

Nostalgia waves: a media framing of post-Communist nostalgia in Romania

(Valurile nostalgiei: cadrul media al nostalgiei postcomuniste în România)

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Abstract: *This article explores the post-communist nostalgia waves within a media framing perspective, focusing first on the context of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Romanian communist regime, when public opinion polls, along with their media coverage fueled a debate over an unexpected social trend: Romanians' nostalgia for communism. The first part of the paper is dedicated to the theoretical framework of the study, the framing process, the typology of news frames and the framing devices. A twofold approach is used in the content analysis of the news: first, a framing analysis of 175 articles published between 2008 and 2019 that covered public opinion polls, and next, the framing devices employed in the construction of news headlines. The second part presents the results, with the finding of two editorial waves (in 2010 and 2014), a proposed meaning of the nostalgia "issue specific frames", and a variety of nostalgia framing devices used in the headlines. The latter pinpoint the specific rhetorical short-cut used in 14% of the headlines that were framed from a "nostalgia for communism" angle. The results are put in perspective with the framing theory, and future research is outlined with a framing effects analytical framework.*

Keywords: *news framing, media analysis, nostalgia waves, framing devices.*

Introduction

The term "nostalgia wave" was coined by Fred Davis in reference to a potential collective identity crisis of the seventies in the United States, in a context marked by profound societal changes and following "the massive identity dislocations of the sixties."¹ Nostalgia's palliative role as a cultural haven, noted Davis, responded to a moment when a large number of common convictions was "challenged, disrupted, and shaken"² to an unprecedented extent.

Sociology and anthropology provide sound theoretical accounts of individual and collective forms of nostalgia. Janelle Wilson builds on Davis' argument to further explore the way that defining historical events foster a "generational identity", while nostalgia provides meaning in the process of identity negotiation and facilitates the continuity of identities beyond moments of crisis³. Collective nostalgia appears to have ambivalent functions towards the cohesion of a generation, as it "can serve the purpose of forging a national identity, expressing patriotism" but it also "might reflect selective remembering and selective forgetting that occur at the collective level."⁴ Wilson also explored the meanings assigned by different generations in relation to the waves of nostalgia mediated by popular culture of the 50s and 60s.

The digital turn plays a key role in shaping new and different waves of cultural nostalgia. A growing body of media and advertising studies explored the link between nostalgia waves and

¹ Fred Davis, "Nostalgia, Identity and the Current Nostalgia Wave", *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Nr. 11/ 1977, pp. 414-424.

² *Idem*, p. 421.

³ Janelle L Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, Bucknell University Press, 2005, p. 7.

⁴ *Idem*, p. 31.

generational change as means of attracting new segments of consumers coming of age in a transforming digital environment⁵. The emergence of an online nostalgia culture can also be seen as the transition of communities of “consumed nostalgia”⁶, configured in the 1970s through practices of displaying childhood memorabilia, to an online “community of the longing”⁷ where the commodification of socialist material culture overlaps with alternative memory practices. Ryan Lizardi studied the multi-generational impact of a mediated nostalgia as an increased cohesion of digital communities “through a shared and displayed history.”⁸ Katherina Nyemeyer explored the growing influence of the digital cultural industries visible as a “nostalgia wave”, where contents and narratives are produced “not only in the nostalgic style but also as triggers of nostalgia.”⁹ Goran Bolin examined how an everchanging media environment shapes three modes of generational nostalgia: “technostalgia, nostalgia as loss of childhood, and nostalgia as the realization of the impossibility of intergenerational transfer of experience.”¹⁰ Bolin also pointed to a potential confusion occurring in nostalgia studies, since nostalgic media content “needs to be related to by a nostalgic subject in order for nostalgia as a state of being to become realized. Until that point, it is just retotyping.”¹¹

The question of post-communist nostalgia wave(s) was approached by scholars considering two successive waves of communism-related nostalgia in the Eastern European countries as manifold ways of relating to the past¹², ranging from reflective to restorative forms of nostalgia¹³. Recent work has pointed to the dynamic strategies of identity (re)construction¹⁴, and put in perspective the discontinuity and the continuity of a collective memory of socialism within the process of coming to terms with the communist past¹⁵. Last, but not least, the second wave of post-communist nostalgia appears as a “second-hand nostalgia” emerging from interactions with the material culture of the socialist period¹⁶.

What about the post-communist nostalgia waves in Romania?

⁵ Justina Gineikienė, “Consumer Nostalgia literature Review and an Alternative Measurement Perspective”, *Organizations and Markets in Emerging Economies*, Vol. 4, Nr. 2/ 2013, pp. 112-149.

⁶ Gary Cross, *Consumed Nostalgia: Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

⁷ Marek Jeziński & Łukasz Wojtkowski, “Nostalgia Commodified. Towards the marketization of the post-communist past through the new media” in *Medien & Zeit*, 31(4)/ 2016, pp. 96-104.

⁸ Ryan Lizardi, *Nostalgic Generations and Media. Perception and Time of Available Meaning*, Lexington Books, 2017, p. 122.

⁹ Katharina Niemeyer (ed.), *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 7.

¹⁰ Göran Bolin, *Media Generations: Experience, identity and mediated social change*, New York: Routledge, 2016.

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 103.

¹² See Daphne Berdahl, *On the Social Life of Postsocialism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010; Ekaterina Kalinina, *Mediated Post-Soviet Nostalgia*. Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2014; Alexandra Bardan, “Marketing Post-Communist Nostalgia in Romania: A Case Study on Contemporary Anniversary Events”, *Styles of Communication*, Nr. 1/ 2018, pp. 55-69.

¹³ Svetlana Boym sets a distinction between “restorative nostalgia”, aimed at a transhistorical reconstruction of a golden era in the past, and “reflective nostalgia”, focused on emotions and longing, and linked to a reflexive individual and cultural memory, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2001.

¹⁴ Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper, “Memory in Post-communist Europe: Controversies over Identity, conflicts, and Nostalgia”, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, Vol. 32, Nr. 4/ 2018.

¹⁵ Irena Reifová, “The pleasure of continuity: Re-reading post-socialist nostalgia”, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Nr. 6/ 2018.

¹⁶ Serguei Alex. Oushakine, “Second-Hand Nostalgia. On Charms and Spells of the Soviet *Trukhliashechka*” in Otto Boele, Boris Noordenbos, Ksenia Robbe (ed.), *Post-Soviet Nostalgia. Confronting the Empire’s Legacies*, New York: Routledge, 2019.

Problem Statement

Nostalgia's function as a selective memory is better understood in the context of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Romanian communist regime. The broad media coverage¹⁷ of the 1989 events also prompted manifold types of remembrance, featuring editorial, marketing and advertising strategies overcoming a hegemonic discourse on communism that dominated the public space during the first decade following the revolution. Competing memorial narratives appeared to emerge from all corners of society, while digital platforms and social media echoed and amplified alternative histories of the communist past. Public opinion polls, along with their media coverage fueled a debate over an unexpected social trend: Romanians' nostalgia for communism, adding to an already inflated discourse on post-communist nostalgia. Following this lead, several scholars approached the multifaceted phenomenon of post-communist nostalgia in the wake of the digital turn¹⁸, while the role of the media in framing a post-communist nostalgia discourse was explored mainly as channeling views of and about the communist past¹⁹. This study aims to cover a gap in the literature addressing the evolution of post-communist nostalgia waves in Romania from a media framing perspective.

Our research interrogates the relation between opinion polls and their news coverage and examines a series of press articles discussing the surveys, the data and the results, as well as subsequent implications for the Romanian society in the wake of the first "nostalgia wave". Media coverage of public opinion polling has received limited empirical attention, available data recording an edited volume by Septimiu Chelcea and Gabriel Jderu²⁰ that aimed to identify the journalistic procedures and treatment of data obtained from public opinion polls. Chelcea and Jderu's case study on the news coverage of a 2004 international survey showed several deficiencies of articles published in mainstream media: errors made in data presentation, the partiality of information selection and the ambiguity of results interpretation²¹. The discourse analysis also revealed the use of sensationalism and partisan bias as editorial tactics.

¹⁷ The media coverage extended beyond 2009 and was also preceded by a wave of popular culture productions that proposed alternative approaches of the past, see Manuela Marin, "Between Memory and Nostalgia: The Image of Communism in Romanian Popular Culture. A Case Study of Libertatea Newspaper", *Palimpsest* Nr. 5/ 2013, pp. 4-16 and Diana Georgescu, "Between Trauma and Nostalgia. The Intellectual Ethos and Generational Dynamics of Memory in Postsocialist Romania", *Südosteuropa* 64, Nr. 3/ 2016, pp. 284-306.

¹⁸ Cristina Petrescu, "Websites of Memory: In Search of the Forgotten Past", in Maria Todorova et alii. (ed), *Remembering Communism. Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe*, Budapest: CEU Press, 2014, p. 596; Cristina Petrescu, "Nostalgia, Identity and Self-Irony in Remembering Communism," in Lavinia Stan & Lucian Turcescu, (coord.), *Justice, Memory and Redress in Romania: New Insights*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2017, pp. 192-213; Codruța Alina Pohrib, "The Romanian "Latchkey Generation" writes back: Memory genres of post-communism on Facebook", *Memory Studies*, 2017, pp. 1-20 ; Alexandra Bardan, Natalia Vasilendiuc, "Representations of the Communist Period in Romanian Digital Communities: A Quest for Online 'Displaced Nostalgia'", in Ryan Lizardi (coord.), *Subjective Experiences of Interactive Nostalgia*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 145-166.

¹⁹ Alina Hoge, "Coming to Terms with the Communist Past in Romania: An Analysis of the Political and Media Discourse Concerning the Tismăneanu Report", *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 2 (2)/ 2010; Alice Bardan, "Remembering socialist entertainment: Romanian television, gestures and intimacy", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 20, Nr. 3/ 2017, pp. 341-358.

²⁰ Septimiu Chelcea, Gabriel Jderu (ed.), *Refracția sociologică și reflexia jurnalistică: despre sondajele de opinie și prezentarea lor în mass media*, București/ Editura Economică, 2005.

²¹ Septimiu Chelcea, Gabriel Jderu, "Preluarea datelor din sondajele de opinie publica în mass-media din România în anul electoral 2004: incorectitudine, subiectivitate și ambiguitate", *Sociologie Românească*, Vol. II, Nr. 3/ 2004, p. 96-107.

The problems reported in the above study did not seem to have been solved in 2013, as illustrated by the following example: two different media outlets that covered the same poll displayed in the headlines, one of them the text “Poll: Half of Romanians consider communism ‘a bad thing’”, and the other one “Poll: Half of Romanians consider communism ‘a good thing’”²². The question here is not who got it right, of course, but rather why an outlet chose to signal the glass half-full, while the other chose the opposite, with a third outlet conceding that “Half of Romanians consider communism ‘a bad thing’, the other half ‘a good thing’”²³. These examples point to the common ground of agenda setting and framing theories, dealing with the relationship between what becomes news and how news is constructed and described. First developed in the field of social psychology, the framing concept became widely used in mass communication studies as a versatile framework employed in the study of news framing and of framing effect.

This study will build upon Claes de Vreese’s framework based on an integrated process model of framing and will choose the frame-building stage, the framing process in the newsroom, and the outcomes of this stage, meaning the frames manifest in the text²⁴. News framing concerns the way media covers a topic by selecting certain aspects of the story and making them more salient, thus focusing on specific issues at the expense of others. Ervin Goffman viewed frames as “schemata of interpretation”²⁵, while media framing was seen by Todd Gitlin as a dynamic process involving “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, as well as selection, emphasis and exclusion”²⁶. In this perspective, the equivocal coverage of polls identified earlier concerns, in fact, a range of news frames that provide specific ways of readings the survey results. Adding the abundant literature on framing effects, news frames can also influence how the audience understands and evaluates a survey, and to a larger extent, they may impact on the public perceptions of social issues.

A second element of de Vreese’s framework concerns a typology of news frames, with a) “generic frames” that can be identified across different issues and contexts and b) “issue specific frames” which are pertinent to a specific event²⁷. A similar approach was examined by Shanto Iyengar with the distinction between “thematic” and “episodic” frames, operated under the assumption that “news about political issues almost invariably takes either an episodic or thematic frame.”²⁸ Moreover, as Iyengar

²² The two articles appear as archived by *Inscop.ro*: ZiarMM, „Sondaj: Jumătate dintre români considera comunismul ‘un lucru bun’”, miercuri, 11 decembrie 2013, archived by *Inscop.ro* on <https://www.inscop.ro/10-decembrie-2013-ziar-mm-ro-sondaj-jumatate-dintre-romani-considera-comunismul-un-lucru-bun/>, (accessed on August 23, 2020) and București FM, „Sondaj: Jumătate dintre români considera comunismul ‘un lucru rău’”, miercuri, 11 decembrie 2013, archived by *Inscop.ro* on <https://www.inscop.ro/10-decembrie-2013-bucurestifm-ro-sondaj-jumatate-dintre-romani-considera-comunismul-un-lucru-rau/>, (accessed on August 23, 2020).

²³ Iulian Tudor, „Jumătate dintre români consideră comunismul ‘un lucru rău’, cealaltă jumătate, ‘un lucru bun’”, marți, 10 Decembrie 2013, *Romaniatv.net*, https://www.romaniatv.net/jumatate-dintre-romani-considera-comunismul-un-lucru-rau-cealalta-jumatate-un-lucru-bun_113875.html, (accessed on August 23, 2020).

²⁴ Claes H. de Vreese, “News framing: Theory and typology”, *Information Design Journal*, 13(1)/ 2005, pp. 51-62.

²⁵ Erving Goffman, *Frame analysis: an essay on the organization of experience*, Harper & Row, 1974, p. 21.

²⁶ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, University of California Press, 2003, p 7.

²⁷ Claes H. de Vreese, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁸ Shanto I. Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?: How Television Frames Political Issues*, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 2.

pointed out, choosing the form of a frame will influence attributions of responsibility on a matter for both the causes of and the treatments for social problems²⁹. These criteria offer new layers of interrogating news framing, exploring which type of frame prevails and the attribution of responsibility as a consequence of the framing.

Thirdly, in our endeavor to build a consistent media framing analysis stands the question of how to identify a news frame. De Vreese draws on previous empirical approaches to sum that “framing devices” should be used, consisting of specific textual and visual elements that can help measure news frames³⁰. The framing devices range from rhetorical to technical journalistic means of expression. In the present study, public opinion polls, survey results and subsequent topics may figure as triggers for a news organization to cover the story from a specific angle, related (or not) to nostalgia for communism. Depending on the framing devices used, post-communist nostalgia may (or may not) become news. The surveys considered here aimed to assess particularly, or among other themes, various issues related to the past³¹.

Enlarging our perspective, we will examine the post-communist nostalgia waves within a twofold approach: first, associated to the news coverage of opinion polls and second, functioning as a framing device in the construction of headlines.

Based on this framework, the following research questions will be examined:

Q1: Can post-communist nostalgia be considered as a news framing device, and if yes, to what extent?

Q2: Based on the attribution of responsibility suggested in the headlines, can the responsibility recipients be determined?

Solution Approach, Corpus and Method

Our qualitative content analysis will focus on the news articles covering public opinion polls, published between 2008 and 2019 on digital news sites and platforms.

For data gathering, a series of validity criteria was set up, as recommended by Laurence Bardin³²: exhaustiveness, homogeneity, representativeness, and relevance. The research corpus has been partially constructed, as we tested the wave pattern of post-communist nostalgia for a conference presentation in 2018³³. For the present article, a more thorough data selection was carried out, combining several strategies: an online key word search³⁴ using two expressions (in Romanian), “nostalgia comunismului” and “sondaj communism” each combined with a complete sequence of years starting from 1990 and

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³⁰ Claes H. de Vreese, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³¹ A list of the identified polls figures in the Appendix.

³² Laurence Bardin, *L'analyse de contenu*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2003, pp: 127-128.

³³ Alexandra Bardan & Natalia Vasileandiu, “Mapping ‘displaced nostalgia’ in Romania: the past in the representation of generations born after 1989”, presentation at the International Conference *Communicative Forms and Practices of Nostalgia: Conceptual, Critical and Historical Perspectives*, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden, 8-9 Nov.2018.

³⁴ We used Google as a web search engine as its ranking systems are designed to retrieve the most relevant results.

ending in 2019. The first three pages of results were scanned, meaning a total of 174 web pages. Complementary sources were used: a key word search using the title of the polls, studies discussing the polls results³⁵, and press coverages made by local polling companies, if available³⁶. The first set of data collected 220 news articles. Using the homogeneity and the relevance criteria, we kept only texts published by media outlets (national and local) that related directly to a poll (cited, mentioned, or used to build up an argument). This process narrowed the results to a final corpus of 195 articles published between 2008 and 2019 on digital news platforms.

A content analysis was then used, both for quantitative and qualitative purposes. The quantitative approach was first used to measure the evolution of the articles covering local polls within specific criteria, the number of news articles published each year over the chosen period. Secondary, we related the number of identified polls with their news coverage.

Qualitative content analysis was used to sort, in the first place, the recurring frame of “nostalgia.”³⁷ As such, this step was used to narrow even more the results, focusing exclusively on the articles that framed the term “nostalgia” in the headline. The QDA Miner computer-assisted qualitative analysis software was used for this procedure. The unit of analysis was coded as “headline implying/ suggesting *nostalgia*.”³⁸ A second code was introduced, pointing to the headlines that framed the news in reference to a poll, as an indicator measuring whether a “generic” or an “issue specific” frame was used. The frame concerning “attribution of responsibility” was examined under the limits of our framework, since a headline is too short to develop such an issue. Another type of coding was used, aiming to determine “the subject” and “the object” of nostalgia within the headline framing.

Findings and Discussion

Our first objective was to provide a context for the news coverage of surveys carried out between 2008 and 2019. This analysis was set to visualize the distribution over time of the news articles and of the polls. A first observation relies on the comparison between the total number of articles and the number of polls, resulting in 195 articles that covered 36 polls over a period of eleven years.

The following figure (Fig. 1) illustrates the number of news articles published every year compared to the number of polls conducted, and leads to a few relevant observations: although the number of polls is pretty low, with a maximum of 5 surveys identified for 2010 and 2014, there are two notable peaks in article publishing for the same years. Another peak is visible for the end of the decade, but with a slight

³⁵ Luminita Murgescu, “Romanian Perceptions of Communism”, *Euxeinos*, Nr. 3/ 2011; Manuela Marin, “Re-Assesing post-communist nostalgia in Romania: chronological framework and opinion polls”, *Twentieth Century Communism*, Nr. 11/ 2016, pp. 10-26.

³⁶ Media coverages made available online by INSCOP: <https://www.inscop.ro/en/category/media/> (accessed on August 30, 2020) and IRES: <https://ires.ro/arhiva/studii> (accessed on August 30, 2020).

³⁷ Regarding the identification of recurring frames in the media, de Vreese recommends a deductive approach, meaning predefined frames that are operationalized prior to the analysis, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁸ Coding criteria was marked to select all headlines containing the word nostalgia, texts that implied regretting, longing, yearning, crying for the past, a desire to go back in time, to bring back communism, but it rejected opinions on communism (as a better past, a good idea, a good thing, better living etc.). A second coder checked randomly the corpus, based on the coding criteria presented.

growth. A first correlation with the publishing context can be made, as all three peaks correspond roughly to the round anniversaries of the fall of communist regimes, when news coverage concerning the communist past tends to intensify, thus replicating a wave pattern. Referring to our previous study on the use of communist iconography to promote clubbing events³⁹, the first publishing peak (of 2010) concurs with the peak of this visual technique used in online marketing strategies, which later decreased towards 2014. Previously cited studies also suggest that popular culture related to the communist past was trending around 2010, and it corresponds, within a larger time frame, to the proliferation of online alternative memorial narratives on communism in a new digital and generational context. The 2014 publishing peak may be correlated with an important political event of the year, the presidential elections, when Romanians had to choose between two clear (ideological) options: left (Victor Ponta) or right (Klaus Iohannis).

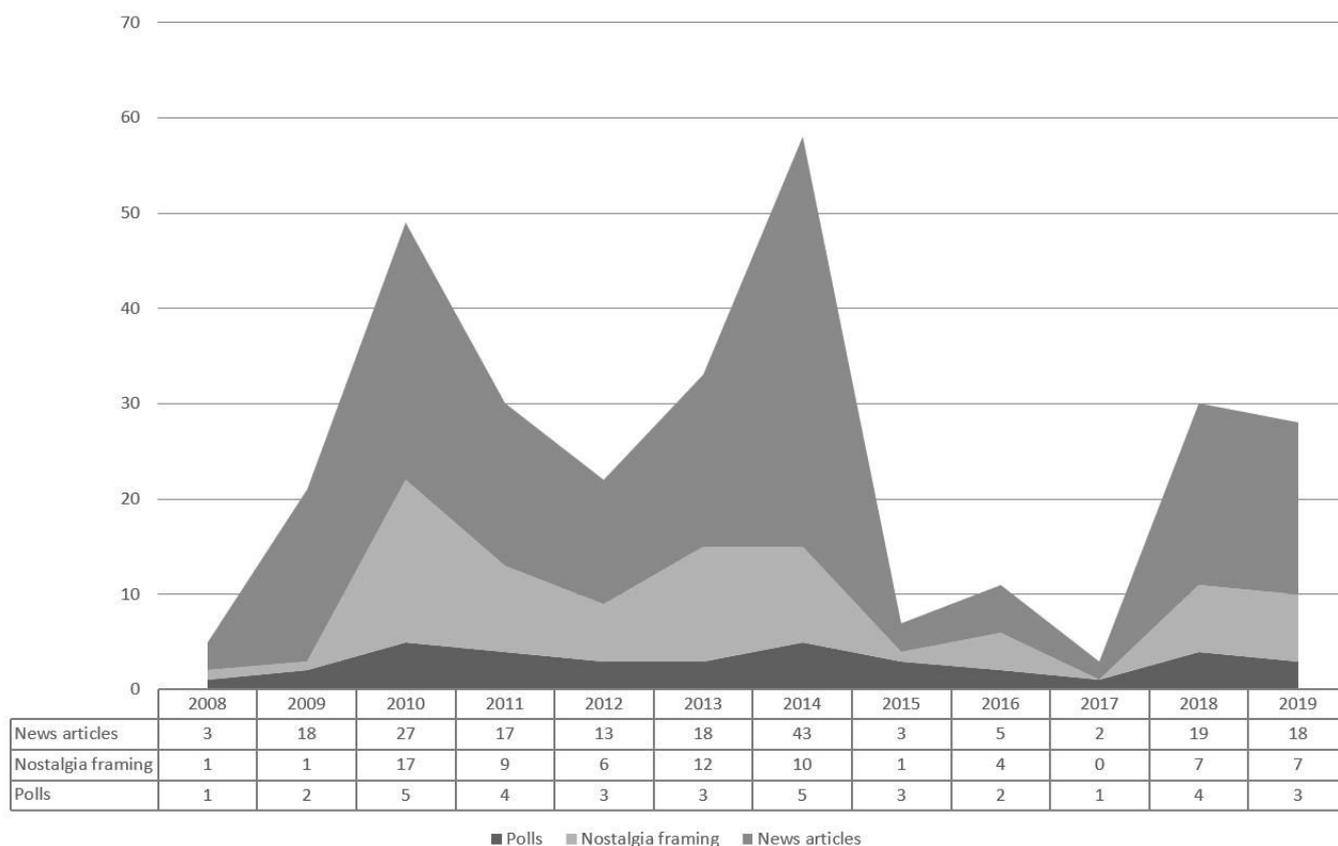


Figure 1. Time frame of 2008-2019: the number of polls covered by the news, the number of news articles published on digital news platforms, the number of nostalgia framing of headlines (author’s archive)

Editorial waves of nostalgia framed news

Analysis that aimed to identify the recurring frame of “nostalgia” within the news coverage of the polls provided 77 headlines, meaning that 28% of the headlines published between 2008 and 2019 used nostalgia as a framing device, data which partially answers to Q1.

³⁹ Alexandra Bardan, “Marketing Post-Communist Nostalgia in Romania”, *op. cit.*

Moreover, figure 1 also illustrates the number of news articles published every year compared to the number of headlines integrating nostalgia framing. A similar wave pattern may be identified, yet with a notable difference when comparing the peaks. There is a similar proportion for the first 2010 wave, but the next one (in 2014) shows a particular dynamic: while the news coverage increased dramatically, the nostalgia framing dropped slightly compared to the first wave. Considering post-communist nostalgia within a media framing approach, two evident editorial waves can be noticed: a consistent one in 2010, followed by a lower one in 2014. The end of the decade illustrates an even weaker wave⁴⁰, which might be replaced, starting with 2020 with a nostalgia for the times before the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Nostalgia frames as a sign of crisis

The next code aimed to identify which type of frame was used for the 77 headlines selected in the analysis. We searched for the headlines containing the word “poll”, as a framing device for the source of news: 30 of them specified the word “poll”, while 47 headlines framed nostalgia with no reference to a source. In this perspective, we may also sort a share of 61% “generic frames” corresponding to the headlines that framed nostalgia as a topic pointing to issues placed in general context and 39% “issue specific frames” equivalent to the headlines framing nostalgia as related to the results of a survey.

A brief overview of the “issue specific frames” in headlines provides a starting point for a more elaborate understanding of nostalgia in the patterns of news construction. Under the limits of the present study, we advance the nostalgia “issue specific frames” as marker of a societal crisis, where references to scientific based data (the polls) are used as an argument to signal a split menacing the future evolution of the society, divided between the option to keep up with the current course of development and the desire to return/ regain the order of the ancient regime. This hypothesis may be tested in a further in-depth analysis of the news articles featuring nostalgia as an “issue specific frames”, correlated with the context of the publishing and the poll they covered.

Nostalgia framing devices

The last two codes were used to assess the subjects and the objects of nostalgia for the 77 headlines. Titles attributing nostalgia to specific subjects counted 55 results, where 3 groups stand out: a large group of “Romanians” (with several subgroups, that will be discussed below) counting 39 cases, “young people” (6 cases)⁴¹, and “sociodemographic categories” (3 cases)⁴². From a statistical point of view, 81% of the headlines named the Romanians (in various shares) as subjects of nostalgia, followed by 13% pointing to young people, and 6% to social categories.

⁴⁰ 2018 was also the anniversary of a century since the Great Union.

⁴¹ The young people were referred to as “the students”, “the young people”, “Romanian pupils”, “Romanian teenagers”, “Even the young people, 34%”, “More and more young people”.

⁴² This group referred to “The elderly, people with no education, the Moldovans” and “Moldovans and people with no education” (found twice).

A focused view on the first group brings a series of details. For the “Romanians” category three types of framing devices were used: 43% of the headlines used “proportions” (with expressions such as “Half of the Romanians”, “Over a third of Romanians”, “Most Romanians”, “1 out of 3 Romanians”), 37% of the headlines used “percentages” (in various numbers, with expressions such as “x% of Romanians”) and 20% of the titles used “generalization” (Romanians).

A particular group of headlines pointed not to the subjects but to “causes of nostalgia” with 6 cases: “failure of the present”, “failure of the school” (twice), “economic difficulties”, “mess”, and “political and economic crises”), sign that the “attribution of responsibility” may be framed in nostalgia related headlines, results which provide a response for Q2.

Analysis of the object of nostalgia in the 77 headlines brought 69 results, where 4 groups were noticed. Four types of framing devices were used: 47% of the titles used “generalization” (with 32 occurrences of the term “communism”), 25% of the headlines used “specific temporal location” (with expressions such as “the communist period”, “the Golden Era”, “the ancient/ Ceausescu’s regime”), 21% used “specific actors” (pointing to “Ceaușescu” in 10 cases, and to the “RCP” in 4 cases), and 7% referred to specific social topics (“Citizen safety” - used twice, “communist festivities on May, the 1st” - used twice and “Key industrial/ economic areas”).

We further compared the most used framing devices found in the headlines, when attributing the subject and the object of nostalgia. A relevant observation steps out in terms of rhetorical journalistic procedures, pointing to a rather consistent use of the “generalization” technique when assigning “communism” as the object of nostalgia. A brief semantic analysis would show a clear difference between stating a “nostalgia for communism”, which implies a nostalgia for communism *per se*, and a “nostalgia for the communist period”, which may be associated with a variety of features attached to that specific phase of the past⁴³. Compared to the total number of 195 articles from the corpus, 14% of the headlines were framed from a “nostalgia for communism” angle.

The specific rhetorical short-cut used in headline construction that consists of assigning “communism” as the object of nostalgia is a news framing device that participates in the flow of post-communist nostalgia editorial waves visualized in figure 1, completing our answer to Q1. On the other hand, these findings relate to Chelchea and Jderu’s analysis on the use of sensationalism as editorial tactics. Finally, observations from all stages of our study shed a light on the variety of nostalgia framing devices, and last, but not least, our analysis showed that only 28% of the headlines used nostalgia as a framing device when considering the total number of news articles covering the polls, published between 2008 and 2019 on digital news platforms.

Conclusions

⁴³ Including one’s youth, which stands as an important trigger for nostalgia.

The aim of this study was to examine the media framing of news published between 2008 and 2019, that covered public opinion polls questioning specific or general topics related to the past.

Two editorial waves of nostalgia framed news were identified, a consistent one in 2010 and a weaker one in 2014, each one emerging within a different context. While both may be linked to round anniversaries of the fall of communism, the 2010 wave occurs in a context of cultural and generational change, while the 2014 wave surfaced in the background of a major political event of the year. De Vrees considers news frames as “parts of political arguments, journalistic norms, and social movements’ discourse. They are alternative ways of defining issues, endogenous to the political and social world.”⁴⁴ In this respect, the editorial waves of nostalgia reveal the frame-building process aiming to highlight relevant local issues in the more general flow of news. The nostalgia framing devices deconstructed here captured the latent meanings embedded in the news headlines, making sense of what is at stake. The polls “made the news” in most articles, while there were a significant few where “the nostalgia for communism” became news. Fred Davis linked nostalgia to massive changes in society and an identity crisis. News framing simultaneously reflect and forge perceptions about a particular issue, and, as such, nostalgia frames could have signaled that nostalgia for communism represented a crisis that would be dealt with.

Considering the media framing of post-communist nostalgia, this study focused on the production of meaning in news. Future research might integrate a framing effects framework, aiming to assess the negotiation of meaning by individuals, and an in-depth investigative approach may reveal the semantics behind their understanding of post-communist nostalgia. This is a specific type of questioning, one that the framework of public opinion polling cannot assure.

Notes:

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⁴⁴ Claes H. de Vreese, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

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