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## THE LANGUAGE OF LUCK: AN EXPLORATION INTO MEDIA DISCOURSE ON GAMBLING IN ROMANIAN NEWS OUTLETS

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**Abstract.** The issue of gambling has become a widely discussed topic. In Romania, this discussion has gained momentum due to public concerns about excessive and unmarked advertising, as well as the proximity of gambling halls to public institutions and schools, posing a risk to young people. Mass-media also plays a crucial role in shaping and directing public opinion. Therefore, this research uses a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative methods with qualitative methods in order to closely examine how the media constructs its narratives about gambling and the individuals involved in such practices. This paper takes into account the predominant frames used in online media coverage of gambling in the general news websites *Libertatea* and *Adevărul* and the tabloids *Click* and *Cancan*, along with prevailing sentiments and narratives in each case. By using a Media Frames Corpus, the study unveils prevalent themes such as “Policy prescription and evaluation,” “Crime and punishment,” and “Public figures and celebrities”. Notably, sentiment analysis uncovers a pervasive negative tone across all sources, with *Click* exhibiting the highest negativity. It has further yielded results that showcase

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general news websites' focus on legal and regulatory aspects, and tabloids' tendency to expand on anecdotal, sensational or tragic stories.

**Keywords.** gambling, media discourse, news outlets, framing, sentiment analysis, narratives

## 1. Introduction

This paper seeks to situate gambling within the broader field of media studies. To this end, it employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to elucidate the multifaceted nature of this complex phenomenon. This study aims to identify how the media shapes its narratives about individuals susceptible to the influence of factors such as luck, risk, and uncertainty.

The media plays a pivotal role in forming and directing public opinion, which can subsequently exert influence over political decisions and legal matters. The prevailing beliefs fostered by this phenomenon can influence the current political climate regarding gambling regulations and addiction prevention, which this paper seeks to explore in the context of the current socio-political situation. This is particularly relevant in light of the risk factors associated with gambling behavior and its implications for public health.

The gambling-media duo yields equally valuable insights, regardless of the direction of impact. In this sense, gambling can be viewed as a lens through which aspects of the current media ecosystem can be better understood. Such practices and behaviors have witnessed a surge in both online and offline advertising. The gaming industry, for instance, has been known to use gambling-like features, such as loot boxes, chance-based item acquisition, or even simulating real-life social casinos and slot machines. This highlights the normalization of these practices in modern media.

## 2. Theoretical framework and literature review

### 2.1. *Gambling*

Gambling has a complex history, spanning social, historical, psychological, legal, technological, and educational dimensions. As Schwartz (2006) notes, it predates recorded history and is defined in various ways depending

on socio-historical contexts (McMillen, 1996). Nevertheless, it is frequently regarded as an inherent aspect of human existence, entailing the potential for gains or losses and an accompanying surge of adrenaline (Ferentzy & Turner, 2013). In light of these considerations, attempts to delineate the term have described it within similar concepts as “risking something of value (usually money) for the possibility of gain with an uncertain outcome” (Ferentzy & Turner, 2013, p. 6). This definition encompasses risk-taking activities found in almost every aspect of social life. It is an aspect of social life (McMillen, 1996) or the wager of any item or possession of value upon a game or event of uncertain outcome in which chance, to varying degrees, determines the outcome (Bolen & Boyd, 1968). In contrast, the Romanian legal framework defines gambling in accordance with the Emergency Ordinance no. 77/2009 as a product that meets the following characteristics: a participation fee; the game being based on the random selection of results; monetary winnings; and public offering of the respective game by the organizer to the participants (Fifoiu et al., 2024).

In their 2019 study, Gordon and Reith proposed that gambling should be regarded as a social practice rather than an individualistic pursuit and should be understood as a product of the broader structures and environment that shape and reinforce it. Wöhr and Wuketich (2021) investigated the potential for harm through studies examining gamblers’ perceptions and overall positioning within a social context. They explored “gambling harm”, defined as “any kind of harm or distress arising from, or caused or exacerbated by, a person’s gambling” (Neal et al., 2005, p. 39). The authors identify the points where negative consequences of gambling are inevitable and the corresponding categories, frequently associated with gambling addiction or problematic gambling, “a significant public health issue” (Miller et al., 2014, p. 529). The findings indicate that the degree of stigmatization experienced by gamblers is comparable to that of individuals with various mental health or substance abuse issues (Wöhr & Wuketich, 2021). Conclusions regarding the depictions of gambling in the media also stem from the acknowledgment of the dimensions of stigma creation (Hing et al., 2014) regarding problem gambling. Labeling, stereotyping, status loss, and discrimination, combined with social distance, induce shame among problem gamblers, with media portrayal playing a significant role in this effect (Wöhr & Wuketich, 2021).

In terms of the Romanian gambling industry, the market is regulated by the National Gambling Office. This institution is responsible for licensing, monitoring, and controlling the entire gambling sector (Pantea & Nestor, 2015). However, the current environment, shaped by recent pivotal actions and events, signifies a dynamic scenario marked by industry growth, alarming public participation in such practices, regulatory adjustments, and heightened awareness of the risks associated with gambling and its advertising. In consequence, several preceding studies from psychology have focused on the phenomenon of pathological gambling among Romanians. These studies have identified several underlying symptoms and characteristics, including depression (Rizeanu, 2013), high levels of impulsivity, neurotic and immature defense mechanisms, and low conscientiousness (Ciobotaru & Clinciu, 2022).

A substantial body of research has been conducted over the past few decades, including studies by Lupu et al. (2002), Lupu and Lupu (2018), Lupu and Todirita (2013), and Molinaro et al. (2014). Sansanwal et al. (2015) ascertained the prevalence of problem gambling and gambling disorder among youth in various counties in Romania. This represents a significant national issue that raises questions regarding the efficacy of market monitoring, compliance with essential legislation, accessibility, and educational initiatives. In this case, the youth can be divided into two categories: those facing adverse family and social circumstances who utilize games of chance as a coping mechanism and those from affluent backgrounds with neglectful parents, for whom gambling serves as a means to seek attention or fill idle time (Lupu & Lupu, 2018). Despite the restriction of minors engaging in such activities (Fifoiu et al., 2024), teenagers present worrying gambling trends. The most recent sociological inquiry conducted in 2023 by Save the Children (Salvați Copiii, 2023), a Romanian NGO, revealed that while only 14% of children admitted to gambling, the phenomenon has a much broader impact. 40% of them mentioned that they have friends involved in such pastimes (Salvați Copiii - Save the Children Romania, 2023).

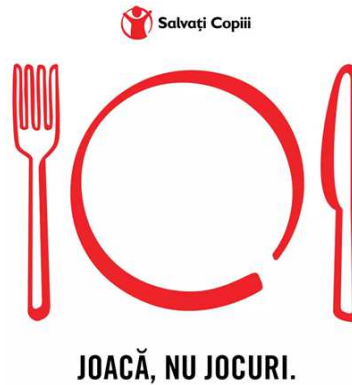


Figure 1. "Joacă, nu jocuri"/ "Play, not games" campaign banner  
(Salvați Copiii Romania [@salvaticopiiiromania], 2023)

These figures have led to more social movements and activism in Romania, aiming to regulate the industry and its advertising. Digital out-of-home advertisements had an exposure of 110,639 hours, while television spots covered the equivalent of 99 days of continuous broadcasting between November 2022 and October 2023 (Salvați Copiii - Save the Children Romania, 2023). Consequently, a campaign entitled "Joacă, nu jocuri" ("Play, not games," understood as games of chance) establishes a dichotomy between wholesome, harmless recreation and the detrimental practice of gambling. The NGO's logo was transformed into an empty plate near gambling establishments and betting ads. This symbolism highlighted the "hunger for money" associated with gambling and drew attention to the unethical behavior of public figures who endorse gambling and the resulting poverty and hunger. (Figure 1). Many content creators have joined the initiative on social media, urging the authorities to enforce laws to ensure a 300-metre distance between schools and gambling venues, implement strict age verification measures, and enact advertising regulations (Salvați Copiii – Save the Children Romania, 2023).

The Declic community, committed to upholding moral standards, has initiated several campaigns prohibiting gambling and sports betting advertisements. Additionally, they have submitted a petition to the Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, and the Senate. An interactive map of outdoor gambling ads in Bucharest, Romania was created to

raise awareness. A video supporting the initiative was released with Internet personality Mircea Bravo. Efforts were also directed toward holding TV channels and shows accountable for promoting such practices, resulting in fines from the National Audiovisual Council (CNA).

## *2.2. Framing and media representations of gambling*

The concept of framing is particularly relevant in understanding the active role of media in constructing meaning. Researchers have named framing, agenda setting, and priming as media effects theories. Neuman and Guggenheim (2011) studied the trajectory of communication effects research over fifty years, highlighting six stages. Consequently, they attributed framing to the fifth stage of theoretical development in media effects. They contend that framing, agenda-setting, and priming fall within “interpretive effects theories.” This stage discusses how exposure influences the way individuals interpret and assign importance to topics addressed by mass media. Their study assessed notable works that focused on these theories according to their number of citations. Part of those publications is Robert Entman’s “Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm” (1993), which is relevant to this paper.

The sociologist Erving Goffman introduced the concept of framing in his book “Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience” (1974). He refers to framing as the intricate process of constructing “definitions of a situation” and highlights its role in helping individuals make sense of their everyday life by reducing the complexity of specific topics. Consequently, framing has been expanded in media studies, with significant contributions from scholars such as Robert Entman. Throughout his work, Entman argues that while framing is a concept frequently encountered among social sciences and humanities, it entails a “scattered conceptualization” (1993, p. 51), thereby lacking a particularly clear definition. Furthermore, he states that framing is a process of selection and salience, involving the selection of certain aspects of reality and the increase of their salience within a communicating text. Moreover, Entman proceeds to expand on the role of framing in news coverage, claiming that news media conveys the significance of specific topics

through the use of frames (Entman, 1993). In this sense, researchers have aimed to study the reasons why “(often small) changes in the presentation of an issue or event produce (sometimes larger) changes of opinion” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104).

The relevancy of framing for this study lies in the concept of media frames, which are further used in developing the methodology. As Scheufele states, frames act as “schemes for presenting and comprehending news” (1999, p. 106). A media frame consists of a main idea that attributes meaning to a series of events, highlighting the core of the issue, conveyed by a communicator to a receiver (Scheufele, 1999; D’Angelo, 2017).

In media frame research, one prevalent challenge is analyzing a broad data set. To overcome this challenge, Boydston et al. (2014, 2015) developed a Media Frames Corpus (MFC) and later elaborated a dataset of annotated articles. The researchers use the term “framing dimensions” to list all types of frames that can be encountered in issues of public concern. They first presented a unified coding scheme fitting for content analysis by nesting issue-specific frames into high-level dimensions. Furthermore, they argued that framing can be perceived “as a general aspect of linguistic communication about facts and opinions on any issue” (2015, p. 438). The MFC has been further implemented by other researchers on broad datasets, such as Kwak, An, and Ahn (2020), who analyzed 1.5 million *New York Times* articles throughout 17 years to assess long-term framing trends.

Moreover, the way gambling is framed significantly influences its handling across all sectors, including legislation, regulation, and commercial practices, apart from the media and public discourse. The party that shapes this discourse wields considerable power over gambling perceptions and determines the actions that are permissible or restricted in response to it (Reith & Wardle, 2022).

Bernhard et al. (2010) used social movement framing theory and ethnographic content analysis to examine anti-gambling discourse in the US. The authors employed the thematic categories of diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation to elucidate the social context of risk-taking behaviors. An analysis of how those opposed to gambling have adapted their messages revealed the existence of a “frame inversion” system. This process shifted the framing of gambling issues from individual responsibility to gambling

as a “sickness” or “disorder.” Gambling was framed as an excess caused by an aggressive industry that capitalizes on addiction. Social issues were defined and framed through various lenses, including religious, rational, moral, scientific, medical, and human-condition-related perspectives.

Various states address gambling-related harms through policies, public health campaigns, and regulatory frameworks. This results in a dualistic approach to gambling, critiquing it for its societal costs while promoting it for its economic benefits. Reith and Wardle (2022) examine the social and commercial determinants of health as they affect gambling in Great Britain. The gambling industry’s economic activity and consumerism have overshadowed its public health issues. The 2005 Gambling Act transformed the industry in complex ways. A shift in perspective views gambling as a key driver of economic growth. This approach allowed for a broader narrative of responsible gambling, emphasizing individual accountability and consumer choice. The freedom to choose is seen as key to gambling, while the damage is ignored. This diverts attention from the drivers of harm: “corporate practices, economic systems, and political decisions.” (Reith & Wardle, 2022, p. 74) Gambling is now seen as a form of consumption, which has led to industry self-regulation. This is designed to circumvent regulation and position the industry as its overseer. Therefore, the continued prevalence of gambling as an economic activity presents a challenge for governmental decision-making.

In addition to the aforementioned media effects theories, the role media has in shaping or influencing individuals’ beliefs has been explored over time through other similar concepts. The cultivation theory, for instance, underscores the significance of prolonged exposure to media content, particularly television, in shaping individuals’ perception of reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Morgan, Shanahan and Signorielli (2015, p. 32) asserted the continued relevance of cultivation theory in the new media era, given “the cultural role of storytelling”.

With this concept in mind, Monaghan and Derevensky (2008, p. 539) argued that gambling has been depicted in the media as “entertaining and innocuous”, which can be harmful to young adults. They also looked at gambling portrayals in movies, where gambling activities are depicted as glamorous pursuits linked to the main character’s skill rather than chance.



The authors further emphasize that positive depictions of gambling may influence young individuals to believe that they, too, can attain glamorous lifestyles. However, negative depictions such as criminals, derelicts, or pathological gamblers are problematic for young people to relate to, potentially distancing them from the inherent risks associated with gambling.

The study of gambling extends to its representation in advertising. Content analyses of gambling advertisements reveal positive depictions, framing such behavior as an enjoyable leisure activity (Korn et al., 2005; Parke et al., 2014). A substantial part of the research has assessed the Australian media landscape. The findings indicate that exposure to betting advertisements is correlated with the development of a favorable attitude toward gambling. Furthermore, it is linked to an escalation in problem gambling, particularly among individuals who are already participants in gambling practices (Killick & Griffiths, 2021). A qualitative content analysis of Australian newspapers has concluded that problem gambling is often framed in terms of potential solutions rather than its causes and consequences.

Moreover, newspapers focused on individual responsibility, whereas the broader social, ecological, and industry factors contributing to problem gambling were not as emphasized (Miller et al., 2014). An analysis of U.S. newspapers has concluded that gambling coverage heavily focused on issues of legalization along with social ones, which at the time were related to various legal actions taken regarding sports gambling. In the authors' view, this emphasizes "the newspapers' latent impacts on fostering public understanding" (Lee et al., 2016, p. 79).

Additionally, tabloid news coverage has been highlighted as a factor contributing to negative moral judgments on gambling behavior. Participants in a study have accused tabloids of sensationalizing individual cases of problem gambling along with blaming and shaming individuals. Moreover, newspapers focus on EGMs rather than the glamorized casinos often seen on TV (Miller & Thomas, 2017).

The examined literature underscores the intricate relationship between gambling and media, emphasizing the need for further research, especially in Romania. Existing studies in Romania have primarily focused on gambling advertising and gambling behavior (Gherghel, 2020; Simion & Dumitru, 2018), with limited exploration into its portrayal in the media landscape.

### 3. Research design

This research design explores the media's depiction of gambling, aiming to unravel predominant themes, narratives, and sentiments. By employing mixed research methods, the study aims to capture the evolving landscape of gambling representation in a technologically advancing and globally connected society. The questions that this study aims to answer are the following:

RQ1: What are the predominant frames used in news websites' coverage of gambling?

RQ2: What is the general sentiment across news media portrayals of gambling?

RQ3: What are the main narratives present in the chosen timeframe?

The research focuses on two general Romanian news websites – *Libertatea* and *Adevărul* – and two tabloid news websites – *Click* and *Cancan* – in order to compare and contrast their approaches regarding gambling portrayals. The online news sites have been chosen based on the highest number of visits, according to SATI (Biroul Român de Audit Transmedia (BRAT), n.d.), in the General News (*Știri Generale*) category. The chosen timeframe for the sampled data is January 1st, 2023 to January 1st, 2024.

The articles are collected using the Google Web Scraper extension. Data collection does not imply ethical concerns, given that the content provided by the websites can be consulted and accessed freely. In order to focus on articles concerning gambling, sampling is done by searching the Romanian n-gram *jocuri de noroc* (en. gambling) and term *păcănele* (en. slots). The argument behind the choice for the latter term, which belongs to the slang, is its frequent use in discussions about EGMs. In terms of potential issues concerning hidden advertising for gambling operators and companies, a preliminary examination has noted that all of the sampled websites have taken measures to label their advertising appropriately. This includes either designating articles to a dedicated section for advertorials or explicitly indicating product placement with a (*P*) in the article titles. Table 1 includes the number of articles for each website in the sample.

**Number of articles extracted from each of the sampled websites**

*Table 1*

News site	Number of articles
Adevărul	94
Libertatea	66
Cancan	34
Click	13

The present research uses a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative methods with qualitative methods in order to detect how the media narratives about gambling are constructed.

In order to answer RQ1, quantitative and qualitative methods are combined. Automated word and n-gram frequency analysis is conducted using KH Coder, a semi-automated tool used to identify co-occurrence networks and patterns in language use. The automatic counting of word and n-gram frequencies allows for the grouping of terms and identification of general and specific frames (Higuchi, 2016). Further, Tableau Public is used for data visualization to represent identified frames and their relationship better.

The media frame analysis follows the Media Frames Corpus framework, categorizing public concern issues into specific frame types. This paper relies on a deductive approach, beginning with the list of frames identified by Boydston et al. (2014, 2015). Manual coding is applied to detect frames, focusing on the title and first paragraph of each article, summarizing the core elements and the angle of the story. To ensure consistency in this manual process, intercoder reliability measures are implemented, enhancing the accuracy and uniformity of the coding across the dataset.

Table 2 includes an overview of the MFC, deliberately omitting the “Other” category. Following the pilot coding process, one additional category of media frames has been added alongside the Media Frame Corpus. This category pertains to “Public figures and celebrities” and has been attributed to news articles concerning the opinions, initiatives, and stories of such actors in the media landscape about the gambling practices, mainly as a consequence of the pursuit of sensationalist content and human interest narratives.

Table 2

The media frames corpus proposed by Boydston et al. (2014, p. 6, 2015, p. 439)

Frame	Description
Economic	"Costs, benefits or other financial implications"
Capacity and resources	"Availability of physical, human or financial resources, and capacity of current systems"
Morality	"Religious or ethical implications"
Fairness and equality	"Balance or distribution of rights, responsibilities, and resources"
Legality, constitutionally and jurisprudence	"Rights, freedoms, and authority of individuals, corporations, and government"
Policy prescription and evaluation	"Discussion of specific policies aimed at addressing problems"
Crime and punishment	"Effectiveness and implications of laws and enforcement"
Security and defense	"Threats to welfare of the individual, community, or nation"
Health and safety	"Health care, sanitation, public safety"
Quality of life	"Threats and opportunities for the individual's wealth, happiness, and well-being"
Cultural identity	"Traditions, customs, or values of a social group in relation to a policy issue"
Public opinion	"Attitudes and opinions of the general public, including polling and demographics"
Political	"Considerations related to politics and politicians, including lobbying, elections, and attempts to sway voters"
External regulation and reputation	"International reputation or foreign policy"
Public figures and celebrities	"Opinions, initiatives, stories shared by or about famous people"

In order to answer RQ2, sentiment analysis is used to examine the sampled materials by employing the Orange Data Mining Tool, which provides a visual programming environment for data mining, allowing users to perform machine learning and data analysis (Demšar et al., 2004). Sentiment refers to the feelings toward entities, events, and their attributes (Liu, 2010). In this study, the Liu Hu sentiment analysis method is used, which can offer a closer look at the polarity of the sampled data. The Liu Hu method is lexicon-based, encompassing positive and negative words that help assess the sentiment of a text. The data set for this analysis contains the titles and the first paragraph for each news article in the sample. The Orange Data Mining Tool is employed for data visualization using heat maps, where clusters that group news articles discussing similar subjects are generated.

Lastly, for RQ3, qualitative content analysis is used to explore the predominant narratives found in the sampled data, contextualizing them through a timeline visualization.

### ***3.1. Limitations and replicability***

The chosen timeframe for data collection may reduce the ability to capture long-term trends, significant events, shifts in public opinion, or regulatory changes. Despite their popularity, the sampled websites may introduce a danger of insufficient representativeness. The discrepancy between the research language and the language of the studied materials may pose risks during the translation process. In addition, sentiment analysis tools may need help with accurately deciphering subjective language and understanding context. The data from the second most widely accessed general news channel, *Ştirile ProTV*, were excluded from the study due to the pervasive advertising content, which hindered the collection of coherent and relevant information, extending it to the following trending website. Moreover, each news website's editorial policy might affect their writing conduct, thereby possibly affecting the results of this study.

The selected sample may limit the generalizability of the findings, as results could vary if different news media, countries, or periods were chosen. Additionally, the time frame of the analysis could influence the results, particularly if it coincides with major sporting events that attract a significant gambling audience. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach that examines both media frames on gambling and how audiences perceive these frames, combining text-oriented analysis with focus groups.

The replicability of this study is bound to be achieved through transparent documentation of methodologies. Contrasting different news websites, exploring tangential topics, or examining gambling portrayals in a broader or more specific context can verify and contribute to reliable insights into media dynamics.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Gambling – media frames in Romanian news outlets

Qualitative content analysis has been used in the process of coding, where each article has been coded according to its title and first paragraph. Using Tableau Public, the results were then quantified.

Regarding the general news outlets *Libertatea* and *Adevărul* (Figure 2), the examination yielded pertinent results in terms of gambling coverage frames. While the general outcome ranks the “Policy prescription and evaluation” frame as the primary concern and *Libertatea*’s dominant one, a closer look shows that *Adevărul* covers gambling from the “Crime and punishment” perspective. In addition, these are followed by the “Economic” and “Public figures and celebrities”- based articles, with the “Quality of life”, “Cultural identity” and “Capacity and resources” categories as the least common frames. Furthermore, the distribution of the “Health and safety” frame reveals an additional difference between the websites, since *Adevărul* directs more attention to this area. Thus, the social issues as well as law regulations and enforcement pervade the scope of these news pages, with *Libertatea* following more closely policy review and guidance, proportionally speaking, than *Adevărul*, which is rather adherent to the consequences of the social dilemmas. However, the “Security and defense”, “Fairness and equality” as well as the “External regulation and reputation” systems extracted from the corpus were not attributed to any article.

At the same time, examining *Cancan* and *Click* (Figure 3), two popular tabloid news websites, is bound to generate productive interpretations. The “Crime and punishment” frame is present as the primary ‘program’ in addressing gambling-related events in both publications. However, the “public figures and celebrities” one follows, presenting another facet of the discourse built around gambling that prompted its introduction into the Corpus. The “Health and safety” aspects came third in the distribution. In contrast, the “Policy prescription and evaluation” ones, the key subject matter among the general newsletters, presents little to no interest to *Cancan* and *Click*, close in occurrences to the least frequent frames – “Morality”, “Cultural identity” and “Capacity and resources”.

The analysis showed no articles covering “Fairness and equality”, “Security and defense”, “Public opinion”, “Political” and “External regulation and reputation”. While the number of analyzed articles from this news category was not as extensive as the previously mentioned ones, the prevalence of specific approaches is noteworthy for understanding the central themes within these frames.

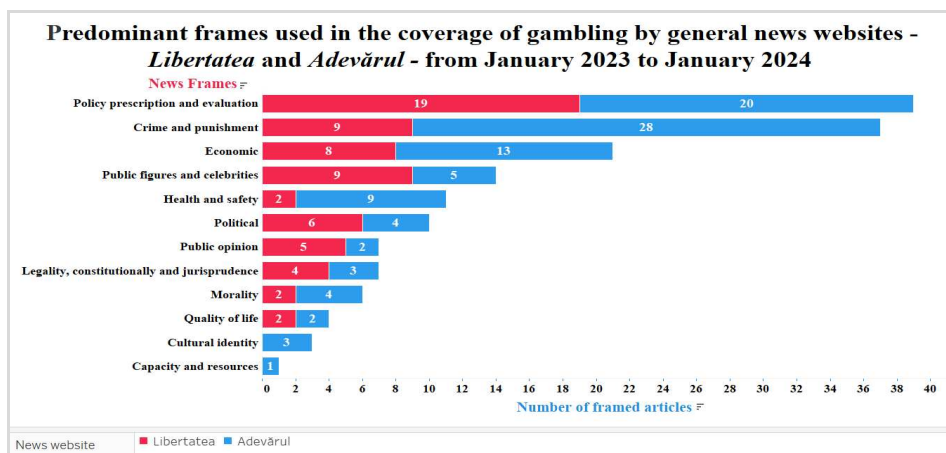


Figure 2. The distribution of media frames for the articles published by two extensively visited mainstream news websites, *Adevărul* and *Libertatea*

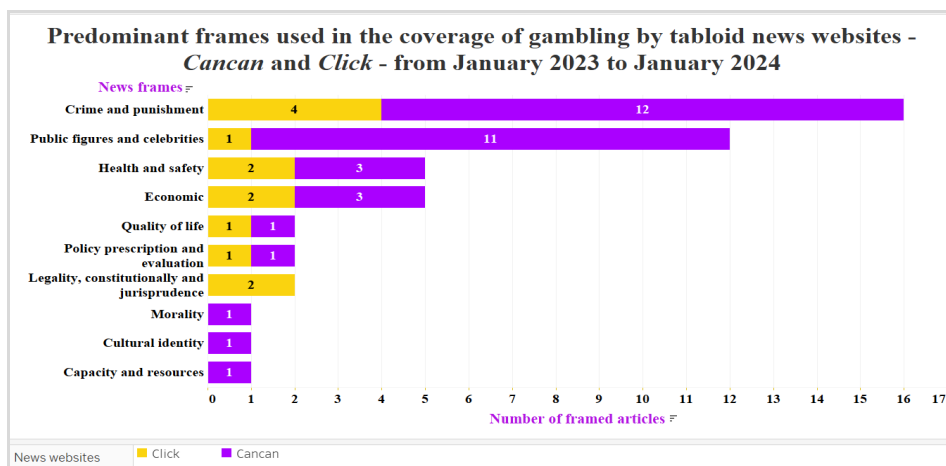


Figure 3. The distribution of media frames for the articles published by two widely accessed tabloid news websites, *Cancan* and *Click*

#### 4.2. Co-occurrence networks

Subsequently, KH Coder was used to generate co-occurrence networks for articles belonging to each news outlet, supporting the results collected through Media Frames Corpus.

Firstly, as depicted by the respective co-occurrence network (Figure 4), apart from extensively using the specific language related to different forms of gambling (“betting”, “slots”, “games”), the articles published by *Libertatea* predominantly build a bridge between political aspects, their legal implications as well as impacts on the individuals and crime rates. Political terms and the figure of Marcel Ciolacu, the PM of Romania, are coupled with juridical and regulatory notions, in turn repeatedly connected to “advertising”, “commercials” or “banning (ads)”. These usually seem to come as a response to “addiction” and robbery instances, in addition to the link between children involved in gambling practices and measures taken to protect them. Personalities like local councilors (Bogdan Roman), George Simion, and Sorin Constantinescu, alongside the political party they belong to (AUR) are also part of the discussion on managing the gambling situation locally (Alba, Roman, Neamț) and nationally.

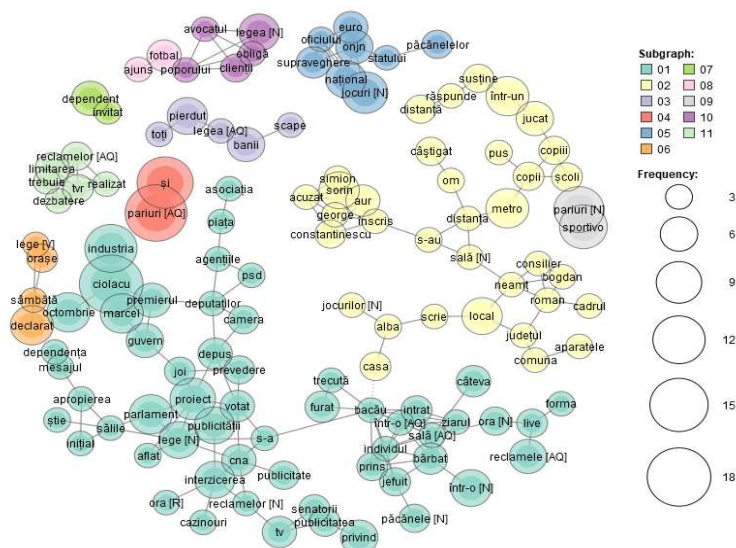


Figure 4. Co-occurrence network – *Libertatea*







link between “young man,” “lost money,” “slots,” “fire,” and “extreme” highlights the tragic consequences of gambling addiction and financial losses. A separate narrative underscores joints between words like “erotic show” and “detained”, “Las Vegas method”, “wealth” and “searches” or “lottery” and “lucky numbers”, involving an overall common theme of luck and chance with underlying entertainment and legal valances.

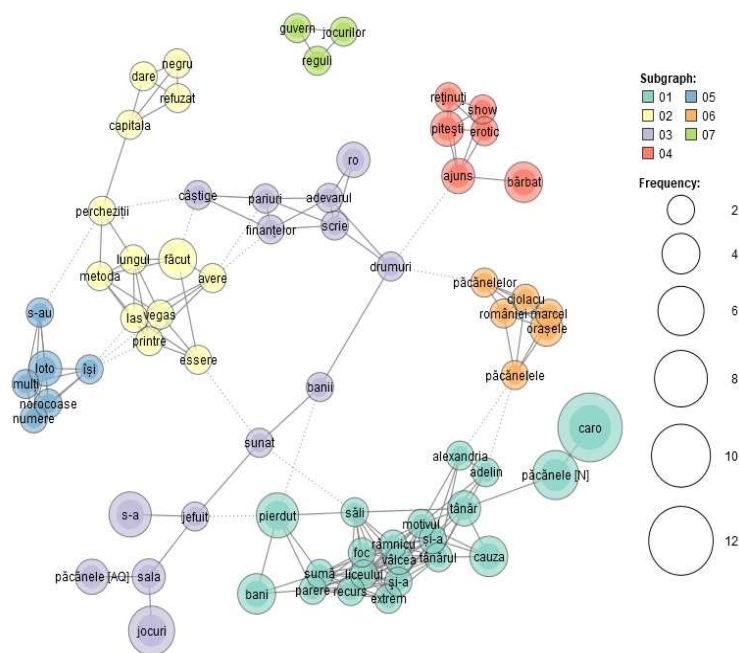


Figure 7. Co-occurrence network – Click

### 4.3. Gambling – Romanian news outlets – sentiment analysis

Sentiment analysis using the Orange Data Mining tool was conducted to grasp the polarity of the sampled data. Firstly, the average sentiment scores were determined for each news outlet, as shown in Table 3. These findings point to a negative general sentiment, with *Click* having the lowest score, whereas *Libertatea* scores the highest.

Table 3

## Average sentiment analysis scores

News Outlet	Average Liu Hu Sentiment Analysis Scores
Libertatea	- 1.32
Adevărul	- 1.75
Cancan	- 1.53
Click	- 1.88

The Liu Hu sentiment analysis method evaluates text polarity by analyzing its lexicon and clustering articles that discuss similar topics and exhibit similar sentiments. The analysis of articles from *Libertatea* reveals a prevailing negative sentiment (Figure 8). These articles address themes related to financial adversity (e.g. “The prosecutor accused of losing the money from the searches to gambling was acquitted. ‘The act is not accounted for by the criminal law’” – *Libertatea*, 2023, November 14), criminal activity (e.g. “Murder at a slot machine caught on camera. The attacker killed another man half an hour later, in front of a hotel in Hanover” – *Libertatea*, 2023, November 15), and addiction (e.g. “Alex Bogdan was addicted to gambling: ‘I lost 150,000 euros. It is one of the most nasty diseases’” – *Libertatea*, 2023, March 1). Conversely, articles portraying positive sentiments tend to explore alternatives for financial gain (e.g. “Dan Negru was offered to promote gambling: ‘Success in life is gained by climbing the stairs, and not by the elevator of luck’” – *Libertatea*, 2023, March 5), narratives of addiction recovery (e.g. “HOW YOU HEAL. ‘The feeling of losing was extraordinary.’ The stories of people addicted to gambling, told by themselves” – *Libertatea*, 2023, November), and advocacy for gambling regulation through laws (e.g. “CNA voted to ban betting advertising in support of a draft law entering Parliament” – *Libertatea*, 2023, February 3).

In the case of *Adevărul*, sentiment analysis similarly indicates a predominantly negative tone (Figure 9). Positive aspects include discussions on financial prosperity (“The luckiest Lotto 6/49 numbers. Many have become rich thanks to these combinations” – *Adevărul*, 2023, November 6), regulatory measures within the gambling sector (“Gambling measures will only be effective if applied during a medium-term” – *Adevărul*, 2023, October 10), and accounts of success attributed to public figures (“A Mega

Millions player has won the top prize worth \$1.58 billion VIDEO” – Adevărul, 2023, August 9). Negative themes tackled by *Adevărul* encompass topics such as poverty (“The phenomenon of Romanian poverty, explained by a psychologist: “The Romanian doesn’t think he can do more, so they settle for less” – Adevărul, 2023, August 9), suicide (“A Romanian woman obsessed with slot machines committed suicide. And his life partner fell into the passion of gambling too.” – Adevărul, 2023, March 13), deteriorating mental health (“The gambling trap. Doctor: “It’s a dangerous thing, it can lead to delinquency in order to get money” – Adevărul, 2023, May 11), and instances of criminal behavior linked to gambling (“13 local elected officials, found by ANI with integrity problems. A mayor ‘forgot’ to declare 70,000 euros gained from gambling” – Adevărul, 2023, July 24).

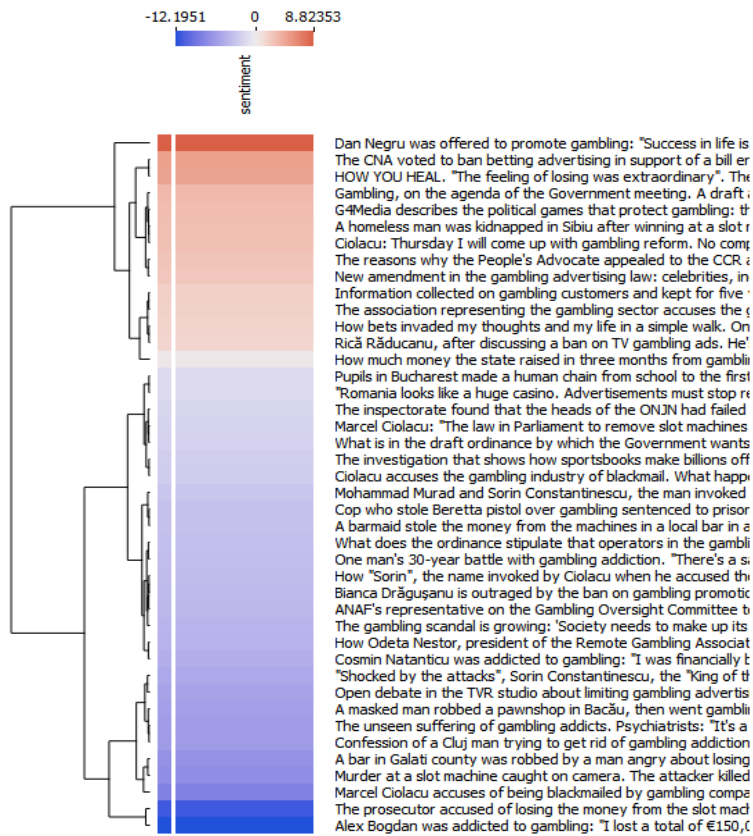


Figure 8. Sentiment analysis – polarity for *Libertatea*

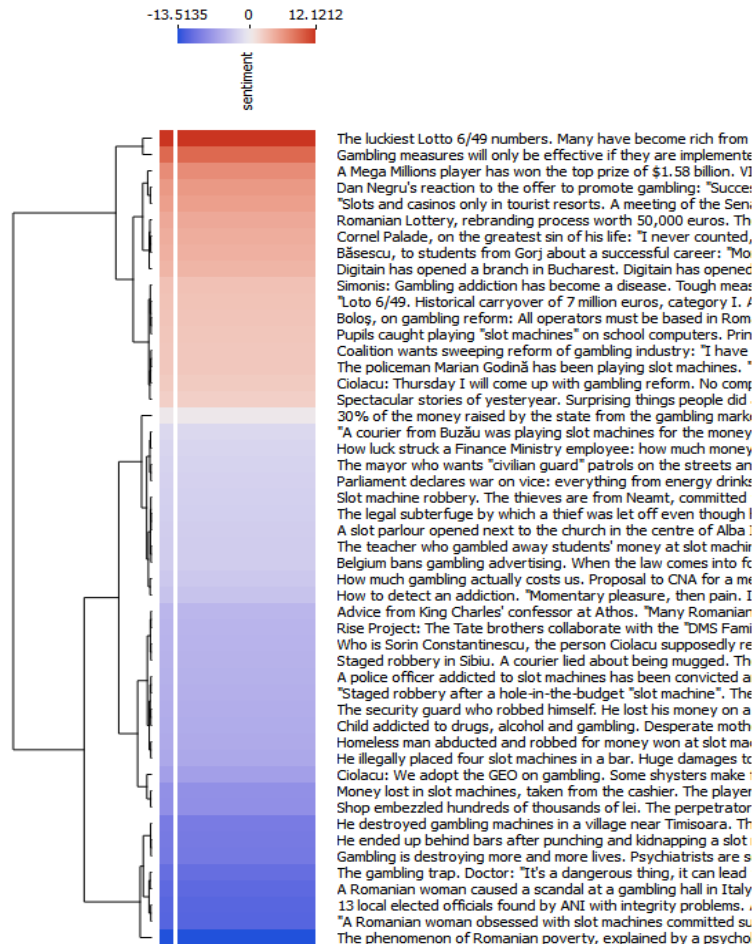


Figure 9. Sentiment analysis – polarity for *Adevărul*

As for the tabloid *Cancan*, sentiment continues to be predominantly negative (Figure 10), with several accounts of criminal activity (“Unbelievable! How a young woman from Bucharest managed to rob a gambling hall” – *Cancan*, 2023, February 15), along with suicide, and addiction (“The heartbreaking way Adelin ended his life because of gambling. He was only 16: “Now he’s an angel” – *Cancan*, 2023, May 25). On the more positive side, articles discuss gambling as a leisure activity (“He came to have fun in Bucharest, at the casino, but was "robbed" by a pickpocket. He lost 58,000 euros” – *Cancan*, 2023, May 25), a partnership between betting

companies and a football team (“NetBet, the new premium partner of CSO Voluntari!” – Cancan, 2023, September 15), and stories from celebrities about addiction recovery (“CRBL’s passion for gambling led him to lose his salary and later get tattooed. “I went home crying” – Cancan, 2023, November 11), or advertising opportunities.

Articles revealing negative scores sampled from the news outlet *Click* (Figure 11) display topics concerning criminality (“He stole 18,000 lei from the gambling hall where he worked. Why did he later call 112?” – Click, 2023 November 3), increases in taxes for the gambling industry (“Taxes on the gambling industry increase. New rules decided by the Government” – Click, 2023, October 6), and two cases of suicide due to financial losses (“A student from Râmnicu Vâlcea died after setting himself on fire in front of the high school. The unexpected reason why the young man resorted to this extreme gesture” – Click, 2023, May 23). On the more positive side, articles tend to mainly discuss financial gains due to gambling (“The strategy by which one man made a fortune at the slot machines. The method was about to bankrupt the city of Las Vegas” – Click, 2023, May 5).

A closer examination of the narratives presented in the sampled data results from a compiled timeline of the publication dates of all the articles under analysis. This bolsters the temporal and comparative investigation process, allowing for a more thorough contextualization of the findings (Figure 13). The parallel weekly-based chronology of the articles reveals several intensity points of the publications, allowing for the discovery of the major events that established the respective discourses. It is important to stress that articles from *Click* will be referred to support other variations of the chart caused by the other journals due to its consistent distribution of the articles throughout the year.



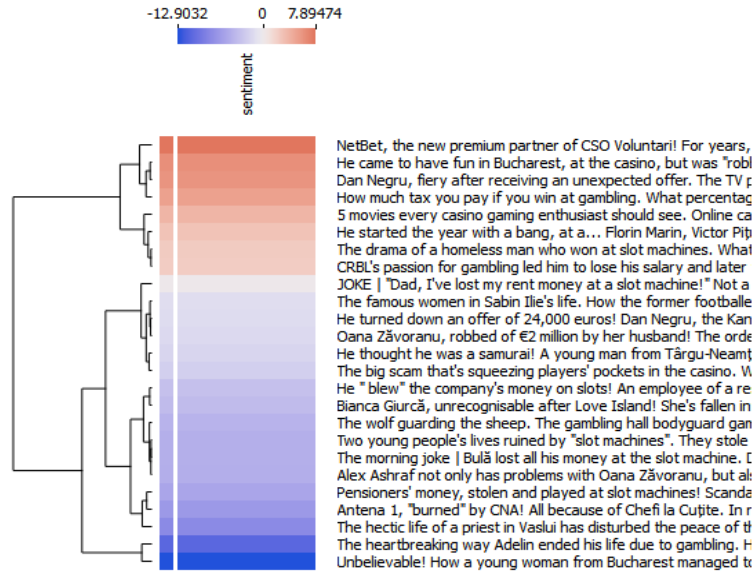


Figure 10. Sentiment analysis – polarity for *Cancan*

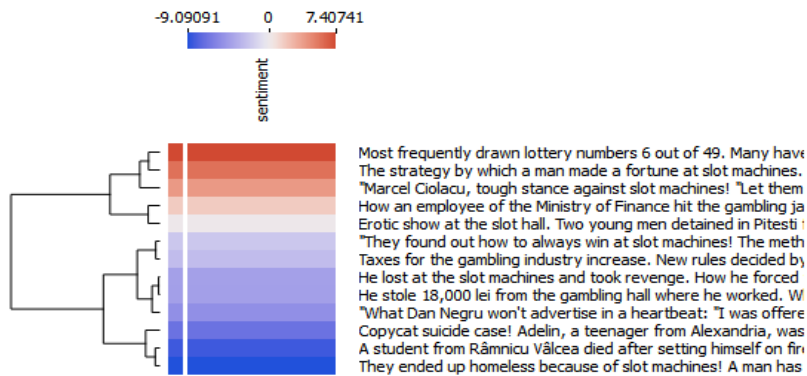


Figure 11. Sentiment analysis – Polarity for *Click*

Thus, the beginning of March (week 9) proved to be particularly productive in terms of news articles issued, peaks could be observed for *Adevărul*, *Libertatea*, and *Cancan*. Recurring articles on all three platforms (with *Click* supporting the argument) draw notable attention to Dan Negru, a famous Romanian TV presenter who turned down the offer to promote gambling and took to social media to deliver a life lesson about



personal merits gained through hard work. However, on *Cancan* an additional interest was shown for the sum of money he missed out on. The political and legal realms are targeted as well about gambling advertising, especially on *Adevărul* and *Libertatea*, including bills addressing the limitations of TV and outdoor ads, politicians advocating for them (e.g. Rareș Bogdan, Member of the European Parliament) and their amendments that allowed for measures considered inefficient, which stirred serious disapproval. Each of the publications equally directs attention to lawbreaking instances of people breaking into a pawn shop, stealing a company's funds, assaulting others, and lobbying in order to obtain money intended for gambling and slot machines.

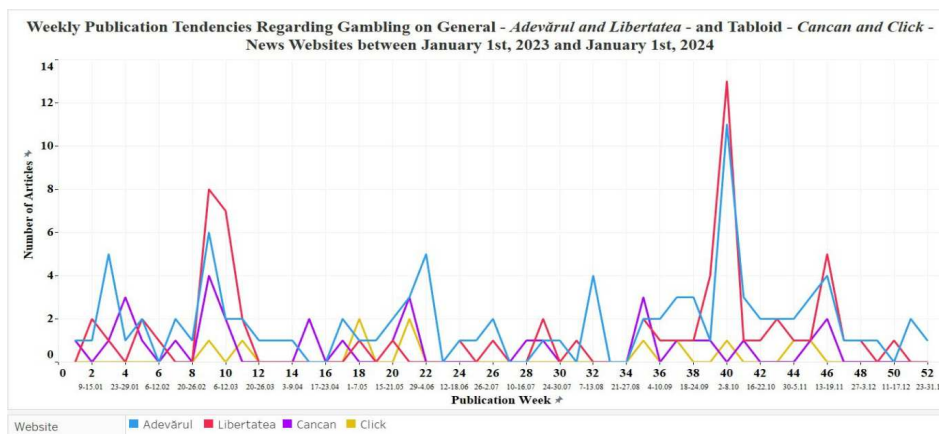


Figure 12. Weekly trends in gambling news coverage on *Adevărul*, *Libertatea*, *Cancan*, and *Click* websites (January 2023 to January 2024)

Nevertheless, the graph's peaks are reached by *Adevărul* and *Libertatea* between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of October. The general news websites concentrated on a gambling reform initiated by Marcel Ciolacu, the PM of Romania, the main figure mentioned in the articles, while the perspectives focus on policy drafting, economic aspects and legality. Subjects entail the imposition on gambling operators to have fiscal headquarters in Romania, emergency ordinance monitoring the legislation in the gambling sector and its advertising, and projects marking the removal of slots from localities, all of which are covered by both publications.

Slight upsurges occurred throughout the rest of the year as well. *Adevărul* and *Cancan* were notably active during the third and fourth weeks mainly due to events from the category of law violation – fights, embezzlement, escaping prison sentences, stealing money from a gambling hall in order to pursue gambling-as well as mentions of celebrities regarding gambling such as Marian Godină, a famous policeman, or Alex Ashraf, a Romanian businessman. *Adevărul* also exhibited a scarce boost in productivity in the 22<sup>nd</sup> interval of the year, distinctly directing attention to the dimension of gambling addiction. *Cancan* further showed an inevitable increase in publications between May 29th and June 4th, generated by the acknowledgment of “the gambler’s fallacy” and the experience of a German tourist robbed at a casino while the tragedy of a young boy ending his life because of gambling loss is a common point of interest for both *Cancan* and *Click* during that week. Last but not least, towards the end of the year, *Adevărul*, *Libertatea*, and *Cancan* displayed a rise in publication in November (week 46). These highlighted repeated records of the withdrawal of Sorin Constantinescu, declared “the King of casinos and slots”, from the A.U.R political party (Alliance for the Union of Romanians) only three days following his enrollment, as well as an allusion to his involvement in blackmailing the PM, along with businessman Mohammad Murad. Moreover, the “Crime and Punishment” theme encompassed indications of a courier and a postman using the money received for parcels, respectively, the pension money he was supposed to deliver, to gamble.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Regarding the main frames used in gambling news coverage, the results associated general news websites with “Policy prescription and evaluation” and “Crime and punishment” approaches, while the tabloids are mainly marked by “Crime and punishment” and “Public figures and celebrities” schemes. Their common frame becomes a connecting bridge across media.

Thus, with “Policy prescription and evaluation” as the main interest and “Crime and Punishment” and “Public figures and celebrities” as subsequent concerns of *Libertatea*, the nodes and edges of its network

highlight the interconnection of gambling with political and legal issues, along with the mentions of social impacts of it. In addition, *Adevărul* primarily suggests a comprehensive discussion on gambling protocols, risks and the resulting consequences, which align with the “Crime and punishment” and “Policy prescription and evaluation” frames the articles are predominantly linked to. It is equally observed that the co-occurrence network of *Cancan* introduces a shift in focus and choice of words in gambling discourse as well as a stress on money, sensationalism, and notorious individuals. Therefore, the results coordinate with the leading themes attributed to the analyzed news – “Crime and Punishment” and “Public figures and celebrities”. Government regulation and tragic consequences of gambling, completed by the entertaining quality of risk-taking, are chiefly associated with *Click*. Hence, this news website generally addresses “Crime and punishment,” “Health and safety,” and “Economic” aspects in terms of its related Media Frames Corpus categories.

Therefore, while the mainstream portals usually reveal legal, regulatory aspects of this approach, with enforcements, proposals and promulgations of law, the tabloids focus on articles connecting gambling to rather anecdotal, impressive or tragic accounts, an idea emerging as a reference point of the research.

In this respect, the study tends to align with and provide further insights into the prior findings from the qualitative content analyses of Australian and U.S. newspapers (Miller et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2016).

Similar to the Australian study (Miller et al., 2014), which focused on solutions to problem gambling and individual responsibility as opposed to broader societal factors and underlying causes, general news websites suggest a continuation of the trend by directing attention to the societal impacts, which resonates within *Adevărul*'s main target on the “Crime and punishment” perspective. The general news outlets reflect a propensity towards solving the issue, referring to growing crime rates and life-threatening behaviors, validating its nature as a public health issue (Miller et al., 2014) with negative implications on the individual (Browne et al., 2016). This is met with increased awareness, activism, and urge for regulations, the prevailing frames supporting or mirroring the information, and actions undertaken by Save the Children Romania (2023) and Declic (2023). This indeed complements the conclusion of Lee et al. (2016), which targets issues of legalization along with social ones

within the media coverage. Thus, the results also become a trace of hope and reaction to the previously cited researchers addressing the prevalence of problem gambling and gambling disorders among Romanian children and adolescents.

Moreover, incorporating the “Public figures and celebrities” perspective, a pivotal locus of tabloids as resulted from the analysis, typifies a prevalent pattern observed in diverse media environments, where narratives centered on human interest hold considerable sway. This parallels the conclusions drawn from the previous efforts of Save the Children Romania and Declic (2023). They employed public figures in fighting the overwhelming advertising for games of chance, exposing the impact of celebrity engagement in shaping the discourse surrounding gambling behaviors in the media, be it negative or positive. Thus, this adds to the suggestion of Lee et al. (2016), which echoes the role of newspapers in enhancing public comprehension yet shifting the responsibility towards the fame dimension, an addition to the existing literature.

The findings from the co-occurrence networks offer a further understanding of how gambling topics are presented and discussed in media reporting, supporting the distribution of predominant frames. They also amount to their respective priorities regarding tone and overall discourse. General news websites treat the subject matter within its diverse forms and manifestations, relating the harms and dangers to the political, socio-economic, and legal aspects and language, the codification providing hints at the proposal of prohibiting gambling dens within a distance of 300 meters from schools and the limitations regarding TV gambling ads (Salvați Copiii – Save the Children Romania, 2023). Meanwhile, the tabloids tend to reduce the scope of the issue, focusing on individual experiences and celebrity involvement rather than broader societal implications, repeatedly operating with names from the public stage, sensationalism, and money-based vocabulary. The latter also publishes frequent jokes to exploit their rather casual style. Thus, it comes down to the predominant “Crime and punishment” viewpoint in building the discourse around gambling, with *Adevărul* and *Libertatea* using policies as devices in synthesizing it and *Click* and *Cancan* availing of the public figures and entertainment-driven nuances, an essential breakthrough regarding the Romanian media.

Sentiment analysis provides deeper insights into the media portrayal of gambling, revealing the topics covered and how they are presented. Findings throughout all the sampled data point towards an increased portrayal of negative topics, with *Click* scoring the highest in average sentiment scores. While all news sites have addressed financial adversity, criminal activity, and addiction. *Adevărul*, *Cancan* and *Click* have each covered a case of suicide, while *Libertatea* has not. The general news sites, *Libertatea* and *Adevărul* have discussed gambling addiction's implications for the individuals' mental health, while such topics have not been found in the data sample from the tabloid outlets, naturally pointing towards a more sensationalist approach in their news coverage. In addition, the tabloid outlets have not attributed a strong focus on the regulation of gambling activities as often as the case for the general news outlets. While all the other news outlets have covered narratives of addiction recovery, this has not been the case for *Click*, where the coverage is mainly focused on financial gains due to gambling.

Romanian news outlets' distinct narratives on gambling reveal significant insights. *Libertatea* and *Adevărul* illustrate events covering political and legal issues, regulatory initiatives, and societal impacts, becoming a nexus of the broader socio-economic and legislative contexts of gambling, which points towards the frames to which they were attributed. Conversely, *Click* and *Cancan* emphasize the strong emotion-provoking affairs and celebrity involvement, often shaping gambling through individual experiences and dramatic personal accounts. This particularly aligns with the literature on media sensationalism and its role in shaping public perceptions (Miller & Thomas, 2017).

The findings again underscore how different media narratives can influence public discourse and perception. General news outlets' emphasis on governmental and social aspects may contribute to a more informed public understanding, whereas tabloids' approach could perpetuate negative stereotypes and stigmatize gamblers, as discussed by Wöhr and Wuketich (2021).

These portrayals of gambling reflect deeper socio-political tensions between control and unpredictability in a world increasingly driven by uncertainty. Mainstream media outlets like *Adevărul* and *Libertatea* focus on legal and regulatory aspects, presenting gambling as a societal issue tied

to crime, public health, and the need for stricter regulation. This aligns with global trends, where gambling is seen as a public health crisis requiring political action, reflecting broader societal concerns about crime, addiction, and the mental health impacts of gambling (Miller et al., 2014).

Conversely, tabloids such as *Click* and *Cancan* emphasize sensationalism, celebrity involvement, and individual experiences, framing gambling as a thrilling escape or personal drama. This approach highlights the appeal of risk and emotional highs while often neglecting the broader structural causes of gambling issues.

The contrast between the two types of media mirrors societal divisions: mainstream outlets aim to foster informed public debate on regulation, while tabloids perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce gambling's appeal to adventure and unpredictability.

Overall, the given accounts of the games of chance demonstrate the need for continued scrutiny of media portrayals. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical findings, the answers to the third research question contribute to understanding the role of media in guiding public perceptions and informing future policy-making and public discourse on gambling.

Further research directions could emphasize the relevance of video content, as platforms such as TikTok continually grow and gambling operators use them for advertising purposes. Furthermore, research can more directly tackle public opinion by conducting surveys further to grasp public attitudes towards gambling on social media.

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