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EDITORIAL

This is the 16th issue, no. 2 of *Styles of Communication*, the international journal which is published annually by the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies (University of Bucharest, Romania) in cooperation with the Committee for Philology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Wrocław Branch, Poland. From 2009 to 2014, *Styles of Communication* was published by the “Danubius” University of Galați, Romania.

The main purpose of *Styles of Communication* is to show the unity existing within global diversity. As communication implies, besides the transfer of information to others and the decoding of the others’ messages, the production of meaning within (non)verbal texts/objects is closely connected to interculturality, creativity and innovation and it needs a refining of styles in order to avoid misunderstandings.

This issue is a plea for interdisciplinarity as its aim is to include different perspectives on communication, coming from different fields, such as advertising, public relations, or journalism.

Styles of Communication is indexed by ERIH PLUS, Index Copernicus, DOAJ, Genamics Journal Seek, EBSCOhost databases, and it is recommended by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

This issue is focused on various approaches to communication studies.

We would like to see this journal as an ongoing project in which future issues may contribute to the exchange of research ideas representing broad communication -oriented approaches.

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ROLAND-MIHAI ÎMPUȘCATU¹

TRANSFORMATIONAL OR INFORMATIONAL HOLIDAYS? AN ANALYSIS OF THE MESSAGE STRATEGIES FOR TECHNOLOGY BRANDS IN ROMANIA

Abstract. In today's digital landscape, social media platforms, particularly Facebook, play a pivotal role in shaping consumer-brand interactions, especially in high-interest sectors such as the smartphone market in Romania. This study investigates which message strategies are associated with higher levels of user engagement on the Facebook pages of two leading smartphone brands, Samsung and Xiaomi. The research explores the dynamics between messaging strategies (informational and transformational) and user engagement, providing insights into the digital advertising strategies adopted by these brands during the crucial holiday shopping season. The findings suggest that the informational dimension, notably ration message strategy, generated different types of engagement. In particular, ration led to higher levels of sharing than ego. Furthermore, regarding reactions, ration resulted in greater engagement than ego, routine and sensory. This research contributes to understanding digital consumer engagement and provides valuable insights for marketers seeking to optimize social media strategies in the competitive smartphone market.

Keywords: digital engagement, digital persuasion, Facebook, like, comment, share

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1. Introduction

The evolution of digital platforms has opened new communication opportunities for companies, and digital communication strategies have become a pillar in brand communication (Anton, 2020, p. 76). In Romania, despite the TikTok app's rapid growth, Facebook remains the main social media platform (Statista, 2024a). Due to its widespread adoption, Facebook is also a brand promotion tool, while global digital advertising budgets have surpassed traditional promotion budgets (Statista, 2024b). The most prosperous season for the advertising industry is Christmas. In Romania, local brands actively launch communication campaigns specific to the holiday period (IQads, 2021, 2022, 2023). According to a study, during the holiday season, 28% of the Romanians' budget is used for Christmas gifts, and 14% of people want to receive gadget gifts (e.g., smartphones) (Reveal Marketing Research, 2023).

With a considerable share of Romanians' spending on Christmas presents, including a preference for gadgets such as smartphones, understanding the dynamics of consumer engagement on social media is crucial for brands such as Samsung and Xiaomi, which have a significant share of the Romanian smartphone market. In terms of the gadget market in Romania, Samsung occupies 44.44% of the smartphone market, Apple 24.03%, and Xiaomi 8.5% (Statcounter, 2024), a ranking that is consistent with the global mobile phone market (Counterpoint, 2024). Romanians buy 3 million smartphones annually (Barza, 2023).

Starting from Kim & Yang's (2017) message strategies (informational versus transformational), this study explores the complex relationship between these strategies and user engagement on Samsung and Xiaomi's Facebook pages. By studying 67 posts from both brands in December 2023, this research seeks to explore how these different messaging strategies correlate with user engagement on a platform that remains a dominant force in the Romanian social media landscape.

Social media engagement, characterized by likes, shares, and comments, plays a crucial role in determining the visibility and success of brand communication on platforms such as Facebook (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, pp. 63-64), which prioritizes interactivity in its algorithms (Macready, 2024). This study examines the effectiveness of informational and

transformational message dimensions in engaging users. It investigates the broader implications of such engagement for brand promotion and audience reach in the digital sphere. As brands attempt to operate in a competitive and dynamic business environment, understanding how digital engagement is essential to creating communication strategies that appeal to audiences, enhance brand visibility, and eventually contribute to business growth in the digital realm.

2. Companies, social media, and engagement

Consumer engagement has become particularly important in today's digital environment, where everyone can communicate about anything at any time (Liu et al., 2018, p. 2). The advancement of technology has made customer engagement a prevalent practice specific to the online environment (Wirtz et al., 2013, p. 224). Engagement is a significant factor in a brand's success on social media. It is used both as an element of interaction between the brand and the audience (Kabadayi & Price, 2014, p. 203) and as an asset that can directly grow the business.

A brand with a high level of engagement becomes more attractive to other users who are likely to interact with the content, increasing the brand's awareness potential (Macready, 2024). Online engagement is also seen as a co-creation between a brand and its users. According to Lusch and Vargo (2006, pp. 283-284), customer co-creation means involving the customer in creating the product offering.

Collaboration between the brand and its consumers can lead to the beneficial effects of co-creation, where the brand and its customers work together to add value to the products/company, such as improving existing services, creating content, or generating new and innovative perspectives, technology can facilitate this process through convenient accessibility and live interaction (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 64). Through their activities, users who interact via features such as "like" or "comment" contribute in one way or another to the company's innovation and thereby create value for the company (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 58).

The benefits of engagement in social media are linked to positive attitudes towards the brand and increased purchase intent (Zhang et al.,

2018, p. 57). Although there may be minor differences in views, marketing researchers agree that consumer engagement is a multifaceted construct encompassing various dimensions and motivations for consumer interaction with brands and communities (Baldus et al., 2015, p. 979). Consumer engagement has also been linked to activities that can significantly impact brand perception and value (Schivinski et al., 2016, p. 74), contributing to its online reputation, while co-creation in the digital environment was found to increase purchase intentions for smartphones (Rao et al., 2021, p. 317).

Since 2016, Facebook's strategy has been to focus on *interactivity*. The algorithm supports posts that encourage interaction, such as those popular in a user's circle of friends (Oremus et al., 2021).

Many researchers have offered definitions of engagement as an essential component of the new communication environments. According to Santos et al. (2022, p. 2), consumer brand engagement refers to the interaction of brand communities in social media, where the community is involved with the brand, its products, the company, and other customers. Baldus et al. (2015, p. 979) conceptualize engagement in terms of consumer activity as the compelling, intrinsic motivation to continue interacting with an online brand community.

Each engagement action weighs differently in Facebook's algorithm and thus can decide whether a post can appear on a consumer's screen (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 441).

In this context, understanding how engagement works is essential for a company's growth in the digital landscape.

3. Engagement features

Social media platforms use ranking algorithms to give higher visibility to content with higher engagement (e.g., more comments) (Gagliardi, 2024). Engagement is also particularly significant in increasing a post's popularity. Factors such as the number of reactions (e.g., likes), comments, or shares can influence whether a post is of value to other users and whether it deserves to be promoted higher by the algorithm (Macready, 2024).

One of the largest companies allowing the use of different forms of engagement is Facebook. As the most used social media platform in Romania, with an adoption rate of 88.7% (Statista, 2024c), Facebook allows companies to create their brand page where content can be posted to engage with the community (Gummerus et al., 2012, pp. 857-858). The algorithm considers various forms of engagement with Facebook posts or pages when deciding whether or not a post is worth showing to a user (Facebook, 2024). In turn, users can interact with posts, and these activities create stronger connections in brand-consumer relationships (Wallace et al., 2012, p. 140).

Yet, Facebook's algorithm has been transformed over time and has been associated with significant changes in the way the platform interacts with users (Oremus et al., 2021). Engagement, however, has continued to be a key pillar that may determine the success of a post and of the Facebook page as a whole, resulting in business growth in the online environment (Lipsman et al., 2012; Wiener, 2021).

Like, share, or comment activity on social media for posts created and shared by brands is an essential factor to consider when developing a company's social media strategy (Kabadayi & Price, 2014, p. 218). When a brand prioritizes acquiring engaged communities, it can also gain significant exposure within its network (Lipsman et al., 2012, p. 40).

Consumer engagement is essential in understanding a company's social media performance. At the same time, it serves a number of functions that directly or indirectly affect a company's online performance. A brand's Facebook engagement rate has a direct impact on the success of a post shared by the company by increasing the likelihood of its spread (Pletikosa & Michahelles, 2011, p. 168), but also includes several valuable characteristics with indirect value, such as brand loyalty (Roberts & Alpert, 2010, p. 204). Similarly, user engagement can be instrumental in creating stronger emotional connections that generate higher levels of trust between consumers and companies (Sashi, 2012, p. 268).

Consumer behavior in social networks is based on three layers: low, medium, and high (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 442). Each level of engagement is associated with behavior defined as consumption, contribution and creation (Muntinga et al., 2011, p.16). The type of behavior users engage

in online is related to the cognitive effort they spend performing an action. For example, a creative process (e.g., writing) is more cognitively demanding than a passive process, such as consuming online content (e.g., reading) (Piolat et al., 2005, pp. 305-306).

The COBRA typology (Muntinga et al., 2011, pp. 15-18) implies multiple actions specific to a given type of behavior. Content consumption is associated with low user engagement and involves passive activities. According to Muntinga et al. (2011, p.16), these could be watching brand-related videos, listening to brand-related audio, viewing brand-related images, reading product reviews, downloading branded widgets, and reading comments on brand profiles on social networking sites. Contributing is associated with a higher level of engagement, as it involves user participation in the following forms: rating products and brands, participating in brand conversations, commenting on brand-related weblogs, video, audio, images, etc. (Muntinga et al., 2011, p. 16). Finally, content creation is the highest form of engagement, as it involves increased cognitive effort, such as publishing a brand-related weblog; uploading a brand-related video, audio, images, or pictures; writing brand-related articles; writing product reviews; or creating brand-related content (Muntinga et al., 2011, p.16)

In an analysis of Facebook behavior, Kim and Yang (2017) associate specific behaviors with user actions on the platform according to the level of engagement. Like is considered the action with the lowest engagement rank from the user, as it requires a single click. At the same time, commenting and sharing require additional actions specific to higher cognitive effort, while sharing may require more cognitive effort because it involves self-representation.

Liking

Social media brand pages can act as a tool for interaction between customers and brands, offering the possibility to communicate through different types of functions such as “like,” “comment,” and “share” (Kujur & Singh, 2017, p. 17). Users of the Facebook platform can express their preference for certain types of brands through the “like” function.

Through the “like” button, liking a brand allows individuals to directly affirm their interest in a particular type of content or brand. This interest may be rooted in factors such as “subscribing” to a brand’s mode of communication or self-expression (Lipsman et al., 2012, p. 43).

The engagement tools provided by Facebook represent a dialogical mode of communication between the user and the brand that can strengthen the relationship. However, each engagement action has a different implication in the user-brand-audience relationship and the algorithm. Facebook has made updates that allow users to communicate affection and messages that convey empathy with a simple click (Heath, 2016). As of 2016, the iconic “like” button is accompanied by five other types of emoji that express multiple types of reactions: “love,” “haha,” “wow,” “sad,” and “angry” (Kokalitcheva, 2016).

Commenting

The average person posts about 5 comments monthly on Facebook (Datareportal, 2023). Comments provide both a technical and interactive role between brands and consumers or between consumers of the brand itself. Engagement through comments has become an established practice in digital marketing campaigns for the advantage it offers on the algorithm since comments are more valued than likes in terms of engagement (Adobe, 2023).

With the development of Web 2.0 technologies that have enabled dialogic communication between brands and users, the importance of user comments in the online experience has become a research focus (Houston et al., 2011, p. 80). A prominent factor in the research is the impact of comments on brand perception due to the impersonalization of people and their tendency to conform to in-group standards, in this instance, comments, at a perceptive, affective, and behavioral level. Thus, this theory indicates the power of comments on a brand, where communication plays a role in forming group norms and influencing group behavior and perception (Hogg & Reid, 2006, p. 23).

Sharing

On average, Facebook users share 4.75 billion items daily (Fu et al., 2017, p. 23). There can be many reasons why users share content, but several features are constant in the literature (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Tennie et al., 2010; Tierney, 2010; Collins, 2015): (1) providing valuable or entertaining content to others, (2) defining ourselves to others, (3) self-promotion, (4) being about other consumers, (5) self-fulfillment, (6) promoting causes and brands. All these situations have in common the sharing of content, which, in one way or another, implies an association between the user and the content. Once shared, the content is spread on the user's page or channel, creating a link between the post and the user. Van Dijck (2013, pp. 211-212) notes that social media users take a strategic approach to self-presentation. When they present content on Facebook, they are attentive to the audience's evaluation (Rui & Stefanone, 2013, p. 1299).

4. Message dimensions and strategies

Message dimensions are divided into two categories based on rational and emotional components: informational and transformational (Wells, 1980, apud Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 443)

The informational dimension addresses people's cognition, while the transformational dimension is linked to their emotional nature. According to Puto & Wells (1984, apud Cadet et al., 2017, p. 120), for an ad to be considered transformational, it must meet two criteria: (1) it must make the experience of using the product more exciting and enjoyable than it would be through an objective description of the product alone, and (2) the experience of the advertisement must be closely related to the experience of using the brand/product so that users associate the brand with the experience created by the advertisement. The informational dimension is observed in an advertisement when (1) factual information about the product is presented, (2) the advertisement presents information that is important to consumers, and (3) it provides data about customers that consumers accept as verifiable (Puto & Wells, 1984, apud Cadet et al., 2017, p. 120).

Cadet et al. (2017, p. 119) observe the major difference between the two dimensions. They suggest that the emotional ad format is driven by positive and negative feelings, resulting in a level of credibility, while the rational ad format is driven by the level of credibility, followed by positive and negative feelings.

This study includes the message strategies and dimensions addressed by Kim and Yang (2017) and includes the three message strategies for each dimension, as observed in Table 1. For the informational dimension, ration explains the user's need to access information about the product, service, or organization, including product features (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 43), for example, price, battery life, or storage. Product features are the most influential factor in persuading users to buy a smartphone (Ling et al., 2007, p.161; Rahman & Sultana, 2022, p.10). Acute needs refer to the immediate need to satisfy a need and is usually related to urgent situations, while routine refers to the messages that are not explicitly emphasised by an effective strategy but which address people's repetitive activities (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 43)

The transformational dimension also includes three strategies. Ego appeals to the user's ego and is related to the user's self-perception. Social is based on people's desire for social recognition. The sensory dimension appeals to the person's senses: touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste, and provides information that appeals to those senses (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 43)

Given the importance of Facebook engagement for a brand's business growth and the significance of message strategies, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the most used message strategy for Samsung and Xiaomi brands during the holiday season?

RQ2: What message strategy generates the best engagement for Samsung and Xiaomi brands?

RQ3: How were the Christmas messages present in the posts of the two brands?

5. Method

This study focused on a content analysis of Facebook posts by two technology companies: Samsung and Xiaomi. The purpose of the analysis was to observe the differences between two brands that have a different positioning and approach in the Romanian market. Since Apple does not have a Facebook page, it was removed from the analysis and replaced with the 3rd place, Xiaomi.

All posts from 1-31 December, 2023 ($N = 67$) on the Samsung and Xiaomi Romanian Facebook pages were analyzed. The posts were extracted using CrowdTangle software that provides reports with tracking metrics of engagement on the post across Facebook. One-way ANOVA with Post-Hoc Tukey test was used for statistical analysis.

Table 1

Coding scheme, adapted from Kim & Yang (2017)

Message Strategy	
Ration (informational)	Message assuming an audience that makes decisions based on rational considerations; solutions to problems are provided; highlighting distinguishing features or competitive edges. E.g., "Main camera has 50MP and it pairs with the macro camera of 2MP" (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 9, 2023).
Acute needs (informational)	When faced with a constrained timeframe to make a decision, swift action is needed. E.g., "Now it's the chance to win your phone" (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 20, 2023).
Routine (informational)	Message making a reference to conversion behavior that does not require thoughtful consideration. Standard tactics may include message exaggeration and brand corporate recognition. E.g., "Meet the new Galaxy phones" (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 1, 2023).
Ego (transformational)	A message focusing on vanity and self realization; satisfying emotional needs related to one's self. E.g., "Make epic moments with the camera that transforms your pictures into art pieces" (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 15, 2023).

Social (transformational)	Message focusing on the value of others' perceptions (opinions, judgments); mentioning social interactions and contexts; members of the target being marked as socially significant to others. E.g., "The new Xiaomi Pro keeps you connected with your dear ones (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 1, 2023)".
Sensory (transformational)	Message appealing to the human's senses; focused on sensory satisfaction. E.g., "Want to see a Christmas movie while drinking hot chocolate? (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 31, 2023)".

The specific coding for each post was divided into the three elements of engagement: reactions, comments, and shares (see Table 2).

Table 2

Interactions with Samsung and Xiaomi Facebook Pages

Brands	Total Posts	Total Interactions	Reactions	Comments	Shares
Samsung	30	3231	2860	277	94
Xiaomi	37	36206	30302	4717	1187

As observed in Table 2, Xiaomi ($n = 37$) had more posts than Samsung ($N = 30$) which triggered more reactions, comments, and shares.

6. Results

6.1. Message type and engagement

We examined the effectiveness of different messaging strategies used by Samsung and Xiaomi on their Facebook pages, categorized into informational (ration, acute needs, routine) and transformational (ego, social, sensory) dimensions in terms of engagement. Our analysis focuses on the differences between these strategies and user engagement metrics such as comments, shares, and reactions.

RQ 1 examined which message strategy is the most used for Samsung and Xiaomi.

The analysis revealed that the most frequently used message strategy is ration (informational) for both Samsung (53,3%, $N = 16$) and Xiaomi (37,8%, $N = 14$). In the case of Samsung, the following two strategies used are exclusively in the informational dimension with routine (20%, $N = 6$) and acute needs (13,3%, $N = 4$), which are followed by social (6.6%, $N = 2$), ego (3.3%, $N = 1$), and sensory (3.3%, $n = 1$). The following two strategies Xiaomi used are in the transformational dimension with social (32,43%, $N = 12$) and ego (10,8%, $N = 4$). These are followed by acute needs (8.1%, $N = 3$), routine (5.4%, $N = 2$), and sensory (8.1%, $N = 2$).

The results show that Samsung's holiday communication strategy is mostly informational, while Xiaomi's strategy combines both.

RQ 2 asked what message strategy drives the best engagement for Samsung and Xiaomi brands.

To answer this question, we performed One-Way ANOVA with Post-Hoc tests.

Liking

For Xiaomi, ration displayed a significant difference in how message strategies generated engagement. Ration ($M = 794$, $SD = 464.90$) led to more reactions than routine ($M = 163.14$, $SD = 414.70$), $p < 0.05$, ego ($M = 105.64$, $SD = 232.39$), $p < 0.01$, and sensory ($M = 11.5$, $SD = 284.93$), $p < 0.01$. No significant results were found between the other types of message strategies: acute needs ($M = 345.64$, $SD = 925.02$), and social ($M = 644.50$, $SD = 457.96$).

The One-Way ANOVA showed no significant effect of content type on the reactions for Samsung, $F(5, 23) = 1.42$, $p = 0.2217$. This finding suggests that users' reactions to posts did not depend on whether the post was informational or transformational. Therefore, while users may not be more likely to interact with a post of a particular content type, other factors not analyzed here may influence their engagement. On the informational dimension, ration ($M = 91.25$, $SD = 192.72$) did not lead to more reactions than acute needs ($M = 12.37$, $SD = 36.55$) or routine ($M = 10.43$, $SD = 14.37$). There were also no significant differences between the message strategies used in the transformational dimension,

ego ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 14.75$), social ($M = 54.12$, $SD = 210.70$), sensory ($M = 6.87$, $SD = 27.50$), $F(5, 23) = 1.42$, $p = 0.2217$.

Commentting

The analysis of Samsung Facebook posts showed that on the informational dimension, ration ($M = 6.31$, $SD = 4.96$) did not generate significantly more comments than acute needs ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 14.17$) or routine ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 1.79$). There were also no significant differences between the message strategies used in the transformational dimension, ego ($M = 0.62$, $SD = 2.50$), social ($M = 0.93$, $SD = 2.56$), and sensory ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 17.00$), $F(5, 23) = 0.96$, $p = 0.4444$. These results showed that the type of content, whether informational or transformational, does not significantly influence the number of comments the posts receive.

The results of the analysis of Xiaomi's Facebook posts showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the number of comments between these categories. The three types attributed to both informational and transformational dimensions did not lead to a significant number of comments with ration ($M = 27.21$, $SD = 23.92$), acute needs ($M = 241.50$, $SD = 873.63$), routine ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 6.02$), ego ($M = 36.14$, $SD = 127.85$), social ($M = 26.71$, $SD = 26.64$), sensory ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 9.47$), $F(5, 25) = 90$, $p = 0.4808$. The results showed that regardless of the type of content, it did not affect the audience to post comments. For Xiaomi, acute needs showed a high mean for comments compared to other message strategies, but the high standard deviation suggests this may be due to anomalies, $p > 0.05$.

Although the results did not display significant results, we can see a difference in mean values. For each post category, Xiaomi had a higher average number of comments than Samsung. In the case of Xiaomi, a single post generated a high number of comments ($N = 3276$). The post is a giveaway involving an acute needs message strategy for holidays. It encourages people to leave comments on the post quickly to enter a contest for winning a mobile phone: "The holidays are magical with a Redmi Note 12 Pro 5G in hand, and now's your chance to win it! Enter the giveaway and be renewed with a prize from Xiaomi. All you have to

do is: Tell us in the comments: What Holiday moment would you immortalize if you won a Redmi Note 12 Pro 5G?" (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 12, 2023).

Sharing

The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between content types for Samsung, $F(5, 23) = 2.50, p < 0.05$. This suggests that certain types of content on the Samsung Facebook page were more likely to be shared than others. Ration (informational) had the highest mean of shares ($M = 2.62, SD = 1.40$), $F(2.50), p < 0.05$, suggesting that the ration dimension might be particularly effective in generating shares. Among the six types, ration and ego ($M = 0.18, SD = 0.75$) seemed to differ in how often they are shared, with ration content being shared more often than ego ($p = 0.02$). There were no significant results found between the other types of message strategies: acute needs ($M = 0.75, SD = 2.23$), routine ($M = 0.75, SD = 1.06$), social ($M = 1.00, SD = 3.74$), and sensory ($M = 0.56, SD = 2.25$).

For Xiaomi the ANOVA results did not reveal a significant difference in shares between the message strategies with ration ($M = 7.28, SD = 4.84$), acute needs ($M = 63.85, SD = 230.64$), routine ($M = 1.21, SD = 3.14$), ego ($M = 5.42, SD = 16.79$), social ($M = 6.00, SD = 5.90$), sensory ($M = 1.00, SD = 2.54$), $F(5, 25) = 0.94, p = 0.4592$. Therefore, it can be inferred that the type of content did not significantly affect how often posts were shared on Xiaomi's Facebook page.

The results of One-Way Anova with Post-Hoc test showed that for Samsung, the informational dimension appears to be the most effective in generating shares. At the same time, the analysis suggests no significant difference between the two strategies for comments and reactions. For Xiaomi, the informational dimension significantly drove more reactions, indicating that it is highly effective. Another messaging strategy, acute needs (informational), showed high means for both comments and shares, but these appeared to be influenced by outliers, and there was no statistical significance to establish.

The research suggests that informational strategies, particularly ration, could be beneficial for both brands in engaging their audiences. However, it is also important to consider the variability and presence of outliers.

6.2. Christmas message in online posts of technology brands

Samsung and Xiaomi had integrated ration in their communication by linking across the holiday context in posts such: “Discover the joy of capturing epic Christmas moments with a 50MP camera” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 16, 2023), or “Enjoy the immersive Christmas experience of a 6.74-inch display.” (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 12, 2023). Although some posts had keywords referring to Christmas such as “Carols”, “Santa Claus” or “Holiday cheer” they contain mainly rational messages that present information about the product (E.g., more prominent display, better camera).

The posts that included ration focused on messages describing the technological capabilities of the phones, such as battery life, screen response time (0.03ms), or refresh rate (240Hz). Although the messages were aimed at a holiday context, such as “Light up the holiday magic with perfect photos on the new long exposure Samsung camera” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 21, 2023), they were only used as introductory messages to convey factual product information. Samsung’s second day of Christmas’ post received 58 reactions and addressed a rational messaging strategy: “Longer exposure time ensures the image quality of your photos. Learn quick and easy tips from the Holiday Picks&Tricks series,” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 26, 2023). This message begins with a rational message that references a mobile camera benefit, and then contextualizes the post with keywords that reference the holidays, such as “Holiday Picks & Tricks.”

The social strategy was also linked to increasing smartphone buying behavior (Rai et al., 2022, p. 19). In Xiaomi’s case, the social strategy focuses entirely on messaging that addresses Christmas, despite ration being the most used strategy in December’s posts. With keywords such as “gifts,” “light and joy,” or “magic” that are integrated into the context of friendship or family, Xiaomi has a communication focused

entirely on the holidays and the related context. The message that got the most interactions ($N = 1985$), for to the social category is the Christmas greeting: “We wish you a Merry Christmas full of light and joy with your family! Don’t forget that Xiaomi technologies bring you a touch of magic every day, so you and your loved ones can have a wonderful holiday!” (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 25, 2023). The post got 82 comments, the highest number in the social category, as well as 23 shares and 1880 reactions, a sign that the community appreciated Christmas messages. Although it implies a mention of Xiaomi technology, it was presented by integrating it in a family context, where the brand had a social character, being an enabler for joy with loved ones. Social interactions during holidays, such as being together with family as mentioned in the Facebook posts, had also been found to contribute significantly to overall well-being (Kasser & Sheldon, 2002, p. 323).

It is also important to note that Samsung did not have a Christmas wish post dedicated to its users in December.

Samsung’s communication does not feature Christmas-related themes prominently. Although each message strategy within the informational or transformational dimensions included at least one reference to Christmas, these references were often indirect. They mention “holiday charm” or incorporate winter elements in broader contexts. For instance, examples include posts like: “Winter is here, cover my phone with something” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 8, 2023) or “Light up the magic of the holidays with Galaxy” (Samsung Romania Facebook post, December 14, 2023).

7. Discussion

The study suggests that the content focusing on the ration message strategy generated more engagement in terms of shares compared to ego message strategies and more reactions compared to messages focused on routine, ego, and sensory content. This may suggest that providing information (ration) may appeal more to an audience. The ration strategy includes information about price, phone battery, or storage related to the factors that drive smartphone purchases (Bali et al., 2023, p. 4).

Ration (informational dimension) was the most used message strategy by both companies, a result which is in line with other studies (Ashley & Tuten, 2015, p. 15), underlining that brands primarily use functional appeals in their content. The use of the rational strategy in communication during the holiday season may contrast with the popular opinion in the advertising field, which is that brands communicate mostly emotionally during this period (Lundberg, 2017; Lepitak, 2023). The informational dimension was also found to be the only one generating engagement in the form of shares and reactions. In contrast, the transformational dimension produced no significantly statistical results for any type of engagement.

Looking at the shares metric, the results revealed a significant difference between content types, suggesting that ration (informational) is more likely to be shared than other types of engagement. This is also consistent with other studies (Kim & Yang, 2017, p.446), which showed that ration message strategies were positive predictors of share. Users were more likely to share informational messages (Saxton & Waters, 2014, pp. 290-291). Also, product information strategies specific to the informational dimension were linked to analytical cognition, which refers to the logical processing of ad content (Chaudhuri & Buck, 1995, pp. 424-425).

The research suggests that user interactions varied according to the type of content being distributed. In particular, there were noticeable differences in the effectiveness of different strategies, exemplified by the increased engagement observed in response to tactics such as rationing. Conversely, a notable finding was that the effect of content type on audience response failed to reach statistical significance in some instances. This observation highlights a consistent and uniform audience response across different messaging strategies, regardless of content variation. Such nuanced insights reveal the dynamic interplay between content composition and user engagement in digital communication contexts.

The analysis shows that the type of content, whether informational or transformational, had no significant effect on the number of comments a post receives.

The study's findings indicate that marketers should prioritize informational strategies. Even if brands tailor their communication

approaches for the holiday season with messages such as “Discover the magic of holidays with the Xiaomi phone with triple 50MP camera” (Xiaomi Romania Facebook post, December 4, 2023), it is essential to incorporate factual references to the product to enhance consumer engagement.

8. Conclusions

This research contributes to understanding digital consumer engagement by differentiating between the effectiveness of informational and transformational message strategies in social media marketing during the Romanian holidays. It highlights the importance of engaging with different types of content.

This study underscores a nuanced relationship between messaging strategies and user engagement on social media. This complexity illustrates the challenge of predicting social media engagement. It highlights the importance of a nuanced, multifaceted approach to content strategy that should consider the diverse preferences and behaviors of audiences. By recognizing that different strategies can yield different engaging results depending on the brand and context, marketers can better navigate the complexities of digital engagement.

The research on informational and transformational message strategies in the context of the Romanian holiday season has several limitations. First, the sample size of 67 posts from only two brands, Samsung and Xiaomi, over a month (December) limits the generalization of the findings. This narrow sample may not capture broader trends or seasonal variations in consumer engagement. Secondly, the study relies on using Facebook as the single platform for analysis, which may have overlooked engagement behavior on other major social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok. Understanding how informational and transformational message strategies perform across these platforms could provide a more comprehensive view of digital advertising effectiveness.

Additionally, incorporating more brands from different industries could reveal whether the effectiveness of informational versus transformational strategies is industry-specific or broadly applicable. Expanding the research beyond the holiday season might also reveal whether these strategies are

specific to the holiday context or generally compelling throughout the year. Finally, relying on quantitative metrics such as likes, shares, and comments does not fully capture the qualitative aspects of user engagement and sentiment, which could provide deeper insights into consumer behavior and preferences.

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MADONNA'S FOUR-DECADE INFLUENCE: BRAND STRATEGY AND GLOBAL IMPACT OF THE CELEBRATION TOUR RIO DE JANEIRO

Abstract. Madonna, a well-known musician and entertainer who has remained at the top of her game for over 40 years, is also a marketing and brand strategist. This research explores the evolution of global perceptions around her brand following her 2024 Celebration Tour, culminating in a record-breaking closing concert in Rio de Janeiro attended by 1.6 million people. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Aaker's and Keller's brand equity models, the study employs a quantitative methodology using a self-administered online questionnaire distributed among Madonna's international fan communities. The survey examined the most important components of brand equity. The results suggest that Madonna has a firm stronghold in the entertainment world. Notably, most respondents reported that the 2024 tour enhanced her brand's value on a global scale. This longstanding impact shows her capacity to continue to be an iconic cultural figure and confirms the longevity and power of her brand.

Keywords: brand perception, brand image, brand equity, Madonna's influence, online music communities

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1. Introduction

Since her rise to fame more than 40 years ago, Madonna, singer and cultural icon, has achieved unprecedented musical, material, and artistic success (Guilbert, 2020). She has established herself as a controversial and provocative thinker, consistently finding herself at the center of endless controversy (Alexander, 2010).

Much of this is owed to the ever-changing persona that accompanies her career. From her debut album to the present, constant changes in style, musical genres, artistic imagery, and how she presents herself to the world have occurred. This has awarded her the title *Queen of Reinvention*, many times shocking the world in the process. At the same time, she has revealed positive changes in culture, gender roles, social views, and innovations in the music business (Guilbert, 2020).

Although Madonna's reinventions are an emblematic constant aspect of her career, scholars have found them to reflect her own creative will rather than a coherent guiding theme (Mole, 2004). Madonna holds records for the highest-grossing solo tour of all time, the most consecutive Top 10 hits on the Billboard Hot 100, the most number one song on the United States dance chart, and the most weeks at number one on the mainstream Top 40 by a female artist.

From the time Madonna started her career, she has managed to transition from a sweetheart, pink, and innocent singer obsessed with sex to become an icon, a champion of minorities and the discriminated against, and fully engaged with the struggle for peace and the environment (Gaugler, 2000).

Madonna's unique branding, artistic, and business initiatives have enabled her to achieve the status of a brand with global mass appeal. This enduring success can be analyzed through the lens of brand equity and identity building based on the conceptualized work of authors Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), which considers the added value that a brand name and its variables and implications bring to a product or a service, and the entertainment industry, to a Celebrity brand as the one Madonna has carefully built for the last four decades.

As a result, an important research question arises: How have global perceptions of Madonna's brand evolved following her 2024 Celebration

Tour? Through this study, we aim to explore the perception of Madonna's brand following her 2024 Celebration Tour.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Brand image and equity in the music industry

According to Aaker (1991, p. 7), brand equity is a category of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand's name and logo that contributes or subtracts value from a product or service. These include brand loyalty, brand reputation, perceived superiority, brand associations, and more.

Similarly, Keller (1993, p. 8) defines customer-based brand equity as the difference between brand knowledge and how the customer responds to its brand marketing. Brand knowledge consists of brand awareness and perception, both important to develop. In the music industry, these theories assume that a singer's brand equity is developed via brand building, brand recognition, good brand associations, and good perceived quality (Keller, 2003, p. 143). Brand image refers to the meanings and emotions a brand evokes for consumers, while brand equity refers to the additional value these meanings and emotions add to the brand (Shin et al., 2014, p. 2).

Creating a unique, strong brand image can be significant as it helps artists differentiate themselves, sustain long-term relationships with fans, and obtain long-lasting consumer loyalty and engagement (Ganesha & Aithal, 2020, p. 282). A crucial aspect of developing a strong brand image is the ability to trigger specific emotions and feelings in consumers' minds (Saleky et al., 2018, p. 174). Such emotional connections can be created through the artist's image, musical style, marketing campaigns, and interactions with their fanbase. By addressing their target audience's values and emotions, artists can create an enduring relationship and build a brand identity (Doyle, 2012, p. 465).

Today, branding has become more about personal and celebrity brands than product and company brands. With the rise of the celebrity phenomenon and the increasing importance of identity, personal branding and celebrity branding have emerged as important components of the marketing landscape (Scheidt et al., 2020, p. 1).

Celebrity branding is not new, as many individuals have used their identities as a vehicle for success (Scheidt et al., 2020, p. 1). Celebrities can be considered human brands (Thomson, 2006, p. 105), and managing their brand equity involves applying the same principles outlined by Aaker and Keller; for example, maintaining brand awareness, building positive and strong brand associations, and providing perceived quality are all key elements to their brand equity.

2.2. The impact of live performances on artist brand equity

From a marketing perspective, live performances help solidify personal brand equity for music artists, as their live shows affect brand identity (Auslander, 2008, p. 94). They allow artists to strengthen their brand promise and build brand equity over time. According to Keller (2001, p. 19), experiential marketing activities such as concerts can also create brand recall and consumer affinity through brand connection and consumer relationship building.

The more consumers enjoy a live performance and have a memorable experience when attending a concert, the more inclined they are to become valued brand loyalists (Thaler et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Thornton & Burkhalter, 2015). Delivering inspiring live shows that provide memorable experiences for fans creates opportunities to enhance music artists' brand identity and brand promise.

Moreover, sharing feedback about the performance can influence brand perceptions among concert attendees and the public. This feedback benefits the brand through greater word-of-mouth, increased social media activity, and positive media exposure (Alves et al., 2018, p. 122).

Considering live performances as a form of event marketing—a type of marketing that has become one of the most effective ways to develop brand equity and make a strong emotional connection with an audience—celebrity and personal branding leave lasting impressions on audiences (Nufer, 2015, p. 15).

2.3. Madonna's brand image and equity building through the years

Throughout her career, Madonna has engaged in deliberate and methodical efforts to shape her persona and image, helping to ensure her status as a marketable artist and steering her seemingly unstoppable rise to become the most successful female artist in pop culture history.

Madonna's brand equity is the extra value her brand name adds to her products (Ganesha & Aithal, 2020, p 282). This manifests in how consumers think, feel, and act regarding her persona and artistic output, shaping whether they choose to stay engaged with her work (Chen, 2010, p. 309).

Given that highly subjective traits such as reputation, emotional connection, and perceived quality are often the primary purchasing criteria for consumers in the entertainment business—as well as in many other sectors of the creative economy—robust brand equity concerning these drivers is crucial to securing long-term profitability and success. Madonna has successfully built brand equity, and her brand management is in line with Aaker's and Keller's concepts.

2.3.1. Image, music, and public persona

The singer's image has played a profound role in the evolution of her brand. However, her music and public persona have also been significant factors. Audiences admire her ability to explore musical genres that are sometimes entirely different, ranging from mainstream pop and electronic to world music (Arranz, 2012, p. 179).

Moreover, the cultural meanings and significations—or myriad interpretations of attributes such as empowerment and transgressive sexuality (Waser, 2020, p. 1) – associated with the Madonna brand have also played a role in ensuring its longevity. Consumers often identify with Madonna, sometimes in opposition to authority and tradition, and appropriate her meanings as part of their own identity (Childs, 1993, p. 70).

The way Madonna carefully orchestrates her brand associations – empowerment, innovation, and controversy – is in line with Keller's (1993) insistence on the need for powerful, positive, and distinctive

brand associations to promote brand loyalty. Her relentless reinventions create brand resonance, the climax of Keller's (2001) Brand Equity Pyramid in which consumers experience a profound psychological connection with the brand.

2.3.2. *Cultural strategy*

Madonna's brand strategy has been anchored by developing substantial cultural brand capital and identity; her brand has been socially constructed to accommodate many cultural dynamics (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 575). This refers to creating and maintaining social and cultural capital to create a strong brand (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014, p. 110).

Her ability to take advantage of and influence cultural trends has enabled her to become a "cultpreneur" – an artist who uses cultural capital to establish a commercial brand (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 582). Madonna has built her personal brand around the people who love her, carefully curating her image and employing music and art as outlets to build herself up as a cultural powerhouse that transcends the confines of the entertainment industry (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014, p. 103).

The cultural aspect of Madonna's brand approach is also strong. She uses her music and public persona to express social issues, generating an aesthetic and culturally relevant brand image (Anderson et al., 2011, p. 67). She also reaches out to an array of different audience segments on multiple fronts.

Madonna's brand heavily depends on a robust cultural strategy that allows her to align with important social causes and cultural movements (Childs, 1993, p. 70). Throughout her career, she has been an outspoken proponent of the LGBTQ+ community, female empowerment, and autonomy, women's independence and self-expression, gender and power dynamics, HIV/AIDS awareness, fighting against racism and religious hypocrisy, minority advocacy, and addressing gun violence in the United States, spreading messages of acceptance and equality (Wilson & Markle, 1992, p. 82). This continual reinvention and adaptation reinforce her brand's alignment with significant cultural conversations and social movements.

3. Historical context and significance of Madonna's Celebration Tour

The Celebration Tour, which took place between October 14, 2023, and May 4, 2024, was a retrospective musical event celebrating the singer's 40-year career and back catalog. It started at the O2 Arena in London and concluded with a free concert at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The tour played a record-breaking 80 shows to an audience of 1.1 million and grossed USD 225.4 million (Frankenberg, 2024). On the tour's closing night at Copacabana Beach, the show attracted an additional 1.6 million people.

The Celebration Tour, in its main run, had the following notable dates:

- London, The O2 Arena: The first four of six shows in the city grossed \$14.7 million, with a total attendance of 60,000 visitors (Askeroff, 2023).
- Paris, Accor Arena: Four shows grossed \$10.7 million, with 62,000 tickets sold (Askeroff, 2023).
- Mexico City, Palacio de los Deportes: Five shows grossed \$14.8 million, with 82,400 tickets sold (Askeroff, 2023).

- *The Rio de Janeiro Concert*

The Rio de Janeiro Concert was a free concert on May 4, 2024. More than 1.6 million people attended. This performance was the largest audience of her career and a record for the largest audience ever for a standalone concert—the largest all-time crowd ever for a female artist. According to Billboard, this free concert produced a USD 57 million economic impact for the city, far exceeding the USD 10 million spent on the concert investment. Madonna was paid over USD 3.4 million for her performance (Del Rosario, 2024).

- *Significance and Impact*

Both the Celebration Tour and the record-breaking performance in Rio de Janeiro solidified her as a pop culture icon and one of the most financially

successful touring acts of the time. Madonna was able not only to reflect on her career advancements but also to honor her influences and peers in the show's content and performances, reaching a high emotional level with her fans (Ganz, 2023). This deep emotional connection contributes to brand resonance, one element of Keller's (2001) Brand Equity Pyramid, where customers feel a strong psychological bond with the brand.

- *The Tour as a reflection of brand values*

The tour was representative of Madonna's wider influences. She has been the most visible public voice for LGBT+ rights, gender equality, and freedom of expression. The Celebration Tour was both a musical and cultural statement, reflecting all the themes of empowerment and social change central to her brand (Keller, 1993).

- *Media coverage and public reception*

News outlets worldwide covered the Rio de Janeiro concert with critical acclaim and on-the-ground reporting. The show featured seamless technical production and a remarkable performance from Madonna, boasting her usual energetic charisma. The setlist, featuring many of her timeless hits, among others, appealed to a wide and "multigenerational" audience, as one critic noted. Madonna's show was well-regarded and lauded for its slickness and spectacle (Snapes, 2023).

- *Brazilian media coverage*

Brazilian newspapers highlighted the cultural significance of the concert. They described the gathering as one of the most important cultural events for the community and emphasized the spectacle's position within popular culture. They focused their accounts on the artist's voice, her long-lasting relationship with Brazilian culture, the 1.6 million fans who attended the show, as well as the significance of the spectacle for both Madonna and the Brazilian audience (Peters, 2024).

- *International media coverage*

In the broader global context, international media outlets such as *The New York Times* and *Billboard* positioned the concert within the scope of Madonna's career and its significance as the conclusion of her Celebration Tour. They focused on her status as a pop icon. They envisioned the concert as part of her enduring brand legacy, offering a broader perspective on her impact on the music industry (Milhorane & Jacobs, 2024).

4. Methodology

A survey method based on exploratory research was designed to conduct this study. Exploratory research is often employed when the goal is to provide background information, familiarize researchers with a general subject, and explore some relationships between variables (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p 72).

In this case, ideas more than conclusions were sought after, looking forward to diverse perspectives instead of representative samples. The goal was to obtain information about the beliefs, perceptions, personalities, and thoughts of the research participants about the Madonna brand across a broad audience.

Brand equity and consumer satisfaction related questions to celebrity branding and event marketing were carefully crafted adhering to the following criteria: This study was planned to take advantage of the existing loyal customers as this has many benefits, such brand equity, image loyalty, reputation, perceptions, associations, and more as fans' buying habits (Mao, 2010, p. 214). Customers who remain loyal tend to leave genuine comments and feedback that can help produce the best results. Their engagement is generally stronger and more focused, making their opinion useful and taking advantage of the loyal consumer's point of view (Agnihotri, 2023, p. 115).

This kind of segmentation was chosen to target the musician's fandom. Brand equity in the musical industry is mostly developed by close emotional relationships with the fans of an artist. Learning about what aspects of the Brand specifically makes fans feel closer to the musician, in this case, Madonna, could give us an understanding of how her brand is generally perceived (Thomson, 2006, p. 111).

Given the research goals and the theoretical framework outlined in Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) theories of brand equity, we created a preliminary set of questions focusing on key constructs such as brand image, brand equity, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions.

To ensure the questionnaire's clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness, it was pilot tested with 26 Madonna fans worldwide via a Madonna fan forum. This pilot group provided valuable feedback on the wording and cultural adaptability of the items. They commented on how clear, relevant, and comprehensive the questions were. Based on their feedback, some questions were restructured, unnecessary items were eliminated, and additional response options were included to accommodate a wider range of answers.

Aware of Madonna's worldwide audience, the survey was translated into three languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese. This multilingual approach was intended to increase accessibility and encourage participation from fans across different linguistic backgrounds.

Participants were recruited via Madonna fan Facebook groups. Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age and self-identified as confirmed Madonna fans. Leveraging these online fan communities allowed us to reach a diverse and engaged audience who were likely to provide meaningful insights into Madonna's brand perception.

To ensure reliability and validity, the questionnaire incorporated pre-existing scales from the literature: Brand Image was measured using items adapted from Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale, Brand Equity was assessed based on Keller's (2001) Customer-Based Brand Equity Model and Purchase Intentions were measured using the scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004).

All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scaling allowed for quantifying attitudes and beliefs, facilitating statistical analysis of the responses.

Data was collected over four weeks in June 2024, one month after the completion of the Celebration Tour. The electronic questionnaire-maintained anonymity and confidentiality in accordance with ethical research guidelines. Participants were informed about the study objectives before beginning the questionnaire, ensuring informed consent. No

personally identifiable information was collected, preserving participant anonymity. A total of 200 responses were received.

5. Findings

5.1. Sociodemographic profile in relation to Madonna brand perception

The sociodemographic profile of the participants (Figure 1) provides some context for understanding how the Madonna brand is perceived after the Rio de Janeiro Concert. With a significant majority – 72 % – identifying as male, this could reflect how Madonna's image, messaging, and evolution as an artist have resonated strongly with male audiences over the years. It may also indicate the influence of specific cultural or social dynamics, where male fans engage more actively in fan communities or feel a stronger connection to the brand. The age distribution further deepens our understanding of the brand's perception. The largest group of respondents falls within the 45- to 54-year-old age range, making up 45% of the sample. The second-largest group, aged 35 to 44, represents 27% of the sample.

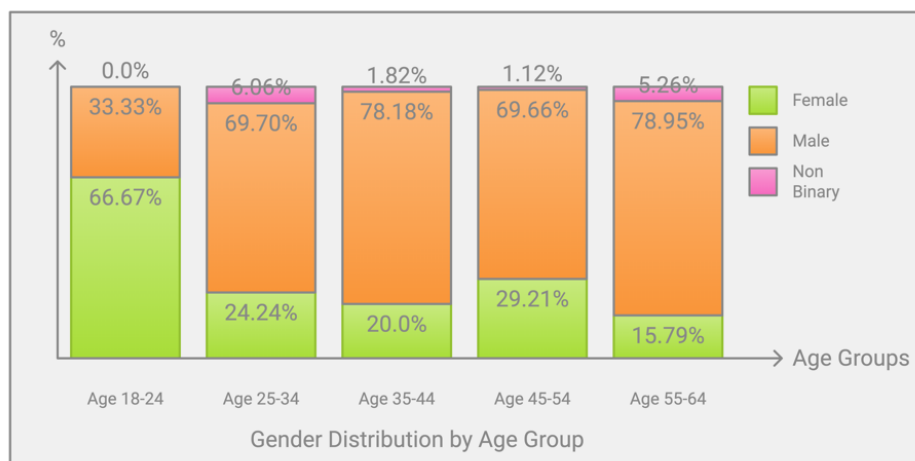


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by age and gender

These two groups, predominantly part of *Generation X*, grew up with Madonna's music during the height of her career in the 1980s and early 2000s. Their perception of the Madonna brand is likely influenced by a long-standing relationship with her work, viewing her not just as an artist but as a significant cultural moment from their youth, given that *Generation X* is characterized by bridging pre-digital and digital eras, political shifts, economic fluctuations and diverse social activism (Katz, 2017, p.16). As Bordes points out, generations have been "shaped by their common history and influences by common icons, events and conditions that become reference points for them, which ends in shared values and behaviors" (Derecskei, 2018, p. 109).

The 16% of respondents aged 25 to 34 may have a different perception of the Madonna brand, as they were exposed to her work during a period when her legacy was already well-established. However, her new releases may not have had the same cultural impact as earlier in her career. Their perception might be shaped more by her status as a pop culture legend rather than a current music trendsetter.

As Figure 1 shows, the gender and age distribution of respondents suggests that Madonna's Brand holds a powerful appeal among older male audiences who likely have a long-term connection with her music and what she has represented throughout their cultural lives. These demographic characteristics may value her as a symbol of reinvention in the ever-changing pop culture landscape. As it will be shown in the next section, this could be related to the nationality of the participants.

5.2. Geographic distribution in relation to Madonna brand perception

Just like the age and gender of the respondents, the geographic distribution of the respondents broadens the understanding of how Madonna's brand is perceived across different countries and continents. The data reflects participation from various regions, with a noticeable concentration in certain areas, as shown in Figure 2.

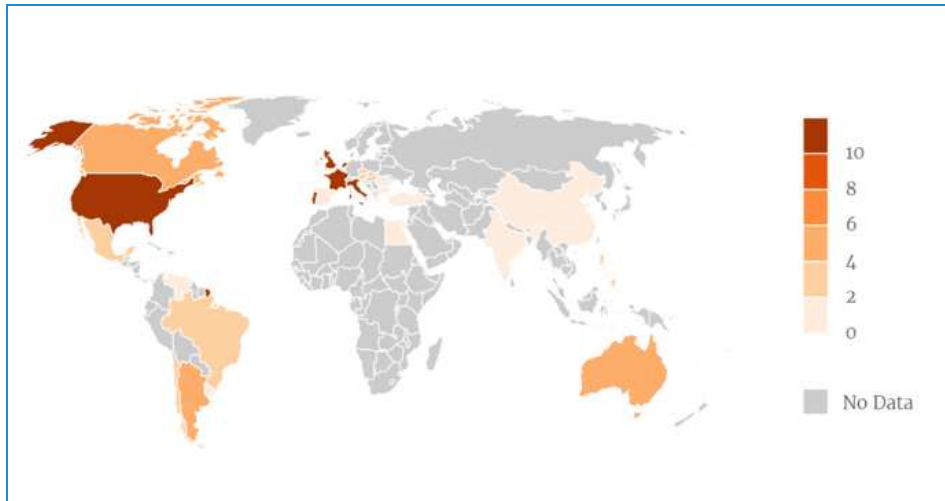


Figure 2. Geographic distribution of the study's participants

Survey participants originated from various regions globally, with a notably higher concentration in Europe and North America. Specifically, 50% of respondents were from Europe, and 35% were from North America, indicating more substantial recognition and engagement with the Madonna brand in these regions.

Europe had the highest representation among survey respondents, followed closely by North America. This pattern is likely attributable to Madonna's origin and her prominence as an American performer, which resonates deeply with audiences due to cultural proximity and the pervasive influence of American popular culture. As Straubhaar (2009, p. 51) highlights, cultural proximity implies that consumers seek out media in a culturally similar or familiar format. Western values, and cultural norms seem to better correspond to those represented by Madonna, American popular music and culture have always dominated audience tastes mass circulation.

5.3. Respondents' perceptions on Madonna's brand

As shown in Figure 3, the data illustrates a significant shift in the perception of Madonna's brand following the Rio de Janeiro concert. Positive descriptors

such as “Positive” (147 mentions), “Iconic” (147 mentions), “Memorable” (129 mentions), “Strong” (115 mentions), and “Relevant” (89 mentions) overwhelmingly dominate the responses. In total, these positive attributes were mentioned 627 times, accounting for approximately 96% of all descriptors used. This substantial affirmation underscores Madonna’s enduring appeal and the profound impact of the concert on her audience.

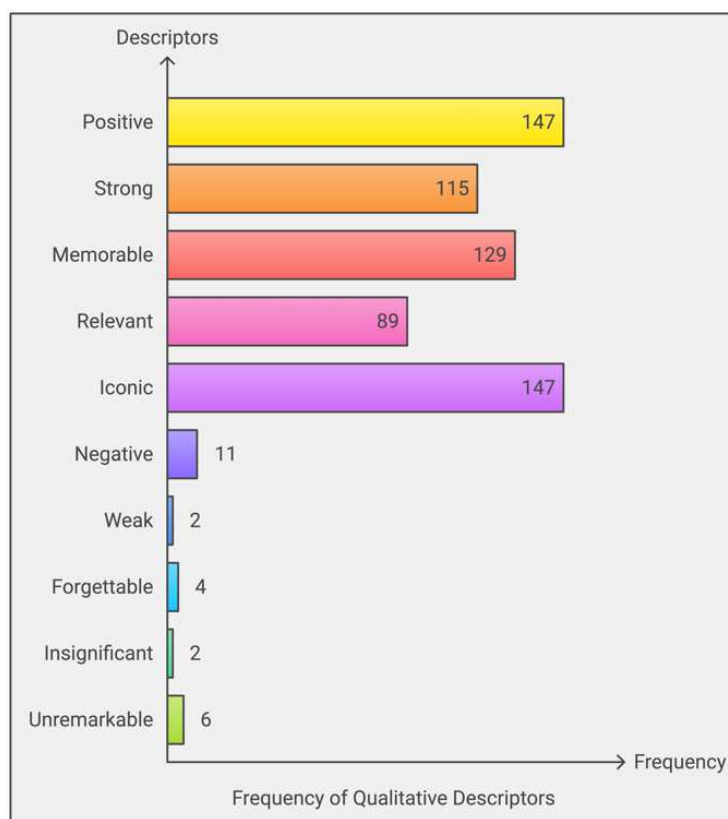


Figure 3. Contrasts in perceptions of Madonna’s brand after Rio de Janeiro concert

Conversely, non-positive descriptors are markedly less frequent. “Negative” was mentioned only 11 times, while “Unremarkable” (6 mentions), “Forgettable” (4 mentions), “Weak” (2 mentions), and “Insignificant” (2 mentions) collectively received just 25 mentions, representing about

4% of the total descriptors. This significant disparity indicates that the Rio de Janeiro concert was predominantly perceived favorably by the respondents.

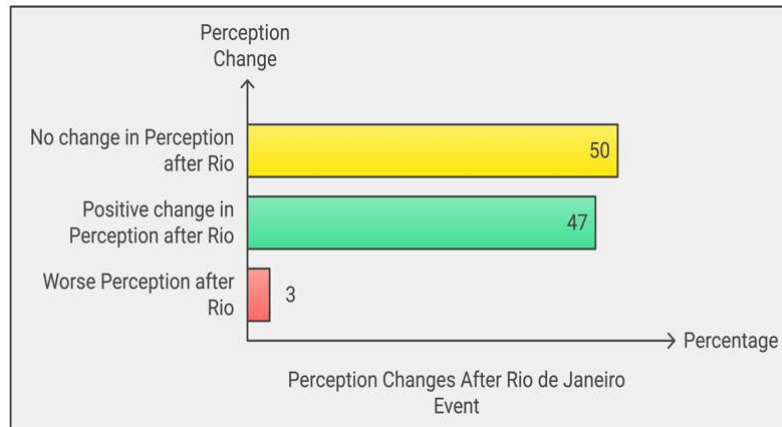


Figure 4. Changes in Madonna's brand perceptions after the Rio de Janeiro concert

As observed in Figure 4, 50% of respondents indicated that their perception of the Madonna brand remained unchanged after the concert, while 47% reported a positive change in their perception. Only 3% mentioned that their perception of the brand changed negatively. When contrasting this data with perceptions of Madonna's brand globally, it is notable that 89% of respondents believe there was a positive impact on the brand, 8% think there was no change, and only 3% feel that the concert did not have a significant impact on the global perception. For Keller (1993, p. 9), powerful experiences, like live entertainment, could increase brand resonance and customer-centered brand equity by creating heightened brand recall and consumer-brand engagement.

47% of participants perceived an improvement, which indicates that live concerts can help sustain or strengthen a brand's consumer impressions. Thomson (2006, p. 113) confirms this, concluding that close engagement with a celebrity or human brand can enhance emotional bonds and positively impact consumer impressions and attachments.

With only a moderate negative change of 3%, it is unlikely that the concert had a detrimental impact on Madonna's brand perception. Low negative sentiment is important to brand consistency because positive

and dependable consumer opinions lead to stable brand equity (Aaker, 1996, p. 11).

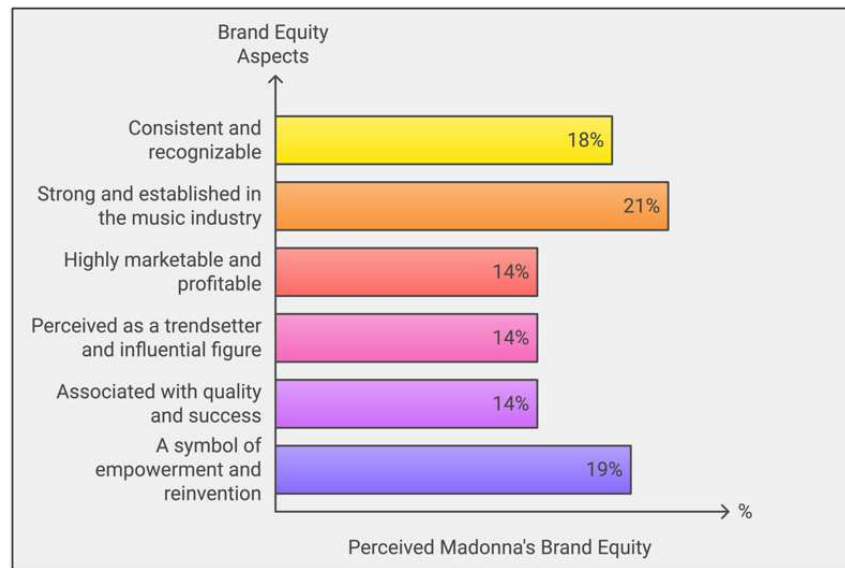


Figure 5. Perceived Madonna's brand equity

The respondents' perceptions of Madonna's brand highlight several key attributes contributing to her enduring success in the music industry (see Figure 5). The largest percentage of respondents, 18%, described Madonna as "strong and established in the music industry." The second-largest group, 16%, characterized her as a "symbol of empowering others and reinvention." Additionally, 15% of respondents indicated that her brand is "consistent and identifiable." Twelve percent viewed her as a "trendsetter and influential." At the same time, 10% perceived her as a "culture creator and innovator," suggesting that she continues to wield significant influence in cultural and social spheres.

Furthermore, 12% associated Madonna's brand with "quality and success," implying that she sets and maintains high standards in her work, leading to successful outcomes. Another 12% linked her brand to the commercial aspects of celebrity, describing her as "highly marketable and profitable."

As defined by Aaker (1997, p. 347), brand personality is the repertoire of human traits about a brand that may influence consumer preferences and brand loyalty. Madonna's strong, empowered, innovative, and consistent personality gives her brand equity and appeal to people. What is seen as a symbol of empowerment and reinvention was her resilience and willingness to change, mirroring Kapferer's (2008, p. 39) idea of brand identity: that a brand must be relevant, staying on the cutting edge of contemporary values and cultural developments.

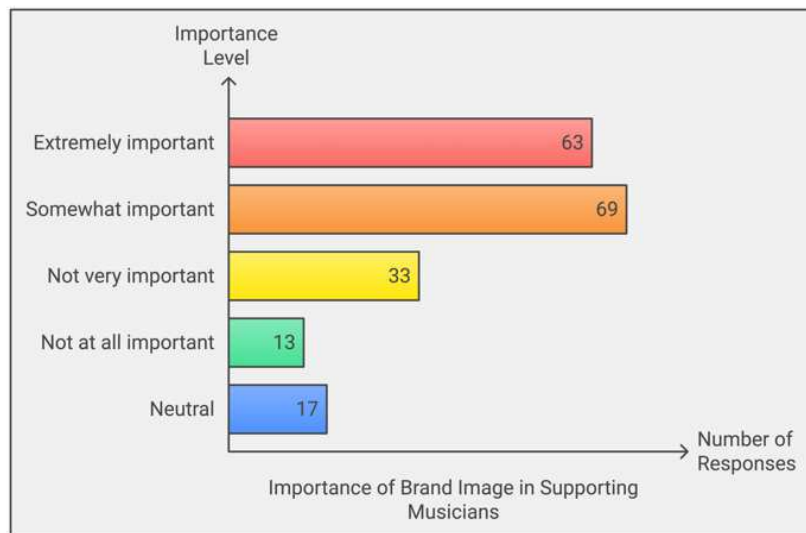


Figure 6. Importance of brand image to support a musician or a band

Regarding the importance assigned to brand image, as shown in Figure 6, it is notable that a powerful brand image is important for most respondents when considering whether to support a musician or band. Specifically, 67% stated that brand image is "extremely important" or "somewhat important." These findings suggest that brand image plays a significant role in consumers' decision-making process. Conversely, 24% of respondents attribute less importance to brand image. In this sense, Keller (1993, p. 3) states that brand image (or images of a brand represented in terms of brand associations in consumer memory) is an integral element of customer-generated brand equity.

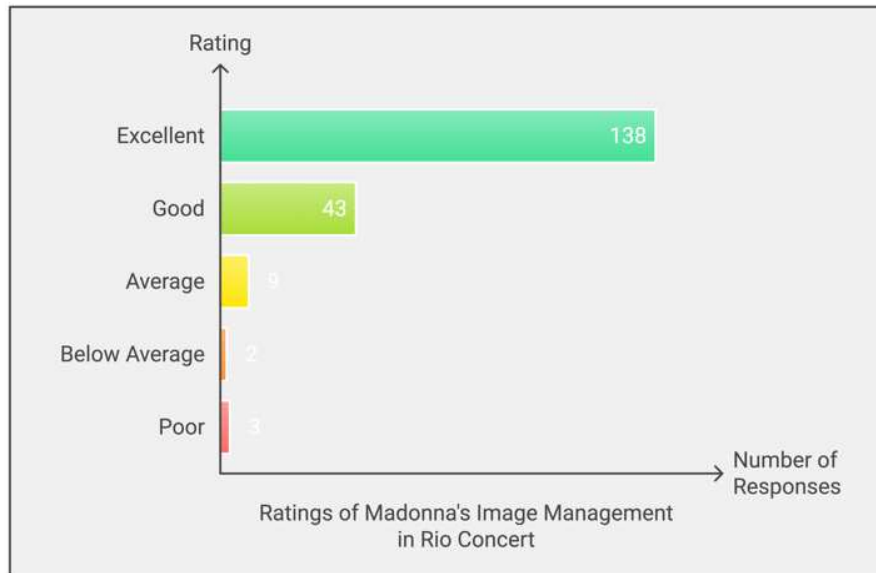


Figure 7. Management of Madonna's image during the Rio de Janeiro concert

As illustrated in Figure 7, most respondents rated the management of Madonna's image during the Rio de Janeiro concert as "Excellent" (71%) or "Good" (22%). These findings suggest that the event was perceived positively by attendees and may have significantly strengthened Madonna's brand image in the minds of her audience.

Herrmann et al. (2000, p.85) point out that positive word of mouth and brand loyalty can result from satisfied customers who experience good service, such as a concert. The fact that 80% of respondents gave the image management a score of "Excellent" or "Good" indicates that Madonna did a great job of leveraging the show to maintain her brand equity in a highly competitive industry.

Respondents perceived that the Rio de Janeiro concert substantially augmented international perceptions of the Madonna brand (Figure 8). Overall, 80% agreed that the concert was a positive enhancer of the brand's value, while very few respondents regarded its impact as neutral or negligible. Event marketing studies have revealed that performances improve consumer relationships and positively affect brand perceptions by establishing a close emotional connection (Close et al., 2006).

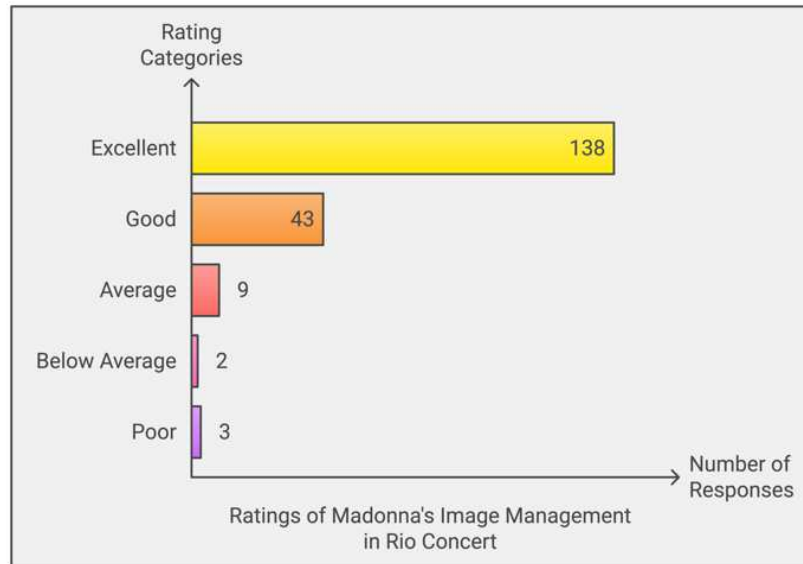


Figure 8. Global perception of Madonna's brand after Rio de Janeiro concert

When asked how authentic the Madonna brand became after the Rio de Janeiro concert, as illustrated in Figure 9, 79% think that it is "very authentic", cementing the idea of Madonna's genuine, truly-herself brand image. Another 13% find her brand somewhat authentic. A small, but still significant, minority of people remain neutral, 6% or thought that Madonna's brand became somewhat inauthentic after the concert, 2%. In the same way, about brand consistency, the 83% of respondents holding a positive perception is encouraging for any brand persona since most of her viewing/reading audience sees her own valuation of her brand as a top priority – and for a major brand celebrity like Madonna, it is.

According to Moulard et al. (2015, p. 174), perceived authenticity in celebrities is an important boost to brand equity, which in turn increases emotional attachment and fan loyalty. In the same vein, Schultz et al. (2014, p. 426) emphasized that consistency of a celebrity brand identity was essential to building and maintaining brand equity, as a consistent brand message creates consumer trust and recognition.

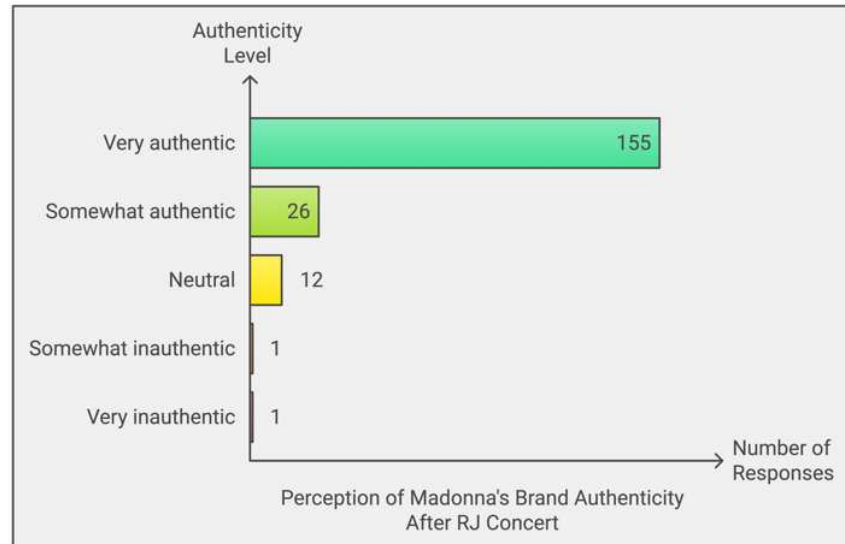


Figure 9. Authenticity of Madonna's brand after the Rio de Janeiro concert

In other brand-related questions in our analysis, the primary factors contributing to Madonna's brand equity were her ability to engage with the audience and her talent, with additional contributions from her public image and role as a spokesperson. Compared to other iconic musicians, 67% of respondents believed Madonna's brand equity was much stronger after the event.

The concert also had impact on purchase behaviour: 64% of the respondents reinforced by the concert, while 13% made new purchases, 23% reported no change in their buying habits. Thomson (2006, p. 105) mentions that fandoms grow attached to their admired celebrity, building brand loyalties, and influencing buying decisions. Seno and Lukas (2007, p. 125) further note that a well-managed celebrity brand might even seem more desirable if they can communicate their brand value proposition consistently well.

All the previous data highlights the concert's success in strengthening Madonna's brand, boosting fan engagement, and reinforcing her influence in music and popular culture.

6. Discussion

The influence of Madonna's brand among an older audience, specifically Generation X (aged 45-54), who witnessed her rise to stardom, can be attributed both to her longevity in the music business and her ability to foster strong brand loyalty over decades. According to Aaker (1991, p. 39), brand loyalty is a core dimension of brand equity, representing a consumer's commitment to a brand; this loyalty contributes to the stability in brand perception among this group, with many reporting a positive change after the concert. Madonna's ability to curate and cultivate a strong brand identity aligns with Keller's (2001) concept of brand resonance, where consumers feel a deep psychological bond with the brand (Anderson & Kupp, 2006).

An examination of the distribution of responses reveals the stronghold that Madonna's brand currently holds, mainly in North America 57% and Europe 35%. These are the regions where the star experienced most of her success, and the media has covered her most intensely (Canavan & McCamley, 2020). This extensive exposure has contributed to high levels of brand awareness, a fundamental component of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Her brand plays a particularly central role in the world of pop culture. Described as a "global multimedia phenomenon" (Arranz, 2012, p. 173), Madonna's brand crosses over generations – appealing to the youth of the 1980s and 2000s and to the parents and grandparents of today's consumers. This intergenerational appeal reflects strong and favorable brand associations, which, according to Keller (1993, p. 9), enhance brand equity by creating positive attitudes and feelings toward the brand. It still holds special meaning in the countries where she had her most successful career; her iconic status and the cultural significance of her brand retain their most forceful impact in these regions over the most extended period (Jesús, 2021, p. 29).

In addition, the high percentage of fans in North America can be explained by what Qyll (2020) calls "Madonna's Americanism," rooted in "Madonna's biographical roots in the Midwest of the USA and in the diverse references to American culture within her world of brand imagery" (p. 63). These strong brand associations with American culture enhance her brand equity in these regions, aligning with Aaker's (1991) emphasis on the value of brand associations in building brand equity.

Moreover, Madonna is proposed as the pinnacle of the fading postmodern era in pop music ages (Canavan & McCamley, 2020, p. 225). Her songs and lyrics are highlighted as markers of this cultural phase, offering insights into how these themes resonate with and influence consumer behavior. Her ability to adapt and remain relevant across different cultural phases enhances her brand image, contributing to strong brand associations that influence consumer behavior (Keller, 1993). Madonna is an artist who has traversed different eras, from pre-postmodernism to the present, which explains why her fan base spans such a wide range of ages (Canavan & McCamley, 2020, p. 225).

Regarding Madonna's brand perception after the Rio de Janeiro concert, both personal and global, many respondents' answers echo the strong and favorable impact of the event: Positive, Iconic, and Memorable perceptions were the most notable among other associations. This significant shift in perceptions made her brand more positively perceived afterward, and Madonna maintained her position as a prominent music icon following the concert. The quality and consistency of a live performance can significantly contribute to improving perceived quality and brand loyalty, key components of brand equity (Swarbrick et al., 2019, p. 2).

The dual perception of consistency and reinvention – 'consistent and recognizable' versus 'empowerment and reinvention' – might seem like opposing principles, but Madonna's enduring appeal as a brand rests precisely on her success in balancing both. This balance reflects Keller's (2003) notion that strong brands must stay relevant by adapting to changing consumer needs while maintaining a consistent brand identity. Her longevity comes from the coherence of her brand, existing in productive tension with her capacity for reinvention. Madonna's brand is known by fans for its capacity for innovation, which strengthens her brand equity by keeping brand associations fresh and engaging.

Respondents described the Madonna brand following the Rio de Janeiro concert as mainly Positive, Iconic, Memorable mentions overwhelmingly dominate the responses. of brand personality, which contributes to brand equity by fostering trust and emotional connections with consumers (Aaker, 1997). It is her 'authentic voice,' symbiotic with her skills as an influencer, cements her role as the cultural arbiter par excellence. This strong perception of authenticity enhances her brand equity by creating favorable brand associations and deepening brand resonance (Keller, 2001).

She has cultivated a repertoire that balances authenticity with reinvention, taking charge of her messages and communications across all media. In terms of cultural influence, this mastery of authenticity has been a vital factor in allowing Madonna to continue as an agent of meaning.

The closing concert strongly reinforced fans' purchasing decisions – 64% of respondents agreed that the Rio concert further cemented their decision to purchase merchandise and music. This increase in purchase intentions reflects the impact of enhanced brand equity on consumer behavior, consistent with Keller's (1993) model where strong brand equity leads to more favorable consumer responses. This emphasizes live performance as a moment of contact that helps solidify fans' connection with the brand while providing economic activity for the artist. The live concert served as an experiential marketing event that deepened brand resonance, encouraging fans to engage more actively with the brand. The study shows that during and after the show, the brand could convert passive listeners into active consumers.

Madonna's brand equity is perceived to be stronger than that of other iconic musicians after the Rio de Janeiro show. The fact that 67% of respondents believe her brand is "much stronger" than that of competitors indicates that the show did not just maintain her place in the industry; it also created more separation from her contemporaries. This perception of superior brand equity gives Madonna a competitive advantage in the industry, as strong brand equity enhances customer loyalty and reduces vulnerability to competitive actions (Aaker, 1991). This is the ultimate endorsement of her legacy, confirming that her brand not only remains relevant today but continues to surpass those of her peers. As Canavan and McCamley (2020, p. 227) state, "Madonna will continue to find large audiences as long as she represents and combines the postmodern aspects of critique of the marketable commercial sensationalism of the fragmented spectacle".

Through this study, it becomes evident that brand image continues to be an important element for Madonna's music fans as a means of retaining and sustaining their enduring connection with her. By continually managing her brand image and nurturing long-term relationships with fans, Madonna exemplifies effective brand equity management, ensuring sustained brand resonance and loyalty (Keller, 2001). Indeed, she continually manages her brand by building long-term relationships with them.

7. Conclusion

This analysis of Madonna's brand equity, with special reference to the buildup to her 2024 Celebration Tour and the closing in Rio de Janeiro, illuminates the mechanisms perpetuating her status as a global cultural icon. It shows that Madonna's brand is not just enduring but continues to evolve in ways that resonate profoundly with a broad and diverse audience. The concert in Rio de Janeiro was a powerful brand amplifier, augmenting global perceptions of Madonna and the personal perceptions of her fans.

This study employed quantitative methodology grounded in established theoretical frameworks by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2001). Our questionnaire was developed and pilot-tested with international fans to ensure clarity and relevance. By utilizing validated scales from existing literature, the study aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the measurements.

The Rio de Janeiro concert can be regarded as a benchmark in maintaining Madonna's brand equity, which may have been instrumental in spreading her brand globally. The concert likely reinforced her standing among fans who had followed her musical and acting career while elevating her status among new fans.

Hence, it is conceivable that live performances continue to play a significant role in her brand strategy. The ability of the concert to promote purchase intentions while positively affecting global perceptions attests to the economic and cultural impact of her live performances and speaks to the effectiveness of her strategic brand management. This finding supports Keller's (2001) emphasis on experiential marketing activities in fostering brand resonance and deepening consumer relationships.

Another significant aspect is authenticity. It is a testament to her brand's developed strength that Madonna is one of the most commercial brands in entertainment yet is considered to have an authentic image in a culture that increasingly values authenticity. This correlation lends credence to the notion that Madonna's brand is based on an identity commensurate with her performance and music foremost. Authenticity enhances brand equity by fostering trust and emotional connections with consumers (Aaker, 1997).

8. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Recognizing the descriptive nature of the research, acknowledgement of the methodological choices presents limitations. While effective in reaching a geographically dispersed audience of Madonna fans, the self-administered questionnaire may not provide a fully representative picture of her global fan base. The descriptive findings offer valuable insights but need more depth than probabilistic sampling and inferential statistical analysis might provide.

There is also a geographic concentration in Europe and North America, which, while significant regions for Madonna's fan base, means that the perspectives of fans from Asia, Africa, and parts of Latin America outside Brazil and Mexico are underrepresented. This limitation may affect the generalization of her brand equity in a genuinely global context.

Future studies should consider employing probabilistic sampling methods to enhance representativeness and generalization. Expanding the sample to include a more racially and culturally diverse group of fans from a broader geographic selection would provide a more comprehensive understanding of Madonna's global brand perception. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could offer deeper insights into the underlying reasons for fans' perceptions and the cultural nuances influencing brand equity.

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

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).

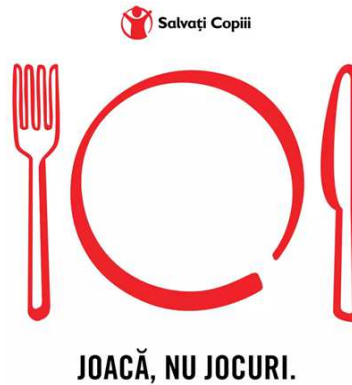


Figure 1. "Joacă, nu jocuri"/ "Play, not games" campaign banner
(Salvați Copiii Romania [@salvaticopiiiromania], 2023)

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.

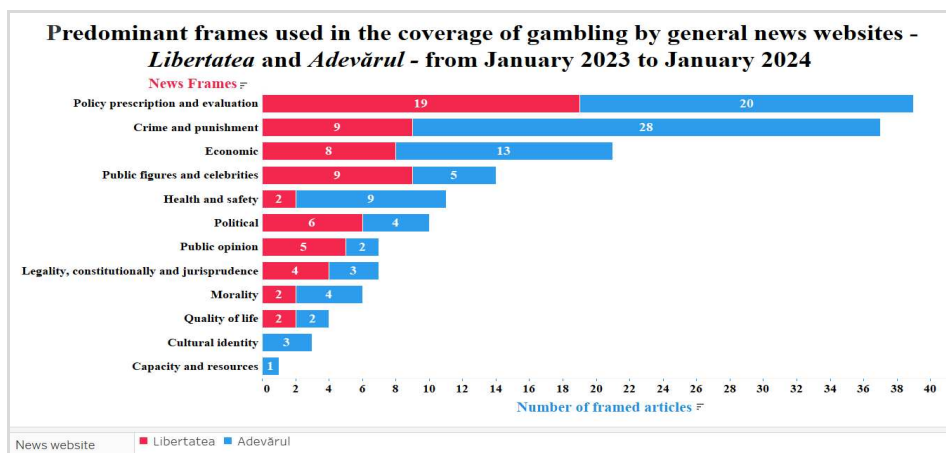


Figure 2. The distribution of media frames for the articles published by two extensively visited mainstream news websites, *Adevărul* and *Libertatea*

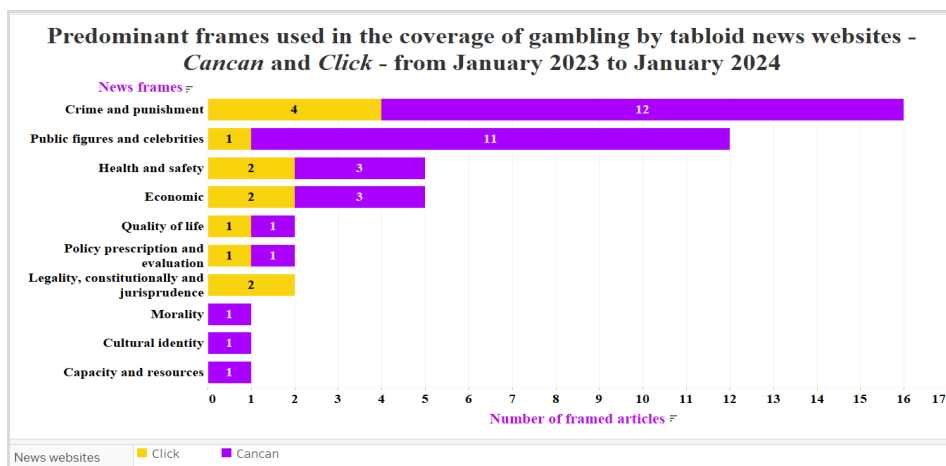


Figure 3. The distribution of media frames for the articles published by two widely accessed tabloid news websites, *Cancan* and *Click*

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.

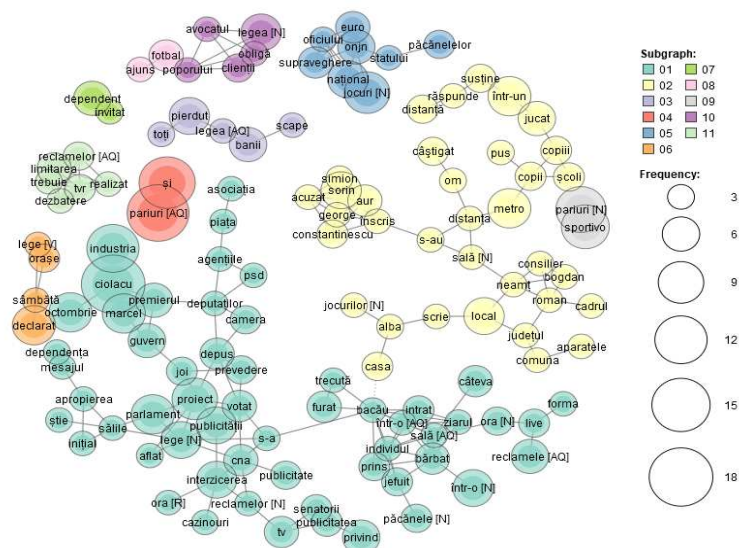


Figure 4. Co-occurrence network – *Libertatea*

Additionally, the discourse displayed by *Adevarul* (Figure 5) shows that it joins the previous publication, as suggested by the most stretched out color-coded network, in widely discussing policies, prevention, legislation and governance perspectives while broadly availing the particular gambling vocabulary. In this context, the limitation on gambling publicity primarily stems from the associated dangers: “addiction”, the “alcohol”-“drug” connection, “jail” and conviction (“sentenced”), robbery and stealing (“robbed,” “stolen”), “criminal files” and illegalities. However, there are also references to the financial dimension, by bringing up both the finance ministry and earnings-related terms.

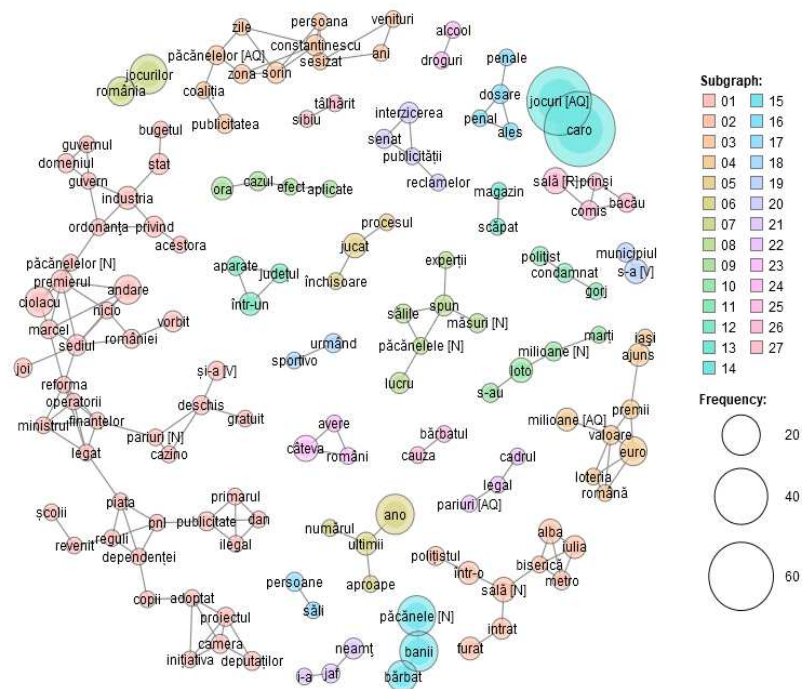


Figure 5. Co-occurrence network – *Adevarul*

On the other hand, the first tabloid (Figure 6), *Cancan*, moves the emphasis on other angles of the gambling panorama. The diverse terminology employed by the general news website when referring to the games of chance is now mainly reduced to the Romanian slang term

associated with “slots”. At the same time, it is important to notice the replacement of “addiction” with the Romania equivalent of “passion”. Moreover, according to the first subgraph in the legend, *Cancan* gives great priority to the money-based information. The discourse is further completed by words such as “exclusivity” and by the invitation “here is what happened”, marked by a tendency to revolve the articles around public figures (Dan Negru, Oana Zavoranu, Alex Ashraf) with references to gambling. However, the word “joke” discloses another direction of the gambling discourse.

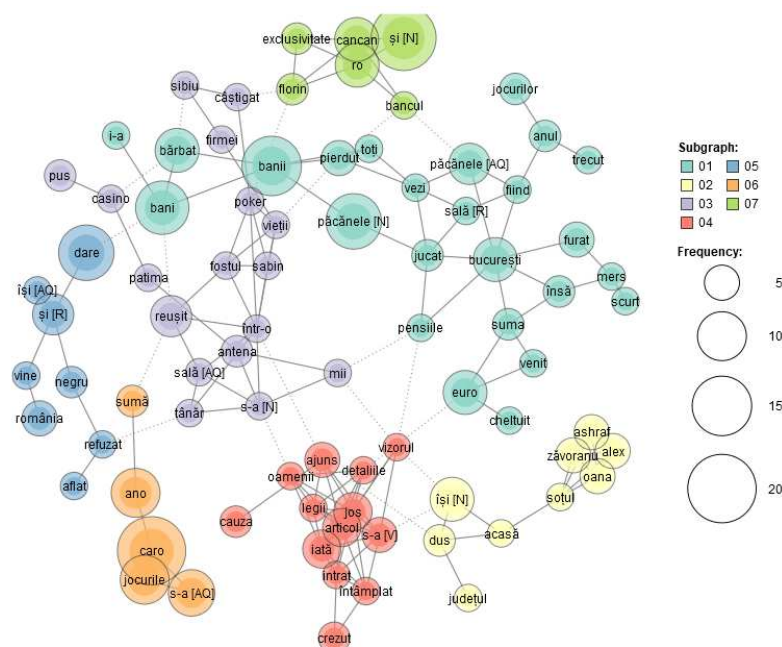


Figure 6. Co-occurrence network – *Cancan*

The co-occurrence network resulting from articles published by *Click* (Figure 7) highlights prominent themes such as government involvement in regulating games and rules, as well as associations between gambling and various aspects of entertainment and risk-taking or life-threatening behaviors. The correlation between “government,” “games,” and “rules” underscores discussions on regulatory oversight. At the same time, the

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.

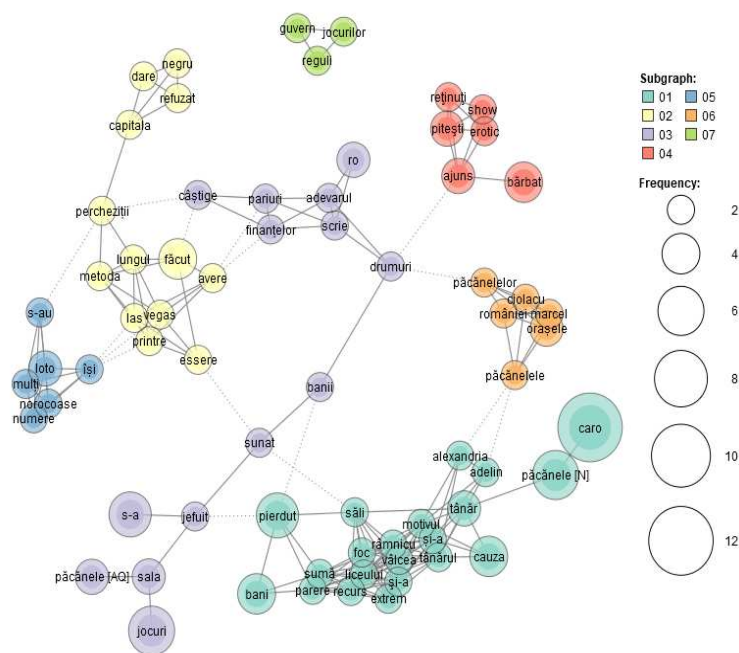


Figure 7. Co-occurrence network – Click

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).

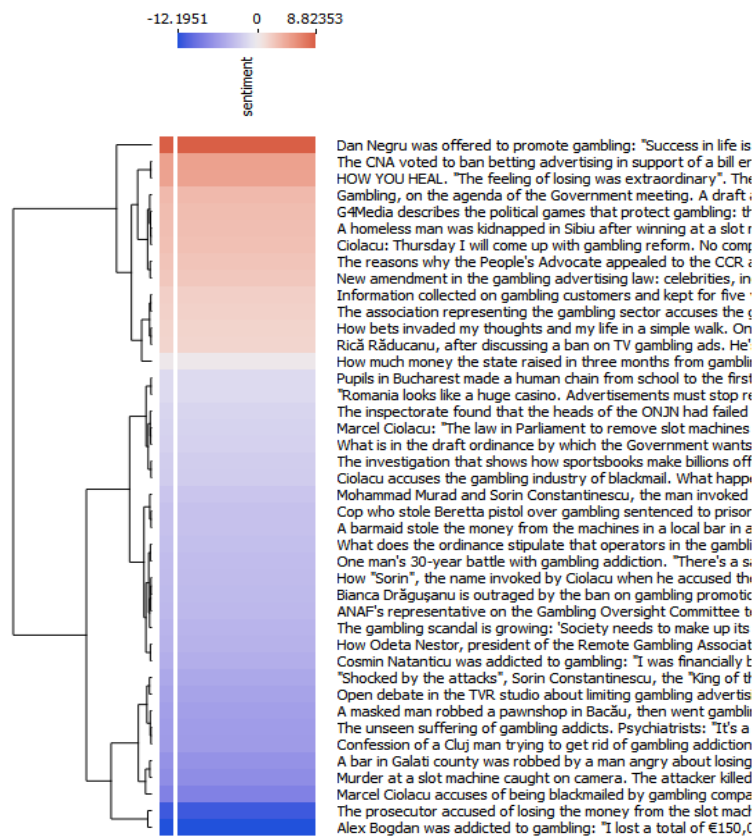


Figure 8. Sentiment analysis – polarity for *Libertatea*

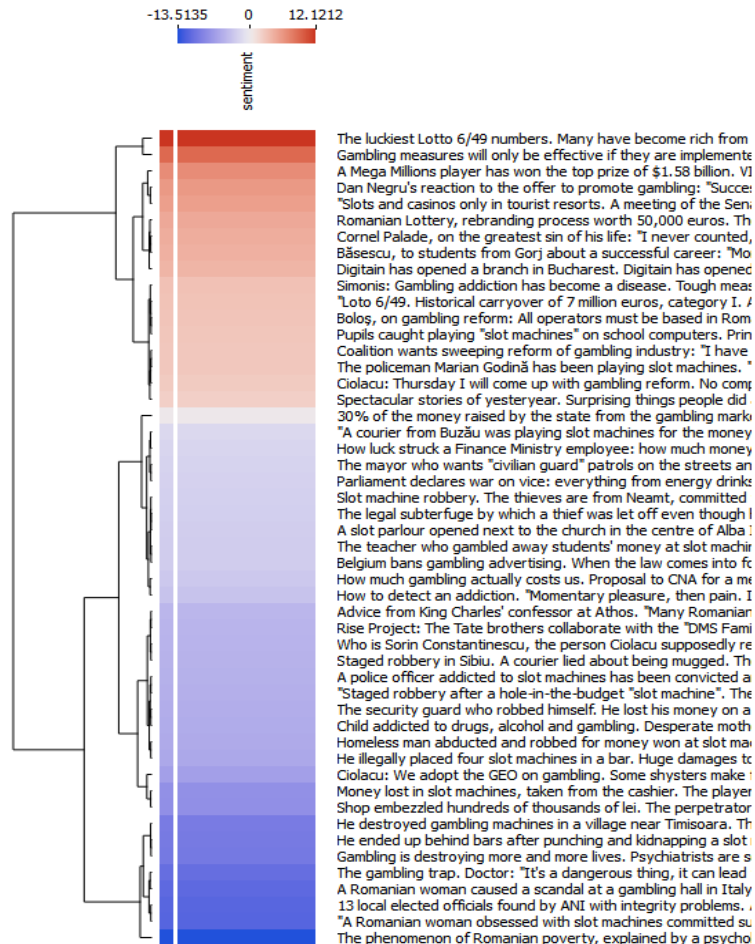


Figure 9. Sentiment analysis – polarity for *Adevărul*

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.

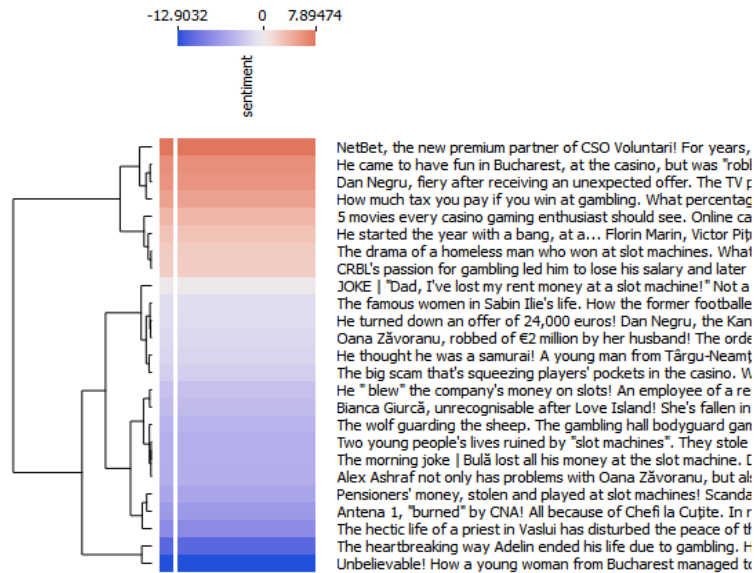


Figure 10. Sentiment analysis – polarity for *Cancan*

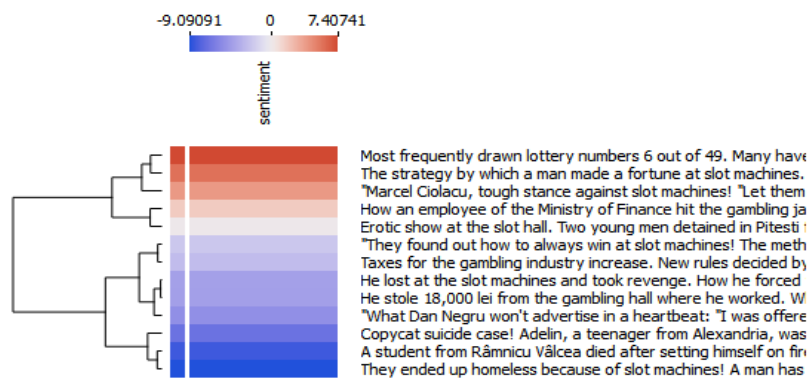


Figure 11. Sentiment analysis – Polarity for *Click*

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.

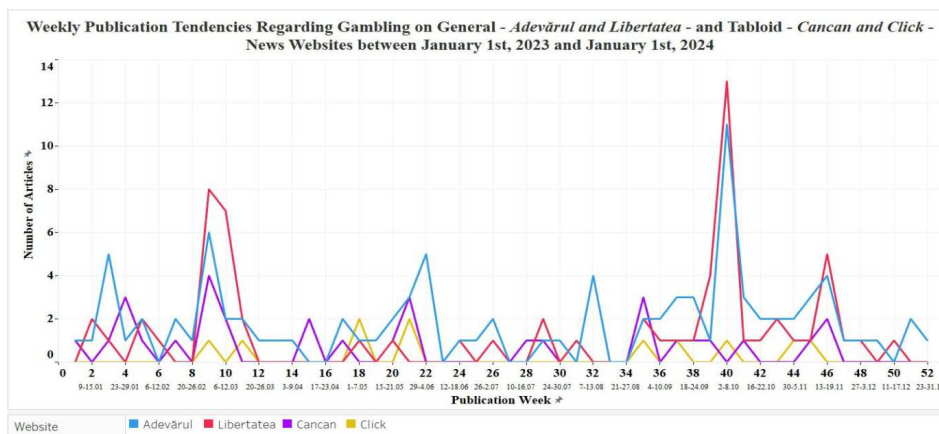


Figure 12. Weekly trends in gambling news coverage on *Adevărul*, *Libertatea*, *Cancan*, and *Click* websites (January 2023 to January 2024)

Nevertheless, the graph's peaks are reached by *Adevărul* and *Libertatea* between the 2nd and 8th 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 22nd 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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BOOK REVIEWS

IOANA MOLDOVAN¹

CHRISTOF AMRHEIN. 2024. *Immersive Journalism and 360-degree Videos. An Experimental Approach and the Perspective of the Experts*. Cluj-Napoca: Accent. 128 p.

Christof Amrhein's book, *Immersive Journalism and 360-degree Videos. An Experimental Approach and the Perspective of the Experts*, was published in 2024 by Accent, Cluj-Napoca. The book analyses thoroughly the effects of users' engagement with 360-degree or immersive videos, as well as the prospects for the future development of 360-degree videos, especially for journalism and cinematic storytelling. According to the author, in today's society, due to the latest technological developments, there has been a significant shift concerning how people search for information and engage with it. Therefore, the central issue addressed in this book is the "phenomenon of communication through 360-degree or immersive videos (IV)" (p.11). This review aims to analyze and summarize the book, highlighting its strengths and areas for improvement.

The book is structured in seven chapters. The first chapter of the volume begins with an overview of the development of virtual reality technology over time. The author also emphasizes in this chapter the various applications VR technology and 360-degree videos can have in different domains such as advertising, marketing, journalism, healthcare, tourism, or education (p. 22). For instance, the author discussed the relevance of

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VR technologies for healthcare. VR technology can be used to train doctors or educate patients about their health conditions. Also, the author emphasized the fact that psychologists and psychiatrists already use this technology as an instrument against depression and anxiety. Furthermore, according to the author, this technology can also be applied in destination marketing and tourism. Additionally, VR technology can be applied in the field of education. Pilots learn how to fly using *VR technology-based simulations*. Training for “handling critical situations for military and civilian population are performed in VR environments” (p. 22). Moreover, museums and other cultural institutions offer nowadays virtual tours using VR technology (p.23). VR technology is slowly becoming an important part of our everyday lives.

Furthermore, this book analyzed immersive journalism. In the first chapter, the author also discussed current developments in journalism and environmental communication in the context of climate change.

The second chapter of the volume begins by outlining the theoretical framework on which the study is based on. Thus, two main paradigms are discussed here: technological determinism and constructivism. In the next part of this chapter, the author defines the main concepts involved in the reception process in VR media: immersion and presence. Furthermore, the author also addresses some theoretical models explaining how users engage with and experience immersive content. *Thus, “the immersive communication model, the two-level model for the emergence of spatial presence, the Modality-Interactivity-Agency-Navigability (MAIN) model”, and “the conceptual model of immersive journalism”* are outlined here (pp. 47-53). However, the author states that *the Two-Level Model for the Emergence of Spatial Presence* and *the Modality-Interactivity-Agency-Navigability (MAIN) model* are relevant to his research on immersive journalism.

In the third chapter of the book, the author focuses on detailing the impact of VR technologies on immersive journalism, as well as the challenges and opportunities of immersive journalism. Previous research emphasized that immersive media impacts the level of empathy, information processing, or media credibility (p. 14). Also, the most important asset of VR technology is the experience of presence (p. 67). The fourth chapter of the book outlines the mixed-methodology involved in conducting the research: an experiment and a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with experts from

Austria and Germany. The experimental-based findings regarding cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes of user engagement with 360-degree videos are presented and discussed in the fifth chapter of the book, while the results concerning the perspective of the experts regarding the applicability of 360-degree videos and the future opportunities for this kind of communication are illustrated and discussed in the sixth chapter of this study. The final chapter of the book is dedicated to concluding remarks, limitations of the study and future research perspectives.

In my opinion, the book has some major strengths, such as the clear structure of the study and the mixed methodology that includes both a factorial experiment and some semi-structured interviews with experts working in academia and in VR and filmmaking industry (p. 77). The expert insights provide valuable information about “the applications and relevance of VR technologies, the future of this technology, the elements that distinguish immersive media from 2D media, spatial and self-presence, *and* the cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcome of user engagement with immersive media” (pp. 102-106). The results from the experiment emphasize the impact of 360-degree videos, and based on the study results, the author recommends that 360-degree immersive videos should be used to raise awareness of environmental topics (p. 100).

An additional strength of this book is its comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach since the author skillfully integrates technology and communication concepts into his study. Furthermore, the author succeeded in building a strong systematic literature review that contributes to a better understanding of VR technology and 360-degree immersive videos.

Another strength of this book is its historical perspective on the development of VR technology. This perspective helps readers familiarize themselves with the topic of VR technology and better understand how this type of technology impacts journalism. The author also presents the implications and applications of VR technology and 360-degree videos in different domains, such as health, marketing, or education.

However, in my opinion, one of the major strengths of this book is the fact that in the third chapter of the book, the author included a critical reflection on the challenges the field of journalism faced over the last decade due to the rapid technological development of our society. In the past years, technology has greatly developed, impacting not only

how people communicate but also how they search for information and engage with it. Thus, the journalism field was also affected by this great technological development. Nowadays, people read news articles on mobile devices rather than buying printed newspapers or magazines. Also, the contemporary mobile user has a very different media consumption pattern from the one people used to have years ago. Now, our social media feed offers a wide variety of information, from news articles about conflicts around the world and politics to information about a close friend's holiday (p.30). In this context, the *platformization* of today's society has also greatly influenced journalism (p. 27). It changed the journalistic profession, and it also created new professions, such as *content creators*, *social media influencers* or *bloggers*. Furthermore, as a result of this great shift regarding people's engagement with journalistic content and how people consume media, *clickbait journalism* emerged in social media. Moreover, social media platforms use AI-based algorithms to curate information displayed on a user's feed based on their preferences and online behavior (p. 28). These AI-based algorithms transformed how social media users consume journalistic content because individuals receive news articles in their social media feeds that are in accordance with their political views, preferences, and online behavior.

This book provokes the reader to contemplate the current state of journalism and how technological development influences how people produce and consume information. Moreover, Amrhein's book significantly contributes to the study of immersive media, offering valuable insights into its potential to reshape journalism and communication. This book is essential for scholars, students, and practitioners working in communication and journalism. It also provides valuable guidance for those interested in leveraging immersive technologies for educational and social purposes.

CORNELIA MOȚĂIANU¹

OANA MARIA CĂLIN. 2022. *De la șezătoare la comunitate o line. Revitalizarea tradițiilor românești prin social media. From Gatherings to Online Communities: Revitalizing Romanian Traditions through Social Media*. București: Editura Etnologică. 150 p.

“From Gatherings to Online Communities: Revitalizing Romanian Traditions through Social Media” represents an important contribution to understanding how national traditions can be reintegrated into modern daily life through digital platforms. This work undertakes a multidisciplinary analysis of the revitalization of Romanian traditions, exploring aspects of authenticity, community, cultural heritage, emotions, and economic impact within virtual communities on social media. Additionally, the research proposes a conceptual model that defines virtual communities of tradition within the framework of the “living tradition” concept—one of belonging to a group through shared values—and integrates them into contemporary theories of communication sciences.

The author investigates the significance of the concept of tradition, addressing the idea that tradition, as a national identity element, is a dynamic and adaptable phenomenon. The paper explores ‘authenticity’ in the digital context, arguing that adapting traditions to a new medium does not necessarily distort their fundamental values but allows them to resonate with a modern generation of social media users. By studying the cases of virtual gatherings and cultural interest groups, such as the

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case study 'Semne Cusute în Acțiune' (SCîA), the book highlights how the reinterpretations of traditions through social media are not merely a reconstruction of the past but an active process of cultural reappropriation that embraces authenticity as a dynamic and evolving element.

The author introduces the idea of the virtual community as a space of convergence between cultural tradition and technological innovation. The concept of 'living tradition' used in the analysis is both innovative and well-argued, being inspired by contemporary ethnology, which redefines tradition as a continuously evolving process. Thus, online communities, although virtual, become spaces of authentic interaction and cultural exchange, functioning as extensions of traditional physical spaces. The work highlights that these virtual spaces fulfill functions similar to traditional spaces (such as gatherings) – providing emotional support, stimulating knowledge exchange, and preserving cultural identity. This work, therefore, makes a valuable contribution to understanding how social media can become a suitable medium for 'living tradition' and the continuity of cultural heritage.

A fundamental aspect of the research is analyzing how social media facilitates the transmission of cultural heritage by creating spaces for emotional connection among users. Through posts, comments, and virtual interactions, online platforms can generate a sense of belonging and communion similar to traditional communities. The book explores how traditional values are reinterpreted and personalized to be appealing in a contemporary context, with the emotional element becoming a crucial bridge in the process of cultural valorization. Thus, social media facilitates the transmission of traditions and amplifies them by creating a space where users emotionally identify with cultural heritage.

Oana Călin's also provides an in-depth analysis of the economic implications generated by revitalizing traditions through social media. It examines the role of these platforms in promoting commercial and non-profit projects featuring traditional Romanian motifs, contributing to the development of local economies and supporting artisans. The author argues that by engaging more people in these online groups, the accessibility and visibility offered by social media transform traditions into sources of inspiration and innovation for creative industries and even tourism. This process offers the opportunity for the economic

revitalization of rural communities. This innovative perspective highlights tradition's economic potential as a "cultural brand" in the digital environment.

A strong point of the book is its framing within communication and new media theories. The author convincingly argues that social media functions as a channel for disseminating and reconfiguring tradition, positioning these platforms as agents of cultural mediation. By applying theories of digital communication and virtual interaction, the study demonstrates how social media not only facilitates the distribution of cultural content but also plays an active role in the reinterpretation of traditional values. The research also situates virtual communities within the "communicative ecosystem" model, providing valuable arguments regarding their capacity to support participatory communication and to generate a two-way flow between creators/experts and cultural content recipients.

The book "From Gatherings to Online Communities: Revitalizing Romanian Traditions through Social Media" makes a valuable contribution to understanding the processes by which traditions can survive and even thrive in a globalized and digitized society. Through this endeavor, the author highlights the complexity and importance of transmitting tradition through modern technology, offering a fresh perspective on cultural values as living elements subject to continuous reinterpretation and recontextualization. By integrating Romanian traditions into the virtual space, the paper demonstrates that cultural heritage can be revitalized and continue to play an active role in daily life while providing new economic opportunities and a platform for intercultural communication.

JULIA SZAMBOLICS¹

MIHAI CHIRICĂ. 2024. *Celebritățile digitale și publicitatea. Utilizarea platformelor Instagram și TikTok dintr-o perspectivă comparativă/ Advertising endorsed by digital celebrities. A comparative perspective of Instagram and TikTok usage*. București: Tritonic. 250 p.

Mihai Chirică's debut publication as a unique author is entitled "Advertising endorsed by digital celebrities. A comparative perspective of Instagram and TikTok usage." The book is the outcome of his PhD thesis, which he successfully defended at Babeș-Bolyai University. Due to the extensive literature on the topic, the comparative cross-platform approach, and the mix of qualitative and quantitative results derived from empirical research, this publication is an important addition to the national literature on influencer marketing and social media influencers.

The development of the influencer marketing field presented the advertising industry with a new, extremely dynamic, fast-changing phenomenon. Platform affordances change, new social media platforms emerge, and algorithms undergo adjustments. As the reader progresses through the book's pages, the necessity for this book becomes increasingly evident.

In the introduction of the book, the author emphasizes the theoretical and practical implications of the research. The findings contribute to refining the Persuasion Knowledge model and support the importance of transparency

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in advertising campaigns on Instagram and TikTok. This work represents one of the few empirical studies conducted within the local context, utilizing an online questionnaire-based experiment with young adult respondents from Romania.

From a practical standpoint, this study has several implications for influencers, brands, marketers, and users. The author emphasizes the need for clear advertising disclosure laws in Romanian and European landscapes to uphold ethical standards in influencer marketing practices.

The book contains eight chapters. The first four chapters cover the context and the theoretical background, while chapters 5-8 outline the methodological approach and present the research outcomes, the limitations of the study, and future research opportunities.

Chapter 1 defines the concept of a digital celebrity or social media influencer and dives into the specifics of influencer marketing. The theoretical background of this book continues to evolve in Chapter 2. Here, the author presents the evolution and particularities of various social networking platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, X, YouTube, and Facebook, pointing out their significance for social media influencers and influencer marketing.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the most relevant theories for the study. Hereby, the author turns the reader's attention to the Uses and Gratification Approach and the Persuasion Knowledge Model. Due to important legislation regarding advertising disclosure in several countries, Mihai Chirica looks at the effects of advertising through influencers by referencing key studies published on the matter.

Chapter 4 concludes the theoretical aspects of the research. This chapter discusses the ethical considerations surrounding influencers' advertising activity, and, more importantly, the author draws attention to legal regulations on influencers' advertising activity on social networks from a European perspective. I believe this chapter is one of the most valuable for several reader groups, especially content creators and regulatory bodies.

The research design and the methodology are the subject of Chapter 5. The research aims to investigate the use of Instagram and TikTok by teenagers and young adults in Romania, evaluate the impact of influencers' advertising disclosure on recognition, and investigate the influence of

influencer advertising on Instagram and TikTok platforms on influencers' perceived credibility and advertising outcome variables (attitude towards the brand and purchase intention, respectively). The author uses a mixed-methods approach to achieve the study's objectives, incorporating two group interviews (25 participants) and a questionnaire experiment with 183 participants.

Chapters 6 and 7 extensively present the final results. The final chapter shows the main conclusions, the limitations, and future research opportunities.

The current book sheds light on the importance of advertising disclosure on social media and offers pertinent data on the social media consumption of young Romanian adults, their interaction with social media platforms, and the gratifications they achieve by using TikTok or Instagram. The questionnaire experiment determined the effects of advertising disclosure on the influencer's credibility, and it was developed with the support of a real micro-influencer. This aspect contributes to the originality of the research.

The book is written in an accessible manner, well documented, and offers an overview of fundamental and specific literature from both national and international sources on the topic. It is a must-read for policymakers and advertisers, as it not only offers valuable insights on a specific target audience but also presents data on advertising effectiveness, enabling marketers and advertisers to create more successful campaigns.

I recommend this book for scholars and students interested in influencer marketing. It offers not only an approachable research design but also a critical view of the current legislation regarding the online activities of social media influencers and the regulation of advertising disclosures.

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