the results of our analysis. We avoided choosing 2015 because at that time 25 years of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Romania were celebrated. For this reason, in 2015 the press paid particular attention to this country and covered numerous events related to South Korea in order to mark the 25 years. We also avoided choosing 2016 as the political events which took place in Korea at the end of the year (the corruption scandal involving the president of South Korea) were highly covered in international and Romanian media.

In order to identify the articles the following key words have been used: South Korea 2014, North Korea 2014. Please rephrase.The grid analysis was structured as follows: period of time, type of article, subject of the article, topics, sources, whether the article referred to Romania or not,, presence or absence of photo/video.

The objectives of the analysis were: 1) To identify the type of articles about South Korea and North Korea published in Romanian aggregate sites of news (Hotnews.com and Ziare.com); 2) To identify the sources and the subjects of articles published about South and North Korea in Romanian articles; 3) To identify the way the journalist covers the information about SK and NK (in correlation with Romanian events, with/without photos or videos). At the same time, we tried to answer some questions during the analysis:

> RQ1: How much attention will the Romanian media pay to South Korea and North Korea?
> RQ2: What kind of topics will be covered most frequently by the Romanian media in relation to North Korea and South Korea?
> RQ3: What are the techniques journalists used in their coverage in order to build up the images of South Korea and North Korea in the Romanian media?

3. Analysis of the results

3.1. Data regarding the analyzed articles

The grid analysis which was used to identify the way Romanian media presented North Korea and South Korea included a series of variables related to: the aggregate news website which published information about the two countries, the publishing data, the type of article and the presence of photos, drawings, maps, graphics or video. In this way, we tried to find out if there are differences between the two aggregate news websites (Hotnews.com and Ziare.com) and whether the articles related to the two countries were simply news or if they involved the journalists' effort to obtain information and to present an analysis of information from various sources.The data analysis obtained highlighted the fact that both aggregate news websites were interested in publishing articles about South Korea and North Korea. However, the number of articles published by Hotnews.com (N=98; 53.6%) was significantly higher than the number of articles published by Ziare.com (N=84; 45.9%).

Type of article

Approximately two thirds of the articles were simply news about the two countries (N=106; 57.9%). Most of this kind of news was published by Hotnews.com (57.1%). One third of the article was represented by analysis articles (28.4%).The differences between the number of analysis articles published by the two sites were small (Hotnews.com- 24; Ziare.com – 28). The opinion articles were quite few (N=23) (Figure 1). Hotnews.com published a number of opinion articles (17) three times bigger than Ziare.com (6).

Figure 1 Type of articles published on aggregate news websites - Hotnews.com and Ziare.com (%)
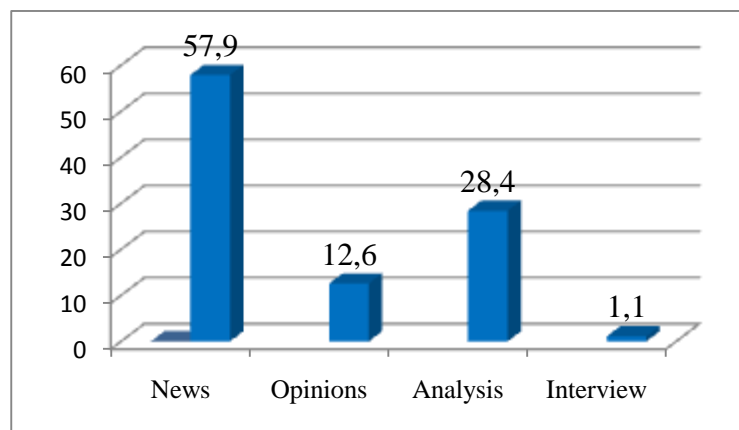
Photo, Video, Map, Graph or Drawing

Most of the articles were accompanied by images (photos, video, maps, graphics or drawings) (N=126; 68.9%). Unlike the articles published by Hotnews.com, the articles published by Ziare.com were associated with images to a greater extent. Only 3.6% of the articles identified on Ziare.com lacked images, the rest of 96.4% were accompanied by real photos from the two countries (89.3%) and drawings (7.1%). Less than a half of the articles published by Hotnews.com were accompanied by images (44.9%). One third of the articles included photos representing real items from the two countries (31.6%) and only 11.2% included videos (Figure 2).

Figure 2 The article is published together with…
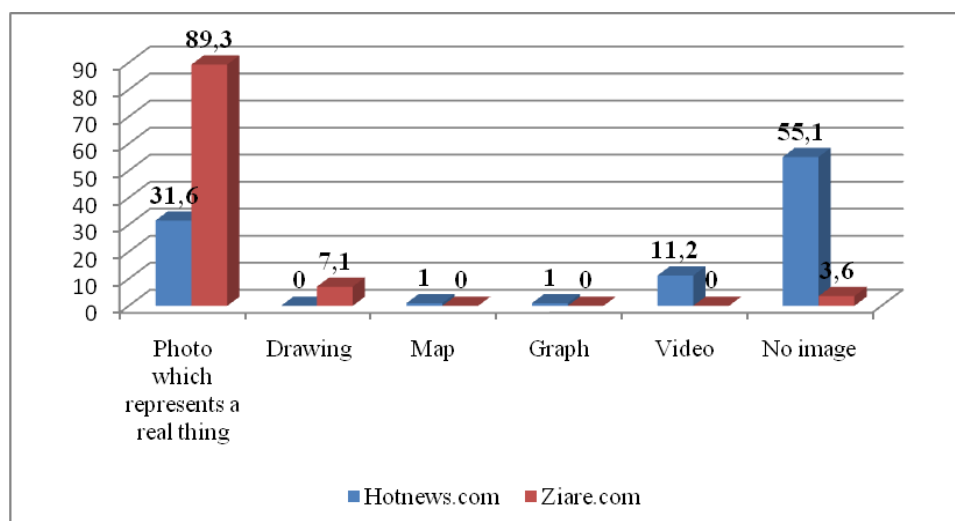
3.2. The main topic of the articles

South Korea (43.2%) and North Korea (41.5%) were equally presented within the articles from the analyzed corpus. The differences are noticeable if we analyze the distribution of the articles about each of the two countries depending on the website which published them. Hotnews.com published more articles about North Korea (N=51; 52%) and Ziare.com published more articles about South Korea (N=44; 52.4%). Both websites equally published articles which included information about both countries, at the same time (Hotnews.com-12 articles; Ziare.com-15 articles).

3.3 Articles regarding the two countries include information about Romania

In order to identify the context in which the Romanian journalists presented South Korea and North Korea, we also included in the grid analysis variables that would help us highlight the information regarding Romania. Only a quarter of the articles (24.6%) also mentioned Romania when they presented information about the two countries mentioned above. Romania was referred to in the context of discussing the presidential elections (22 articles). Another topic which determined the inclusion of Romania in the articles narrating about South or North Korea was the participation in international events (sportive or cultural) (16 articles).

Table 1. Articles contain information regarding Romania

Romania is mentioned as…	Hotnews.com	Ziare.com
Host country of an event	1	0
Participant to an event	6	10
EU member	0	2
European Southeastern country	0	1
Country where presidential elections took place	4	18
A communist country ruled by Ceausescu	2	1
Romania was not mentioned	86	52

Few articles presented information about Romania during the communist regime (3), about EU membership (2), Romania as a host country of an event or as a Southeastern European country (1 article) (Table 1).

3.4. Topics tackled in the articles

The analysis of the topics identified in the published articles from the two aggregate news websites highlighted the presence of four main topics associated with South Korea and North Korea: 1. Sport related issues (28.4%); 2. The political relations between North Korea and South Korea (22.4%); 3. Military and defense issues of South Korea and North Korea (18.8%) (Figure 3). The themes that were most frequently associated with South Korea were *sport related issues* (47 articles about South Korea and only 5 about North Korea). North Korea is most frequently mentioned in relationship with two topics: *international relations and military and defense issues.* The articles which contain information regarding justice and delinquency, miscellaneous, social, economic and cultural life refer both to South Korea and to North Korea. The articles which present the internal political life mostly contain information related to North Korea (11 articles from North Korea and only one from South Korea). Articles were also published which present information associated only with South Korea (South Korean products from LG and Samsung) or North Korea (humanitarian crimes, Kim Jong Un).

Figure 3. Topics presented in articles from Hotnews.com and Ziare.com
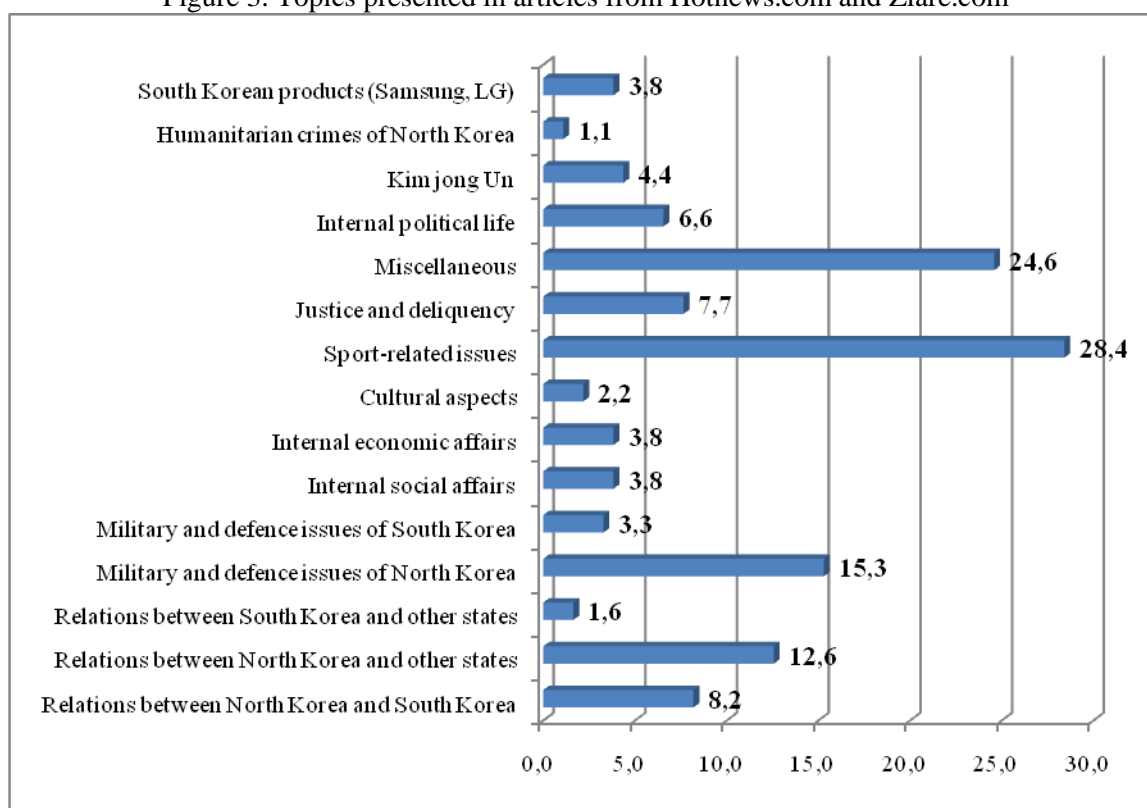
3.5. Information sources

Most of the articles about South Korea and North Korea had as information sources the Romanian press agencies (47%) and the international news agencies (45.4%). The North Korean (11%) and South Korean (9.8%) press agencies and media were also used by journalists who wrote about the two states. The international (15.8%), South Korean (8.7%) and North Korean (1.1%) organizations (1.1%) were also mentioned as information sources (see Figure 4).
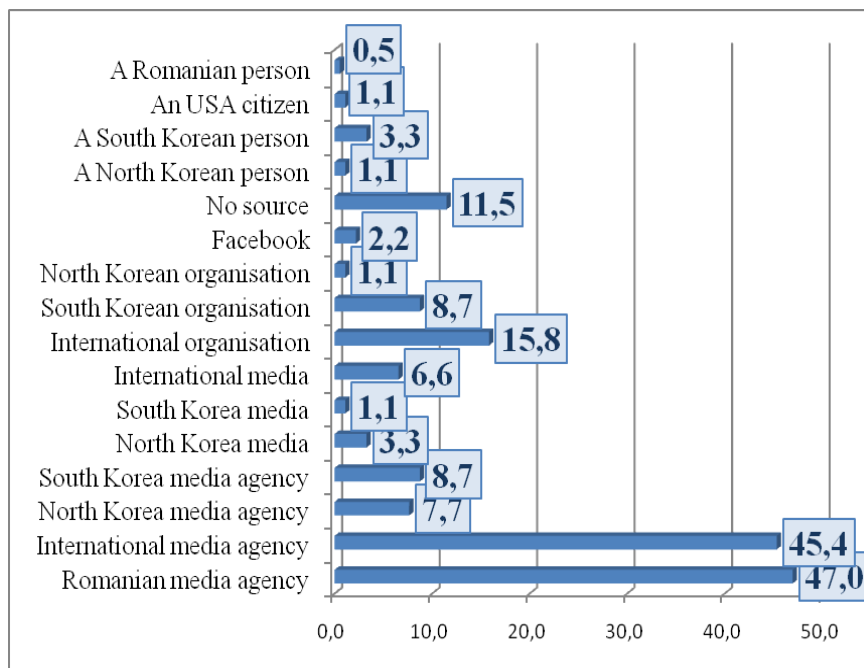
Figure 4. Information sources used by Romanian journalists

4. Conclusions

The results stressed the fact that Romanian journalists were interested in covering South Korea and North Korea to an equal extent, as the number of articles which tackled the issue of the two countries was approximately equal. News on North Korea related to international sanctions, military exercises, nuclear weapons and/or information about the North-Korean leaders. At the same time, the Romanian journalists made many references to the history of relations between North Korea and communist Romania during Ceausescu's regime. Therefore, the journalists of the two aggregate news websites follow the international trend of representations of North Korea. More specifically, Romanian journalists narrate about the North Korean nuclear programme and about the risks that it represents, regionally and globally.

The 'threat frame' that was identified in the American press (Dai and Hyun 2010; Guterson 2008) is also present in the Romanian media when it comes to North Korea. On this occasion, journalists also talk about the risks that North Korea represents at a global level and about the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.On the other hand, the news regarding South Korea refer to the international event in which South Korea took part, to the cultural (movies, music, exhibitions) and sport events, to the products of the electronic industry from South Korea (news about the new products of LG and Samsung) and to the South-Korean investments in Romania. The fact that the Romanian media writes about the cultural products, the sport events and the activity of some South Korean companies confirms the results of other studies which also analyzed how they were covered by the media (Lee and Craig 1992; Yoon and Wilson, 2016).

The information sources used by Romanian journalists are the ones which contributed to the coverage of the two states similar to other countries' media. Most of the times, Romanian journalists used the Romanian press agencies and the international press agencies (except for the Korean ones) as information sources. In this respect, Romanian journalists are not different from the journalists in other countries. Media analysts from the USA noticed the fact that journalists brought forward as arguments for their position within the articles interviews with representatives of the central administration or with members of think tanks from Washington. Moreover, the analysts remarked the absence of academic experts and of experts on South Asia issues, which were rarely contacted in order to express their point of view regarding North Korea (Guterson 2008).

In order to answer the research questions at the beginning of the article we can assert that the interest of Romanian media towards South Korea and North Korea was relatively medium. At the same time, our analysis indicated the fact that the main topics related to the two countries were differently covered in themedia in the timeframe 1st of January – 31st of December 2014. Regarding South Korea, the Romanian media focused on aspects related to socio-economic and cultural life, while for North Korea the articles mainly emphasized elements related to the political and military life and to the geopolitical context of Eastern Asia. Besides these differences, the present analysis identified similar information sources as a common element, to be more precise, Romanian and international press agencies which were used for presentewing aspects related to both countries.

Regarding the third research question ("What are the techniques journalists used in their coverage in order to build up the images of South Korea and North Korea within the Romanian media?"), the data analysis indicated a prevalence of what Iyengar (1991) called "episodic frames". "Episodic framings" tend to concentrate on the individual, emphasizing the individual explanations whereas "the thematic framings" are interested not only in the individual level but also by aspects connected to the general social level and implicitly in social explanations (Iyengar, 1991). According to Scheufele (1999), the individual explanations are those which concentrate on the involved actors' personality, moods or motivational contexts, whereas the social explanations are those which highlight the situational forces and the circumstances of a process or event.

The present study highlights a series of limitations, the most important one being the focus on media coverage of North Korea and South Korea in a specific country - e.g. Romania. A comparative analysis of the manner in which both South Korea and North Korea are covered in the media in different European countries can indicate both similar elements and national differences. Further research could test whether the results and empirical-theoretical results of the present analysis proposed can be found for a larger sample and/or if a sample should be included in the articles and news published in several European countries.

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