

THE FIRST FEMALE PRIME MINISTER OF ROMANIA IN THE FOCUS OF THE NEWS: FRAMES IN THE NATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE

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Abstract:

Since January 2018, the government of Romania is headed by a woman, the first female prime minister in the history of the country. Beyond other controversial issues relating to the political situation in Romania, especially those in connection with the frequent changes of prime ministers in recent years, media covered the appointment of Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă as premier with special scrutiny, paying attention to details that were not regarded as such in the case of the prior appointed male prime ministers. Thus, discussions could be encountered in the press, on themes mostly related to women, like how does this person dresses, how is her hairdo, or what man she owes her success. This paper deals with the analyze of the media coverage of the topics related to the first woman in a political executive leading position in Romania, such as her nomination and her political activity and public appearance in the first months in office. Based on the results of a content analysis of the Romanian online news, the frames used by the national media in their coverage of these topics are investigated, the major themes on the subject are identified, and the main patterns of media coverage are delineated.

Key words: *female Prime-Minister; Romanian Government; content analysis; media coverage; frames*

Introduction

On January 6th, 2018, Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă was nominated as Prime Minister by the Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), party to which she belongs and that won the parliamentary elections in Romania on December 11th, 2016, with approximately 45% of the votes.

After the elections, the SDP formed a coalition government with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE). However, within a year, two governments, led by Sorin Grindeanu (4 January – 21 June 2017) and Mihai Tudose (29 June 2017 – 16 January 2018), were replaced as a result of disagreements between the prime ministers and the chairman of their party, Liviu Dragnea. While Mihai Tudose resigned, as a result of the withdrawal of political support from his party, Sorin Grindeanu was dismissed by a motion of censure tabled even by the parties that proposed and supported him for the position of premier, SDP and ALDE.

Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă was the second woman nominated by the SDP for the post of prime minister. Previously in December 2016, Sevil Shhaideh was herself nominated for this position, but the proposal was then rejected by the president of Romania, Klaus Iohannis. Mrs. Dăncilă's appointment in January 2018 as head of the Romanian government was controversial, not so much because she was a woman, but especially because she was already the third prime minister designated by the Social Democratic Party within only a year.

Yet, the fact that she is the first female prime minister of the country has not been ignored by the Romanian mass media, who started to discuss issues such as the extent to which a woman is suitable for this position, the ways she managed getting into power, or what and who is behind her ascension, etc. Also, beyond the usual media debates whenever a new prime minister is appointed, regardless of if a man or a woman, including references to political, organizational, administrative, strategic or economic qualities or virtues, the appointment of Mrs. Dăncilă has caused in Romanian media approaches and discussions that, in this form, did not appear in the case of the prior appointed male prime ministers: how does this woman look, how she dresses, how is her hairdo, what "female tricks" she uses, through what specific female strategies did she manage to have this rising political career or what man she owes her success? Etc.

This paper aims to analyse how the Romanian media approached these issues, and which were the prevailing discussion topics regarding both the appointment of Mrs. Dăncilă as prime minister and, further on, her activity and her public appearance in the first months in office. In this respect, a content analysis on the Romanian online news in the time frame of January – April 2018 was carried out. Based on the findings of this analysis the main features of the media covered portrait of the first woman in a political executive leading position in Romania are outlined.

1. Conceptual and theoretical framework

In the view of the constructivist perspective, to which the present approach is referred, people shape together their living environment through socio-cultural and psychological structures and devices and by establishing a social order in this environment (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Order is a biological necessity of people, but it is not part of the nature of things, so it must be created. The social construction of reality consists of the process of interpreting concrete events (physical reality), the result of this process (the social reality) being the common basis of communication and shared knowledge. Therefore, common knowledge is socially constructed and influences the definitions and interpretations of reality in the minds of individuals; this is how specific ideas, actions and knowledge are spread in a society. Human beings create the social world by externalizing and objecting their internalized and subjective meanings, experience and actions.

Within the constructivist paradigm there are several perspectives, among which can be mentioned the media-cultural constructivism, which attributes the function of “reality generator” to the individuals and the systems of the media, and the socio-cultural constructivism, which assigns this function to knowledge, communication, media and culture together (Weber, 2016). Whichever the perspective is chosen as a point of reference, the media are viewed in the present as a major factor in this process, as mass communication contributes significantly to building social reality and perpetuating some representations and categories that, although accepted as “natural”, are, in fact, social constructs. Besides, the basic idea with which the constructivist current appeared in the communication sciences, an idea that later was refined and reinterpreted, but without losing its essence, was that mass media do not describe an objective, actual reality in itself, as they construct it, the world set up through the news being a constructed reality (Neveu and Quéré, 1996: 10).

In sociology of journalism, the “social construction of reality” by journalists has become an idea that is no longer contested, but only debated and analyzed (Schudson, 1989). By translating itself into words and images, the reality presented in the media is no longer the reality itself, but a selected, interpreted, constructed one (Schlesinger, 1978; Weber, 2002). The act of making news is actually the act of constructing the reality itself, rather than making a description of reality (Tuchman, 1980: 12). The media are no longer seen as representing “the eyes from outside” who inform or relate about events, but are recognized as representing an actor of the events, an active participant in their construction, a “partner in the communication contract” (Charaudeau, 1992).

In this context, the term “media framing” is used to describe the process through which the media place the events and topics they relate to in a particular perspective or in certain “frameworks” (O’Sullivan et al., 1994). By framing to the events are given a field of meaning within which they can be understood (Severin and Tankard, 1992). Moreover, the media hints on events and topics can also be used by the people to make sense of their experiences and social situation (Baran and Davis, 2014). “Frames” are “patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, selection, accentuation and exclusion” (Gitlin, 2003: 7) of some thematic aspects, ways of structuring the elements that build up a media discourse (Beciu, 2011). Frames used by the media in stories contribute to defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgements, and suggesting remedies. Hence, media frames call the attention to some things while obscuring others (Entman, 1993). The reality presented in the news can rarely be an accurate representation of reality, because by simply choosing the topics, by relating them from a certain angle or point of view, by using certain sources, by the constraints determined by working practices, etc., journalists construct the reality through a selective process, without necessarily meaning that they intend to distort the truth (Graham, 2015). As such, without being by all means scrupulous chosen, the frames for a given story represent the effort of

the journalist to convey a story in a direct and meaningful way (Iyengar, 1987). News frames are frequently grown out of shared cultural narratives and myths, reflecting on them, and resonating with the larger social themes to which journalists tend to be keenly sensitive.

Mass media play thence a key role in shaping opinions and values in democratic societies, especially in the field of politics (Iyengar, 1991; McCombs, 2004; Baran and Davies, 2014). By preponderant covering the political actions and actors, both through informative and deliberative contents, media form into an active participant in building political reality, including the representation(s) of power, government, political leaders, be they male or female and so on.

The media coverage of Romanian female politicians has been approached from different perspectives, among which there can be mentioned here: the analyses of their media framing on the occasion of the various elections (Dan and Iorgoveanu, 2013; Roventă-Frumușani and Irimescu, 2018), as well as those of the visual self-framing during the election campaigns (Cmeciu and Pătruț, 2014); examining the preponderance of the trivializing framing, the tabloid one, of women in politics compared to men in the same field (Dan and Iorgoveanu, 2013); their media coverage in glossy magazines (Surugiu, 2012); the analyses of the construction of the public image (Roventă-Frumușani, 2015) and the ways of self-presentation and self-exposure, often in an erotic manner, of the female politicians, through the means and communication opportunities offered by the Internet, such as personal blogs, Facebook pages, etc. (Băluță, 2010; Roventă-Frumușani and Irimescu, 2018), as well as the approaches that aimed to analyse the extent to which some female politicians (as was the case with Elena Udrea) willingly present themselves through the exposure of their own body in the media as sexual subjects/ objects of sexual desire – symbols, in their view, not just of the sexual power, but of the political power too (Surugiu, 2012; Kaneva and Ibroscheva, 2014).

3. Methodology, objectives and research questions

Being regarded to the wider theoretical paradigm of socio-cultural constructivism, the research approach presented in this paper can be placed at the intersection of the studies on media framing, specific to the sociology of journalism (Borah, 2018) and the analyzes on the social construction of various topics of general public interest, specific to the constructivist sociology. Methodologically, the study can be placed on the line of researches that use content analysis to make inferences in systematic identification and emphasizing the features of messages (Deacon et al., 2010; Altheide and Schneider, 2013; Krippendorff, 2018).

The general objective of the research, whose results are presented in this paper, was to identify and analyse how the first female prime minister in the history of Romania was (re)presented in the online national and regional media, starting with the date of her nomination for this position of power and continuing with the first

months of the office. Thus, at a general level, the purpose of the research was to delimit the media constructed image of the prime minister of Romania in her first months in this (the highest) position of executive power. In this regard, there have been followed all the media covered aspects, from her political ascension, her political relations, her nomination and the context in which it took place, the appointment, the actions and the activities as prime minister, but also all other elements addressed and/ or highlighted by the media, such as gender characteristics (including physical appearance, whatever it involves) or, more broadly, her personal characteristics.

The central research questions were: What are the topics covered primarily in connection with the nomination, appointment and political activity of Mrs. Dăncilă as premier? What are the topics covered mainly in relation to this person, at a general level? Is the first female prime minister in the history of Romania, only because she is a woman, more often/ intensively media covered as “object”, as opposed to a man, under comparable conditions? Which are the frames used by the Romanian media in their coverage of all these subjects? In order to answer these research questions, I chose to analyse the media construction, namely the coverage of the themes related both to the political and personal issues relating to the first female prime minister in Romanian history.

The method used was the content analysis, which included both qualitative and thematic elements (Anderson, 2007; Altheide and Schneider, 2013; Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013), and implied the application of the basic principles of content analysis (delimitation of analytical units, working with categories, etc.) in two qualitative methodological processes: the inductive development of categories and their deductive application (Gunter, 2000; Mayring, 2000). The grid of analysis comprised 18 items, each with a number of categories ranging from two to 15. Depending on the unit of analysis, the categories were either exclusive (with only one possible category to choose, as in the case of items related to the type of media, type of the article, the tone of the article, the main appeal of the article) or multiple (such as in the case of items respecting the topic of the article, the issues mentioned, etc.).

The corpus of analysis consisted of press articles selected from national and regional media in Romania in the online version. Regarding the procedure for sampling the articles included in the research, in the online search engine www.google.com I used the keyword “Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă”. In the Google menu, I chose “News” and in “Tools” I selected “Recent” in order to be able to delimit the time frame. This was determined by choosing “Custom Range” and limiting the search to the time interval from January 15th to April 15th, 2018. The media articles of the first sixteen pages resulted from the Google search were included in the analysis. The total number of articles included in the analysis was 162. All considered entries were exclusively online Romanian press articles, in Romanian language.

4. Results

In the following section are presented and discussed various findings of the research. There are brought into focus especially the topics and the issues mediatized in connection with the first Romanian female premier, as well as the main aspects with regard to the characteristics of media coverage.

4.1. Media covered topics and issues

The content of the articles included in the analysis has been assessed in terms of the topic addressed, the subject approached as the main issue discussed, and the various aspects that were mentioned in the article, without necessarily being the main theme. Because in some articles not only one major topic was dealt with, but several (see Table 1), as well as not one, but several of the issues highlighted in Table 2 were found in some of the articles, the results are presented using not percentages, but gross numbers.

Tab. 1. The main topics or subjects of the articles analyzed.

Topic of the article/ the main subject addressed	Number of articles (n=162)
Prime minister's political agenda (events, meetings, statements, interviews, visits, etc.)	75
Mrs. Dăncilă's mistakes, faux pas, gaffes, solecisms, gaps (in general)	59
Nomination/ appointment of the first female prime minister of Romania	57
The linguistic (un)skills of the prime minister in the Romanian language (blunders, solecisms, gaps, mistakes)	38
Corruption in connection with Social Democratic Party	27
The political strategy of the prime minister (or/and of her cabinet)	21
History of her political and/or professional activity	20
Lack of premier's political/ strategic/ administrative/ organizational skills; inabilities in terms of political strategy	19
Incompetence of the Social Democratic Party (in general)	19
Prime minister's political activity (generally)	16
Mrs. Dăncilă's outward appearance (clothing, accessories, hairstyle, makeup, etc.)	15
Her economic strategy (or/and of her cabinet)	12
The linguistic (un)skills of the prime minister in English (blunders, solecisms, gaps, mistakes)	8
Wealth of Mrs. Dăncilă	8
The (positive) fact that a woman has achieved to occupy a position of political power/ leadership in Romania	6
Her political/ strategic/ administrative/ organizational skills/ abilities	1
Others	12

As can be seen in the Table 1, the main topics covered in the articles analyzed can be delimited in several categories. A first category comprises relatively neutral and common topics in the context of the journalists' covering political life in general, and of the appointment of a new prime minister in particular. Thus, more than half of the articles analyzed had as one of the main themes the current political activity of the premier: 75 articles were related to her meetings, visits, events, viewpoints, stands, statements, interviews, etc. and 16 articles covered her current political activity at a general level. Other topics that can be also included in this category are: her nomination and appointment as prime minister of Romania (theme covered in 57 articles); the political strategy (of her and/or of her cabinet, topic in 21 articles), the history of her political and/ or professional activity (20 articles), and the economic strategy (of her and/or of her cabinet, in 12 articles).

A second category of topics that were frequently covered includes less neutral themes, many of them (such as the language skills) being less common in the context of media coverage of the nomination and appointment of a prime minister. For the most part, these topics have been negative and critical media coverage of the premier. Thus, 59 articles had as one of the main themes the mistakes, faux pas, gaffes, solecisms or gaps of the prime minister in general – both speech and cognitive blunders (due to lack of knowledge and general culture, poor understanding of terms and concepts, etc.), and blunders in terms of diplomatic protocol. 46 articles treated as the main subject the premier's lack of language skills: faux pas, solecisms, mistakes and gaps (as for grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, etc.) mainly in Romanian (topic in 38 articles), but also when speaking English (in 8 articles). Other main topics of the articles that can be included in this category are: Mrs. Dăncilă's lack of political/ strategic/ administrative/ organizational skills, her failure and inability with regard to political strategy (19 articles dealt with this theme), as well as the wealth of the premier (her and that of her family, accumulated by questionable means – a topic centrally discussed in eight articles).

This latter topic has often been addressed together with another one: the corruption in relation to the Social Democratic Party, to which Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă belongs (central theme in 27 articles). In many of the articles that referred to the prime minister's wealth, there were made links between her political rise in the SDP, then as the head of the Romanian government, and the generous amounts donated by her and her husband to the Social Democratic Party – a way to do political career through corrupt means. In addition to corruption, another set of issues related to the SDP were related to the party's incompetence, in particular to the inabilities of its current leaders to run Romania (topic in 19 articles).

Finally, two other categories of topics discussed by the media referred again exclusively to the prime minister, but not to her political activity, her strategies, etc., but: a) on the one hand, to her external appearance (such as how she looks, how she dresses, her hair, eyelashes, makeup, etc.), Mrs. Dăncilă being often treated in these articles (15) as an "object", both in a negative and a positive way (the latter one

particularly in tabloid newspapers); b) on the other hand, to the (positive) fact that a woman has come to occupy a position of political power/ leadership in Romania, such an approach being uncommon in the articles analyzed, but still present in six of them.

Tab. 2. Aspects or issues mentioned in the articles analyzed.

The article mentions:	Number of articles (n=162)
Controversial statements or actions of the prime minister	73
Mrs. Dăncilă's inability to express herself correctly/ to speak correctly	53
Her incompetence (political / professional, etc.)	46
Aspects of her lack of political intelligence	42
The impact of SDP governance (negative aspects)	36
The fact that Mrs. Dăncilă is inappropriate for the position she occupies / inadequate to represent Romania	33
The fact that she is an obedient political actor/ a political "puppet"/ "marionette"	30
General, unspecified reference to her outfit/ posture (how she "looks", how she "presents" herself)	16
Aspects related to Mrs. Dăncilă's hairstyle	14
Controversies regarding justice and changing the laws of justice	14
The (positive) fact that Romania has for the first time in history a female prime minister	13
The fact that the premier owes her political rise to questionable means (relations, donations to SDP, etc.)	6
How Mrs. Dăncilă dresses/ aspects regarding her clothing	4
How she makes up/ aspects related to her face/ makeup	3
Aspects referring to her sex appeal	2
Aspects about her intelligence (in general)	2
The fact that the prime minister owes her political rise to some "feminine" ways/ "female tricks", or simply being a "woman"	1

Table 2 presents in detail various relevant aspects that have been mentioned in the articles, without necessarily constituting their main theme. As above stated, due to the qualitative and thematic character of the content analysis, the categories were inductively developed based on the evaluation of the content of the articles. The results obtained show, as seen in the table, that the most frequently mentioned issues in connection with the prime minister after her nomination and in the first months in office have been marked by criticism or revealed negative personal elements: her controversial statements or actions (mentioned in 73 articles); her language mistakes, faux pas, blunders, gaps (in 53 articles); her incompetence (political, professional, etc. in 46 articles); the lack of intelligence (in 42 articles); the fact that she is not suitable/ capable for the position of premier (in 33 articles). Other

issues, also negative, linked Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă to the SDP: for example, in 30 articles there was mentioned, in one form or another, that she is the political “marionette” of the SDP’s controversial leader Liviu Dragnea and/or that she is an obedient person, “servile”, “subservient” to him (which would explain her ascension in this position of power). Moreover, the authors of 36 articles also highlighted in one way or another how SDP governance, including that led (more or less) by Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă, harms Romania, and 14 articles mentioned the controversies on justice and on changing the laws of justice in favour of the corrupt members of the governance and generally of the SDP.

Various aspects related to the outward appearance of the first female prime minister of Romania have been specified in relatively numerous articles: aspects of how she generally looks (in 16 articles); how she has the hair-do (in 14 articles); how she dresses (in 4 articles); how she makes up, what “tricks” does she use for her face (in 3 articles); what sex appeal she has (in 2 articles).

Many of these topics, which have not much to do with the premier’s competences, are found in articles as criticism and especially irony of the journalists referring to Mrs. Dăncilă. Among the topics in this category there is, for example, the comparison that the journalist and writer Cristian Tudor Popescu has made, starting with Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă’s hairstyle at the time, in a telephone interview at the Evening Journal on January 16, 2018, on Digi24 TV channel, between the premier and the monkey specie hamadryas baboon. The comparison itself, the interview in its entirety (in which C. T. Popescu made also other statements that could have been considered defamatory), the rapid own ex officio referral of the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD) regarding the journalist’s statement, the fine that the journalist was given by the NCCD, as well as the ironic response of C. T. Popescu to the fine that he received (and which he later contested), were taken over and discussed in numerous articles from different media, some of them having the same title, such as: *Cristian Tudor Popescu compared Viorica Dăncilă with a monkey – VIDEO*, published on 17.01.2018 on the websites: *Știri pe surse*, <https://www.stiripesurse.ro/>; *Știri de Cluj*, <https://www.stiridecluj.ro/>; *B1 TV*, <https://b1.ro/>. The prompt own ex officio referral of the NCCD was noted and addressed in articles such as *CTP, Viorica Dăncilă and the baboon. How does the journalist defend himself against NCCD’s accusations (Digi 24 HD, https://www.digi24.ro/, 19.01.2018)*, and his fine of 1,000 lei was discussed later in articles such as: *The baboon and the Teleorman* (published on the opinion platform *Republica*, <https://republica.ro/>, 01.02.2018) or *“Hamadryas baboon”. The reaction of C. T. Popescu after he was fined by NCCD (Digi 24 HD, https://www.digi24.ro/, 01.02.2018)*.

Some media have also ridiculed the look and the fashion taste of the prime minister, by comparing her with a peasant woman or a housewife, or even calling her “fish wife” (*țață* in original in Romanian), a pejorative word used to designate a tasteless, vulgar woman: *The secrets of fish wife Viorica, the new premier proposed*

by SDP (the news website *Flux 24*, <https://www.flux24.ro/>, 16.01.2018) or *The peasant woman Vasilica – Viorica is a lady beside Cosette* (the newspaper *Național*, <http://www.national.ro/>, 18.01.2018).

And yet, most of the positive remarks in the Romanian media about Mrs. Dăncilă referred to her outward appearance, especially her fashion taste and her hairstyle. In other words, what in most media was criticized and ironized, in some other media was praised or appreciated. It is worth mentioning that most of these positive remarks about the outward appearance of the prime minister can be found in articles published in tabloid newspapers, characterized by a journalistic style based on sensational news, gossips and rumours about celebrities and public figures, as well as by excessive use of attracting attention photos (Burleson Mackay, 2017). Such an article, with a title containing the exclamation “*Look what an elegant premier we will have!*”, was published on 19.01.2018 by the tabloid *Click!* (<https://www.click.ro/>), with numerous photographs and explanations about premier’s preferences regarding clothing and accessories. Figure 1 shows the beginning of this article:

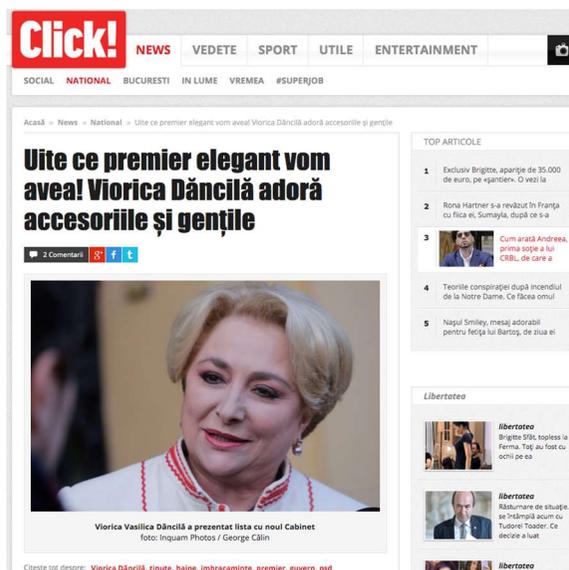


Fig.1. The homepage of the article *Look what an elegant premier we will have! Viorica Dăncilă loves accessories and handbags*, the website of *Click!*, 19.01.2018.

Source: <https://www.click.ro/> Screenshot from: <https://www.click.ro/news/national/uite-ce-premier-elegant-vom-avea-viorica-dancila-adora-accesoriile-si-gentile>

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<https://inquamphotos.com/photos/bucuresti-viorica-dancila-psd-83548>

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Other tabloid newspapers drew the attention, also in a positive way, to Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă’s change of hairdressing, as in the articles: *Viorica Dăncilă*,

change of look. The designated prime minister changed her hairstyle (Libertatea, <https://www.libertatea.ro/>, 23.01.2018) or Radical transformation of look. How the appointed Romanian premier, Viorica Dăncilă, publicly displayed herself! (Cancan, <https://www.cancan.ro/>, 23.01.2018). The same change was also noted in other media, such as the television channels PRO-TV and Kanal D, although in a more neutral way than in tabloids: Viorica Vasilica Dăncilă, change of look before occupying the chair of Victoria Palace (PRO-TV, <https://stirileprotv.ro/>, 23.01.2018), respectively How did the nominated premier, Viorica Dăncilă, appeared at a meeting with UDMR's leaders. Everyone noticed this change (Kanal D, <http://www.stirilekanald.ro/>, 23.01.2018).

Although no comparison was made with the media coverage, in the same conditions (nomination, first months in office) of a male prime minister, it can be said, that, probably, the outward appearance, the clothing, the hairdo, etc. of a man do not attract the same attention of the media, being much less frequently mentioned by journalists. A possible conclusion, which requires further research to confirm it, is that media attention to the external appearance of a person in a position of power is much greater when the person is female, thus confirming the social gender-related expectations and roles: a woman, even in a position of power, must “remain a woman”, that is, she should strive “to look good”; in the case of a man, if he is a good leader, makes good decisions and has the desired results, the external aspect is more or less negligible.

4.2. Aspects concerning the media coverage of the first female prime minister of Romania

The type of media in which the articles were published, along with the type of articles are the first items that characterize the coverage of the analyzed topic. As can be seen in Table 3, most of the articles were published on news websites (47 articles, i.e. 29 %), followed by articles on websites of television stations (35 articles, i.e. 22 %), and articles published online by newspapers in the broadsheet-format (30 articles out of 162, i.e. 19%). The articles from other media (websites of radio stations, regional/ local newspapers, aggregated websites, tabloids, news agencies, opinion websites/ online platforms, reviews/ magazines, and women’s magazines) accounted also for a total of 30% of the overall analyzed items, the proportion of articles in each of these media being below 10%.

Tab. 3. Types of media in which the articles analyzed were published.

	Type of media (n=162)	Number of articles in:	%
1	News websites	47	29
2	Websites of TV stations	35	22
3	National newspapers in broadsheet-format	30	19
4	Websites of radio stations	11	7

5	Regional/ local newspapers	10	6
6	Aggregate websites	9	5
7	National newspapers in tabloid format	8	5
8	News agency	5	3
9	Opinion websites/ online platforms	4	2
10	Reviews/ magazines	2	1
11	Women's magazines	1	1
	Total	162	100%

Next, the belonging of the analyzed articles to certain categories was investigated. As seen in Table 4, most of the items were articles of analysis, which means articles that gave a more detailed approach to the topic, analyzes and views of the journalists. From the total of 162 articles, 35 (i.e. 22%) were of this kind, while 33 articles (i.e. 20%) were reportages, meaning those articles in which a particular topic or event, related to the investigated theme, was reported and analyzed, sometimes "on the spot". On the next place were the simple news (26 items, meaning 16% of the total), that is, those news in which the topic was treated or reported, usually succinct, without the journalist analyzing or expressing his/ her opinion, followed by opinion articles (24, i.e. 15% of the total) meaning those articles in which reflections and a well-defined and expressed opinion of the journalist were presented. Other types of analyzed articles were: 17 review articles (10%), i.e. those articles that provided a retrospective or recapitulative perspective on the topic or summarized the current state of knowledge/ understanding of the subject, targeting the general public; 12 articles that analyzed previous interviews or online postings (e.g. on Facebook or other social media); eight overview articles (5%), that is those articles that combined the synthesized content of several specialized articles into one broad-spectrum article; six television programs (4%), meaning videos along with written texts (news or/and analyses), and one interview (1%).

Tab. 4. Types of the articles included in analysis.

	Type of the article (n=162)	Number	%
1	Articles of analysis	35	22
2	Reportages	33	20
3	Simple news	26	16
4	Opinion articles	24	15
5	Review articles	17	10
6	Articles analyzing previous interviews or online postings (e.g. on Facebook or other social media)	12	7
7	Overview articles	8	5
8	TV programs (videos and written texts – news or/ and analyses)	6	4
9	Interviews	1	1
	Total	162	100%

Other points of interest for researching the media coverage of the subjects related to the first female prime minister of Romania (investiture, political activity, public appearances, but also any related news or analyses, e.g. including those about her personal characteristics and achievements) were to what extent the articles were written in a logical or an emotional manner, leaving that impression when they are read (see Figure 2, which show the main appeal of the analyzed articles), respectively the extent to which the articles were written in a neutral tone, or rather in an dedicated/ engaged tone, whether positive or negative (see Figure 3).

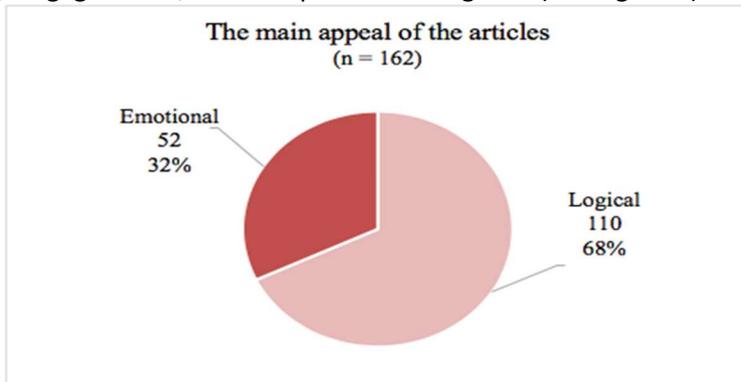


Fig. 2. The main appeal of the articles analyzed.

According to the research data, 110 out of 162 articles analyzed (i.e. 68%) have used arguments or descriptions based on logic (e.g. invoking verified data, scientific facts, real history cases, etc.), while 52 articles (32% of the total) were written in an emotional style, the arguments or descriptions presented being based more on emotions, on the appeal to fear, myths, prejudices or even sophisms. The articles were coded according to the dominant arguments used by their author.

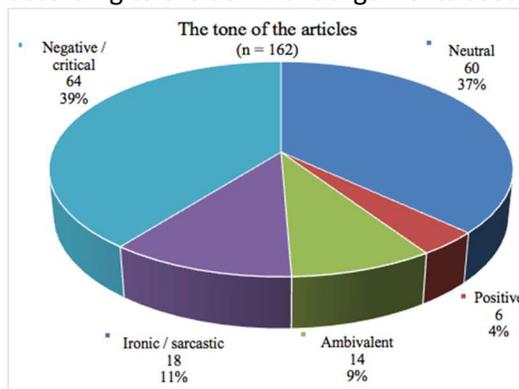


Fig. 3. The tone of the articles analyzed.

Figure 3 illustrates the tone in which the articles regarding the first Romanian female prime minister, after her nomination and in the first months of her term, were written. As can be noticed, most articles (54%) had a dedicated/ an engaged tone: only 4% were written in a positive tone, while most of them (39%) were critical, having preponderantly a negative tone; in addition, as distinguished during the conduct of the content analysis, which led to the inductive development of the analysis categories, some articles, apart from the negative or critical tone, had distinctively an ironic or sarcastic tone (this was the case of 18 articles, i.e. 11% of the total).

In a neutral tone there were written 60 articles (37%), while in 14 articles (9%) both neutral or positive, and critical or negative elements were used, and therefore they were assigned in the “ambivalent tone” category. In this regard, the articles were as well coded according to the prevailing tone used.

Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of the research presented in this paper was to evaluate the mediatization and the media construction of the first female prime minister in Romania's history, starting with her nomination for this position and continuing with the first months of her mandate. Through the content analysis method, the main topics, themes and aspects covered on the subject were delimited, and the various features of the media coverage, such as the type of articles, their prevailing tone and style, etc., were outlined.

A first finding about these aspects is the predominance of the negative, critical, and even ironic/ sarcastic tone of the articles that had the first female Romanian premier as a subject. It is worth mentioning that this critical and ironic tone was determined, in most of the articles analyzed, not by the fact that it was about a woman, but by the fact that this person has made, since the beginning of her term of office, numerous blunders in the political action. The national and local press in Romania did not consider her and did not (re)present or media construct her as a strong and capable person, who managed on her own to have an ascending political career and to accede due to such qualities in the highest executive position in Romania. Instead, most articles highlighted the lack of her qualities, her deficiencies on multiple areas, her failures, as well as the dubious or at least suspicious means and motives, such as the consistent donations to SDP, which led to her political rise. She was not media represented as a model of a strong woman, but rather as a model of a docile, obedient female, servant to the interests of a strong man who in fact leads not only a party, but also Romania.

Without doing anything to change the image of women in Romania or at least to show her qualities and her own authority and power, the female prime minister, as she is covered by the media, appears rather as the opposite of a strong woman, completely or at least largely under the control of powerful men, who make the

decisions behind the scenes and have, in reality, the power. According to many media, through her actions, the female Romanian premier has shown that she unconditionally supports the party leader's interests and that her purpose is to obey and implement his plans (such as those relating to the changes to the Penal Code). Such facts have determined many of the articles' authors to portray her as not the holder of a position of power, but only as a political "puppet".

As regards the topics covered primarily relating to the prime minister, besides those concerning political activities, there are to be noted the themes that highlighted her blunders and mistakes, especially the linguistic and logical ones, but also those of thinking and knowledge. According to information from the media, Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă, both as a European Parliamentarian and as Prime Minister, has made many faux pas, gaffes, solecisms, errors and provoked a lot of awkwardnesses, showing many linguistic loopholes, but also deficiencies as concerns logic, and political and general culture. As a result, it can be said, that her media coverage, both in the first days after the nomination, as well as on occasion of her appointment and in the first months of her term of office, turned into a real "hunt" of mistakes and blunders, who have become in many news the leitmotiv associated with her actions and her person in general. In this context, many of the articles analyzed had a critical and ironic tone regarding the female premier, being a way to banter and, in some cases, even to insult her.

The investiture for the first time of a woman as prime minister of Romania has raised, therefore, the interest of the media, discussions and debates on various political and personal aspects. However, the fact that, for the first time in its history, Romania has a female prime minister, it has not been highlighted as such in many mass media, but other elements, rather controversial, were predominantly emphasized and debated.

As has been stated, the media frames call the attention to some things while obscuring others (Entman, 1993). According to the data of the present study, the main frames in the media coverage of the first female prime minister in Romania, as evidenced by the content analysis carried out on her appointment and in the first months in office, were the negative and controversial aspects, but not those related to her gender, but those related to her subordination and political obedience to some political leaders who run in fact the country, out of the shadow, as well as those related to her political inability and incompetence, illustrated by the numerous political blunders, linguistic faux pas, and diplomatic protocol gaffes. Furthermore, it can be said, as shown by the research results, that the only frame that is set out by the premier' gender and which has also been used often in the media coverage of Mrs. Dăncilă, this time not only in a negative, but also in a positive way, was her outward appearance. Thus, 15 of the analyzed articles addressed the external appearance or semblance of the prime minister as the main topic, and other articles also mentioned subsidiary such issues.

Although no comparative analysis has been made with the case of a man in the same situation, it may be presumed that the media would not have given the same attention and interest to the outward appearance, fashion tastes, clothing, accessories, hairstyle, makeup or eyelashes of a man. Although some of these were criticized or ironized in some media, paradoxically, in others – especially in tabloid newspapers – they were appreciated and praised, and in fact, they were among the few positive aspects publicized in relation to the first woman in the position of prime minister of Romania. Taking into account the quite significant interest expressed by the media for her external appearance, one can say that the first female premier in Romanian history has been media covered, perhaps more intensely than a man in comparable conditions, as an “object”, only as a result of her gender.

Research limitations

Finally, it should be noted, that the study whose results are presented in this paper has, as any sociological research, some methodological and research design limitations, which to some extent can influence the results and their interpretation. Further research on the same subject would be required to verify fidelity and establish the validity of the data, as in any content analysis research. Moreover, other additional research questions and analysis directions on this topic require further investigations. Therefore, all the conclusions drawn must be considered within these limitations.

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