Article

The Spectacle of "Patriotic Violence" in Romania: Populist Leader George Simion's Mediated Performance

Teodora-Elena Grapă [1,*] and Andreea-Alina Mogoş [2]

[1] Doctoral School in Political and Communication Sciences, Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania
[2] Department of Journalism and Digital Media, Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania

* Corresponding author (teodora.grapa@ubbcluj.ro)

Abstract

Political actors who adapt their performance to the logic of politainment gain visibility and success in the public sphere. Such is the case of George Simion, an emerging politician and leader of the newest parliamentary party, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), a populist radical right party that proved especially attractive to Romanian diaspora voters. This study focuses on the discursive and stylistic dimensions of Simion's newsworthiness and mediatization. Additionally, a multiplatform analysis of his populist communication content and style aims to determine degrees of populism. As such, we propose a mixed-methods multimodal approach that combines corpus linguistics and semi-automated content analysis with thematic coding and visual semiotic analysis. The media-reported performance analysis focuses on content (*n* = 963) produced by three popular online news media outlets (*Digi24.ro*, *Adevărul.ro*, and *Antena3.ro*) between May 13th 2015 and April 30th 2022, while the analysis of Simion's discourse examines his Telegram channel's feed (738 messages and 383 images) between March 15th 2021 and April 30th 2022, and his authored texts published in *Adevărul.ro* (*n* = 116) between July 8th 2014 and April 30th 2022. The results indicate that news media reports are defined by conflict (aggression, violence), scandalization, negativity, emotionality, and by a prevalent use of arresting quotes that employ colloquial language (sarcasm, vulgarity). Simion's celebrity populism is styled through an "ideal candidate," "populist campaigner" image and framed through the emotional glorification (unionism, patriotism, Orthodoxy) of a potentially united "homeland," a democratic space that reflects the unadulterated will of ordinary Christian-Orthodox Romanians whose sovereignty is currently undermined by corrupt political elites. He invokes historical narratives (e.g., founding fathers, retrospective utopia) reinforced through othering the EU and ethnic/sexual minorities as forces that threaten the purity of "the people."

Issue

This article is part of the issue "Political Communication in Times of Spectacularisation: Digital Narratives, Engagement, and Politainment" edited by Salvador Gómez-García (Complutense University of Madrid), Rocío Zamora (University of Murcia), and Salomé Berrocal (University of Valladolid).

1. Introduction

George Simion is a Millennial populist politician who uses the affordances of new media as political communication tools by proposing highly polarizing topics (Ofițeru, 2020). He initially entered the public arena as a campaigner for the unification of Romanian-speaking territories and an activist for the rights of Romanian minorities and diaspora members within the European Union. He was part of right-leaning groups and movements such as 2012 Action or the anti-corruption Resist, rooted within United We Save social networks (Marincea & Popovici, 2022). He joined the world of politics by unsuccessfully participating in the 2019 European Parliament elections ("Cine este George Simion," 2021). In December 2019, he became co-president and since

March 2022, the sole president of the newest parliamentary party Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), a populist radical right party (PRRP) that ran on an ethno-nationalist and anti-globalization platform calling for the unification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Particularly attractive for the Romanian diaspora (23% of votes) from countries with large Romanian communities (Italy, Germany, Greece) and openly supported by the Romanian Orthodox Church (Gherghina & Mișcoiu, 2022), AUR was surprisingly voted into the Romanian Parliament on December 2020 (9.1% votes), becoming the fourth political power in Romania. The party's rise happened on the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic's rising unemployment, a crisis that was discursively politicized to make room for a populist opposition to the establishment (Doiciar & Crețan, 2021).

But Romanian politics is not new to populism, as populist movements and parties have accompanied post-communist Romania through its transition towards liberal democracy (Norocel, 2010; Werkmann & Gherghina, 2018). After 1989, two PRRPs were founded in 1990 and 1991: the Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR) and the Greater Romania Party (PRM). Both parties' proposed presidential candidates played significant roles in elections held during the first post-communism decade: in 1992, Gheorghe Funar (PUNR) obtained 11% of votes; in 1996, the PRM candidate Corneliu Vadim Tudor (4.7%) and Gheorghe Funar (3.2%) came in fifth and sixth, while 2000 marked the peak of political support for the far-right with Corneliu Vadim Tudor's 33% score, the highest post-1990 electoral score for any far-right politician in Europe at that time (Thorpe, 2012). For years, Corneliu Vadim Tudor and PRM engaged in "slanderous campaigns against democratic politicians and intellectuals" (Gross & Tismaneanu, 2005, p. 148). PRM served as a political trampoline for another populist leader, George ("Gigi") Becali, a former shepherd turned real-estate mogul and president of the New Generation Party-Christian Democratic (PNG-CD) since 2004, whose public image is associated with religious ethos, as he called himself "The Warrior of Light" or "of Christ" (Asavei, 2022, p. 44). In a country ranked as the most religious out of 34 European countries (Evans & Baronavski, 2018), the Orthodox Church remains Romania's most important religious denomination (85.3%, according to the 2022 census), exerting a considerable sway on local politics (Turcescu & Stan, 2005), even openly supporting AUR (Gherghina & Mișcoiu, 2022). Both Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Gigi Becali promoted Orthodox values and traditional gender roles, which are equated with "Romanianism" (Soare & Tufis, 2021), their discourses encompassing anti-elitist, ultra-nationalist, antisemitic, anti-Roma, anti-Hungarian, and homophobic rhetoric (Asavei, 2022; Corbu et al., 2017). Apart from adopting similar discourses, AUR condemns what they believe is a political establishment built on the legacy of a pre-1989 Romania (Popescu & Vesalon, 2022). The party currently dominates the Romanian populist landscape as the only Romanian PRRP represented in Parliament. In line with some of his populist counterparts and predecessors, George Simion has also indicated an interest in the presidency of Romania (Sirbu, 2022).

The global populist communication phenomenon has been increasingly characterized by the high mediatization and celebritization of populist leaders' strategic controversial performances, adapted to the logic of politainment through distinctive emotional patterns (Bartoszewicz, 2019). As such, it has been argued that when studying populism, with few exceptions, it is the leader who should be the main focus due to their centrality in connecting with their populist followers, especially since their relevance transcends the large variety of links between populists and their parties/movements across different regional contexts (Moffit, 2016). AUR's growing mediatic prevalence stems from scandals involving Simion, whose verbal and physical aggression towards various political actors has been characterized by media commentators as "patriotic violence," which he justifies as him channeling the "screams of millions of desperate Romanians" (Fati, 2022). The issues he highlights are discussed in various online platforms connected to AUR: alternative news sites and echo chambers on Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and TikTok (Doiciar & Crețan, 2021). Moreover, AUR and Simion's growing online footprint has expanded on Telegram, a messaging app that has become increasingly favored by the far right, following banning practices on other platforms and general deplatformization efforts (Van Dijck et al., 2021). Simion himself encourages the public to "install Telegram and get on the Supporters of George Simion group," as "we need alternatives for Facebook" (Simion, 2021). Considering Simion's current centrality to Romanian populism and his high mediatization, our research proposes a multimodal content analysis (text and image) that aims to contribute to academic knowledge on politainment and populist communication through a multifaceted mixed-methods approach focused on a populist leader's mediated performance. The novelty of this study is also seen in its examination of the discursive features of religious nationalism and unionism as peculiarities of understudied populist communication style specific to a Christian-Orthodox, East-European, former communist country. As such, our research combines corpus linguistics and semi-automated content analysis with thematic coding and visual semiotic analysis to identify the discursive and stylistic dimensions of Simion's multimodal performance. Additionally, the multiplatform analysis—mainstream Romanian online news media and Telegram—aims to determine degrees of populism in Simion's discourse.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Politainment and Celebrity Populism

Any social establishment can be described as a stage where individuals perform roles dramatized by language,

mannerisms, and costumes (Goffman, 1956), often congruent with the culture and norms of the respective social setting. Goffman (1956, p. 13) defines performance as "the activity of an individual which occurs…before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers." Seen at "the heart of society's real unreality," the production of various performances is epitomized through its goal as well as its outcome, which is the spectacle (Debord, 1995, p. 13). Whether in news media, advertising, or entertainment, the spectacle is increasingly the omnipresent product and common language of both production and consumption spheres. As such, media communication practices are more infused with entertainment value, especially in political communication, where the media system's commercial interests, when combined with political actors' interests, become oriented towards a specific entertainment category: politainment (Dörner & Vogt, 2002). The term describes a political reality constructed on two indelibly linked levels that mark a phenomenon labeled "celebrity politics" (Street, 2004): entertaining politics, in which political actors use certain strategies to "celebritize themselves to help win media attention and elections" (Riegert & Collins, 2015, p. 7) or when political candidates trade on their background in entertainment to garner votes; and political entertainment, seen in celebrities engaging with politics (Street, 2019), and in the political tropes and themes employed by the entertainment industry (Wodak & Koller, 2008).

Contemporary politics is increasingly characterized by the "presidentialization" and celebritization of political leaders, who "have become as important as—if not more important than—policies and platforms in influencing how people vote" (Moffit, 2016, p. 64). This interdependent relationship between politics and the media, crystalized within the celebrity politics phenomenon, is part of a larger process of mediatization and spectacularization of politics and society at large, a "Mediatization 2.0" given the widespread utilization of social networks (Mazzoleni, 2014), which illustrates how the logic of the political stage adapts to media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979) and show business (Duffy & Pooley, 2019). The consequences are seen not just in election campaign communication but also in the emergence of media scandals (Cottle, 2006), which are mediated processes "necessarily bound to attention and visibility—both provided by and through mass media" that have politicians stage themselves for an endlessly present audience of prospective voters (Vorberg & Zeitler, 2019, p. 5). The increased ubiquity of political scandals is grounded in contemporary media culture and sustained by their newsworthiness (Bednarek & Caple, 2014) through social media networks and echo chambers (Solovev & Pröllochs, 2022). Due to its emphasis on the people's general will and its resulting capacity to mobilize citizens by actuating identifications with in-/out-groups (Blassnig et al., 2019), populist political communication epitomizes these mediated processes

through celebrity populism. This phenomenon "changes the political processes into confrontation, conflict, and [the] performance" of charismatic leaders who embody a distinctive form of normalized emotionality seen in the discursive framing of problems and their solutions (Bartoszewicz, 2019, p. 6).

Populist leaders' perceived centrality within the populist phenomenon is owed to well-balanced performances of extraordinariness—appearing legitimate and authoritative, alongside ordinariness—staged through rhetoric and fashion, but also "bad manners" such as the frequent use of vulgar language, political incorrectness, and scandalous disruptive behavior (Moffit, 2016), which serve to attract media attention due to their high news value (Mazzoleni, 2008). News values theory is rooted in the concept of gatekeeping (White, 1950) and news selection factors (Galtung & Ruge, 1965) and refers to the criteria that journalists apply in the process of selecting and constructing stories that are deemed newsworthy (Bednarek & Caple, 2014; Harcup & O'Neill, 2016). In the case of populist communication, even "quality" news media have been increasingly opening the gates for populists (Mudde, 2019). Their newsworthiness is spectacularly constructed through Negativity, Eliteness, Unexpectedness (Molek-Kozakowska & Wilk, 2021), Conflict, and Proximity (Schmidt, 2020), largely due to their controversial performances that violate socially-accepted norms through scandalization (Wodak, 2015), dramatization (Albertazzi, 2007), as well as the politicization of certain issues (Ernst et al., 2019). Populists exploit political mediatization on the backbone of crises that are discursively framed within the confines of political divides (Bobba & Hubé, 2021) and employ a hybrid communication strategy, so beyond news media, other digital platforms are used for disseminating messages and directly connecting with "the people," as "new media is conducive for populist communication" (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 427). Social media in particular has become a successful set of venues for populist actors, especially on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (Datts, 2020; Engesser et al., 2017; Ernst et al., 2019), and Telegram (Urman & Katz, 2020), seeing how the logic of these platforms is free from the professional norms of news media and their more passive audience (Mudde, 2019).

2.2. Populist Discourse: Characteristics, Content, and Style

Populism has been conceptualized in various ways: as a "thin" ideology that informs discourse which places "the pure people" at its center and the "corrupt elite" and others as antagonists who obstruct the expression of the people's will (Mudde, 2015), as a communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), or as a political strategy seen in the performative aspects of populist discourse (Moffit, 2016). More recently, populism has been defined as a global communication phenomenon, "an expression of

[both] political communication content and style," the operationalization of which makes it possible to determine degrees of populism based on frequent use of content and style features: empty populism (references to the people: people-centrism); anti-elitist populism (negative references to elites and people-centrism); excluding populism (exclusion of out-groups and people-centrism); and complete populism, which encompasses all the above elements (de Vreese et al., 2018, pp. 426–427). These elements build a master populist frame by (a) naming the issue and claiming the "people" need defending from (b) the identified threat, the blame being typically attributed to elites/out-groups, and by (c) claiming the ability to solve the problem through solutions, which often include invoking an idealized homeland and restoring the sovereignty of the people (Blassnig et al., 2019; Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017).

Populist content elements can be categorized based on their us-them dichotomy in both vertical and horizontal dimensions (Brubaker, 2017): "us," the simple, hardworking virtuous people are vertically disaffected by the "corrupt" power elite. Horizontally, the in-group is antagonized by "them": ethnic/religious/sexual minorities or forces/institutions such as globalization and the European Union, who are seen as threatening the people's way of life (Aalberg et al., 2017). PRRPs encompass certain common characteristics: nativism, a nationalistic view over the in-groups' dominion and subsequent exclusion of out-groups such as immigrants in Western Europe or ethnic and sexual minorities in Eastern Europe; and authoritarianism, seen in discourse pushing towards an increased criminalization of perceived social issues such as abortion, sex work, inclusive sex education, drug use (Mudde, 2019). These discourses are expressed through a communication style that crystalizes within symbolic performances such as "the champion of the people" or "the man on the street" (Bracciale & Martella, 2017, pp. 11–12) and can be operationalized following three main dimensions (Ernst et al., 2019): negativity, seen in crisis rhetoric and negativism (negative characterization of targets); emotionality, seen in emotionally-infused absolutism and patriotism; and sociability, which encompasses colloquialism (vulgarism, sarcasm), as well as intimization (references to personal life).

Certain dramatized communication styles can also crystallize within visual social media (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). The content analysis of images (Rose, 2001) can provide insight into the various levels of visual framing (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011) employed in the image construction process by political leaders (Archetti, 2014). Understanding visuals as both denotative and connotative systems (Barthes, 1957/1991) allows for the operationalization of the different structural and symbolic dimensions of populist celebrities' communication style, built on a combination of performed extraordinariness and ordinariness: "statesmanship," seen in imagery depicting the subject in the company of high-ranking/influential allies or patriotic symbols/monuments, their "mass appeal" is apparent when in the company of large crowds, and their "ordinariness," in appearances with regular people, elements which construct the image of "the populist campaigner" and "the ideal candidate" (Grabe & Bucy, 2011, pp. 213–219). This "double-positioning" frontstage performance strategy has the populist leader construct themselves as "both savior of the people and representing the people; and as being one of the people," therefore part of the in-group (Wodak, 2015, p. 152).

3. Methodology

Considering our scope, the questions we formulate are:

RQ1: What are the discursive and stylistic features of the sampled news media content reporting on George Simion?

RQ2: Which populist communication content and style elements construct George Simion's discourse within his authored texts?

RQ3: What are the visual communication style elements of George Simion's discourse on Telegram?

As such, we employ a mixed-methods approach to our analysis of the data sample (see Table 1).

The three corpora we compiled for analysis are: (C1) news media reports on Simion from three mainstream

Table 1. Data sample and corpora size.

Corpus of analysis	Online Platform	Source	Time frame	N total	Corpus size
C1	News media	*Digi24.ro*, *Adevărul.ro*, *Antena3.ro*	13.05.2015–30.04.2022	963	464,477 words
C2	News media	*Adevărul.ro*	08.07.2014–30.04.2022	116	97,477 words
C3a	Social media/Telegram	Sustinatori GeorgeSimion	15.03.2021–30.04.2022	738	15,948 words
C3b	Social media/Telegram	Sustinatori GeorgeSimion	15.03.2021–30.04.2022	383	383 images

Romanian online news outlets, *Digi24.ro* (*n* = 229), *Adevărul.ro* (*n* = 358), and *Antena3.ro* (*n* = 376), of which we filtered the second corpus data based on authorship: Simion's authored texts published on *Adevărul.ro* (C2). This data was collected using a web extraction software, Octoparse 8, which facilitated the obtainment of all articles as far back as he is reported on/published until the extraction day (30.04.2022); therefore, the general timeframe is eight years. The Telegram corpus (C3) was collected on 30.04.2022 with a timeframe going back to the first message on the channel on 15.03.2021, using Telegram's open API to extract (C3a) text messages and (C3b) photos from George Simion's Telegram channel, ambiguously named Supporters of George Simion (SustinatoriGeorgeSimion). To answer the first two RQs, we imported and separately compiled the corpora using Sketch Engine, a text analysis software and corpus manager, which generated lists of frequent lemmas/POS/n-grams that were approached both inductively and deductively (based on literature), as we constructed a codebook which was customized for each corpus as follows.

The C1 (news media reporting on Simion) codebook was based on a combination of the relevant literature on news values (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016), the discursive news values analysis approach (Bednarek & Caple, 2014), populist communication style elements (Ernst et al., 2019), as well as populist communication strategies (Moffit, 2016; Wodak, 2015). Specifically, the first stage of our analysis employed a corpus linguistic approach (discursive news values analysis) to determine the relevant conflict news values linguistic indicators, based on analysis of frequent words/POS/n-grams that construct the conflict news value by referencing controversies, scandals, fights, warfare, and strikes (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016). Following a pilot coding, the codebook used in the thematic analysis of headlines was refined to encompass the following variables: (a) scandal/scandalization as a feature of the conflict news value and populist strategy, seen in reports of incidents provoked by or involving the populist leader (Moffit, 2016; Wodak, 2015); (b) sociability, seen in quoted colloquialism (simple language, vulgarism, slang, nicknaming, use of rhetorical questions and sarcasm) and intimization (references to personal life); (c) negativity as a communication style of reported negativist discourse regarding elites/others, as well as negative characterization of the populist actor by the media; and (d) emotionality as an umbrella-dimension that encompasses emotionally-infused absolutism (the expression of positive or negative emotion when presenting something as unbearable or the only possible solution), and patriotism (references to the "homeland"; Ernst et al., 2019). Additionally, we coded emotionality-relevant categories specific to Simion's populism: unionism (references to an idealized utopic past or future united heartland) and Orthodoxy (the use of emotionally-laden Christian-Orthodox symbolism and vernacular). The thematic categorization was based on analysis of lexical choices, which construct the relevant issues within each headline, since headlines "tend to be strategically engaging rather than just informative" (Molek-Kozakowska & Wilk, 2021, p. 767). To account for the potential limitations of this approach, headline coding relied on contextual information offered by the lead and the body of the article. The headlines corpus was separately coded by each of the two researchers, and the resulting intercoder agreement was 87.22%.

The C2 and C3a codebooks (Simion's authored written texts on *Adevărul.ro* news platform and his Telegram channel) were similarly based on the corpus linguistic approach and the relevant literature, which aided in defining the main actors, issues, and actions that construct the master populist frame (Caiani & della Porta, 2011; Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017). As such, frequent verbs used to tell the story of how things "were," "are," "should be," or "could be," are coded under the Actions dimension, which, together with words designating Issues (e.g., economy/religion/politics) were included in the codebook based on word/POS/n-gram frequency. Next, the codebook was further refined to encompass populist content elements as variables: people-centrism (seen in frequent us/we rhetoric), anti-elitism (blaming "them," power elites), ostracizing others (immigrants/minorities), and invoking an idealized homeland (Engesser et al., 2017; Ernst et al., 2019). As such, we coded the following populist content dimensions: (a) "Us" refers to Person/Group (Simion/AUR party), the People (Romanian citizens/diaspora/people/folk), the Homeland (our country/motherland/homeland, Romania, Bessarabia, Greater Romania), and Allies (group entities/people who support Simion/AUR); and (b) "Them" refers to Corrupt Political Elites who are deemed the cause of certain politicized issues (the president/MPs/political parties), to Institutions or Systems, and "Out-Groups" who are blamed or othered. Additionally, we coded style dimensions: Sociability (colloquialism, intimization), Negativity (negativism, crisis rhetoric), and Emotionality (absolutism, patriotism, Orthodoxy, unionism). The corpora were imported into MaxQDA 2020, a mixed-methods data analysis software, where semi-automated coding was employed: We used lexical search to identify each variable within the corpus, and then we qualitatively examined and coded every statement accordingly, provided the context matched the defined concepts. The colloquialism dimension was entirely manually coded to identify sarcasm, irony, rhetorical questions, and vulgarism.

To answer RQ3, the Telegram corpus of images (C3b) was manually coded in MaxQDA 2020, based on several features of visual communication content (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011; Rose, 2001) and dimensions of the image construction of the political celebrity (Archetti, 2014; Goffman, 1956; Grabe & Bucy, 2011; Street, 2004). Thus, the C3b codebook includes the type of visual content (photograph/poster/media clipping/illustration) and the symbolic dimensions of Simion's persona as a

Christian-Orthodox and a patriotic political leader: (a) a populist campaigner, performing ordinariness as "man of the people," and through celebrity-like mass appeal, due to his political presence among supporters, further constructed through us-them dichotomic images (e.g., large groups of supporters vs. corrupted politicians) and associated with national and religious symbols; and (b) ideal political candidate, seen in visual manifestations of authority and power as well as compassion (Grabe & Bucy, 2011). The visual content was separately coded by each researcher, and the resulting intercoder agreement was 96.6%.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Mediatization of George Simion's Performance

The newsworthiness of George Simion's public performance is constructed by news media reports through prevalent conflict lexis (Figure 1), a news value that informs stories of arguments, warfare, and controversy (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016), reflected in our analysis of the most frequent words/POS/n-grams within the news media corpora (C1).

The results show that conflict is discursively constructed through words (Figure 1) referencing several highly mediatized events whose main actor was George Simion. He is either portrayed as a "violent aggressor" of Virgil Popescu (Minister of Energy), whom he "grabbed by the neck"; of then Prime-Minister Florin Cîțu, whom he "screamed" at; of the City Hall building in Timișoara, which he entered by "force" and caused a "scandal," or he is portrayed as a "victim": he had "ink spilled over him" during a street protest, "was banished" from the Republic of Moldova, and his reentry was denied. This dualistic construction of politicians' personas within public conflicts by the news media plays an important role in the celebrity politician phenomenon (Street, 2019), as seen in Silvio Berlusconi's highly mediatized controversial performances (Mazzoleni, 2014) or Donald Trump's celebrity populism (Bartoszewicz, 2019) as well as his angry populism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018).

The analysis of headlines (689 coded segments) shows that news reports of Simion are permeated by
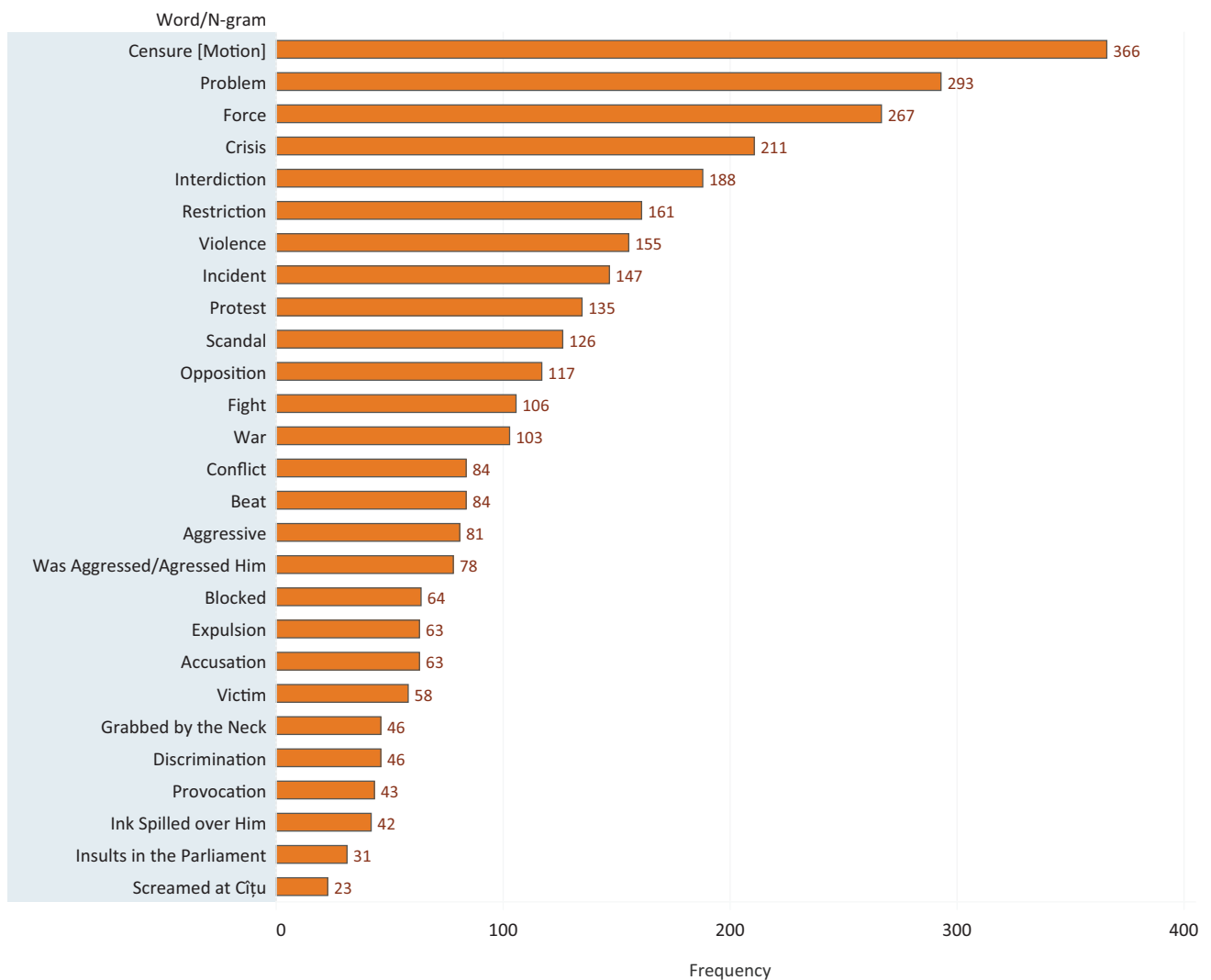

Figure 1. Conflict news value linguistic indicators (C1).

Scandalization, Negativity, Emotionality, and Sociability. More specifically, the results indicate that scandalization-centered headlines (33.38%) are the most consistent in all sampled media (Figure 2). As a political strategy, scandalization generates the necessary attention and visibility populists need, indirectly supported by news media, which prioritizes reports on controversies. This is reflected in our analysis of headlines, which mediate the events involving Simion, labeling them "scandal," "fight," "incident," "provocation," and "conflict."

Another key stylistic dimension of Simion's news mediatization is Negativity (30.33%), which is multifaceted: on the one hand, a dimension of negativity refers to discrediting politicians, for example, when Simion is quoted on or represented as verbally disparaging "corrupted" political actors, or as part of various "calls to action" against the political elite, ranging from public protests to presidential impeachment "against corona, Iohannis [Klaus Iohannis, current Romanian president], and other viruses." On the other hand, some headlines focus on negative characterization of the populist leader/AUR party, either through quoting opposing politicians and others describing them as a "legionary," "dangerous," or through media commentators' positioning by characterizing them as "extremist," "xenophobic," "antisemitic," "neo-fascist." As previous research also indicates (Schmidt, 2020), a multifaceted expression of

negativity within news discourse on populist leaders and parties is a prevalent dimension of the newsworthiness of conflict.

The coded dimensions of Emotionality (24.81% aggregated) within the headlines emphasize Simion's patriotism, unionism, and absolutism, observed in his vivid language: "People are desperate. Our country's lands are being stolen." Orthodoxy, a dimension of emotionality associated with religiousness, is seen in Simion's quotes on God ("God is with us!," "Thank God!") and Christian-Orthodox holidays cheers. Besides a general emphasis on Simion's conflictual, violent behavior, the headlines also present elements of Sociability, such as colloquialism (n = 22; n = 3.19%) seen in quoted sarcasm, insults, rhetorical questions such as references to the PM—"where is Florin Cîțu hiding? Where is the little one?," "we've worked hard to remove this parrot"—or to other MPs—"you are a thief!," "Mr. Roman, your chair is shaking!" Intimization was scarce, seen in a few human-interest stories focusing on Simion's personal life.

These headline constructions mediate Simion's rhetoric; therefore, he sets the agenda through newsworthy scandalous behavior, a dynamic defined as "the Right-wing populist perpetuum mobile" (Wodak, 2015, p. 42). This term refers to intentionally provoked scandals that force the media to celebritize the populist leader by giving them "more face time and an opportunity
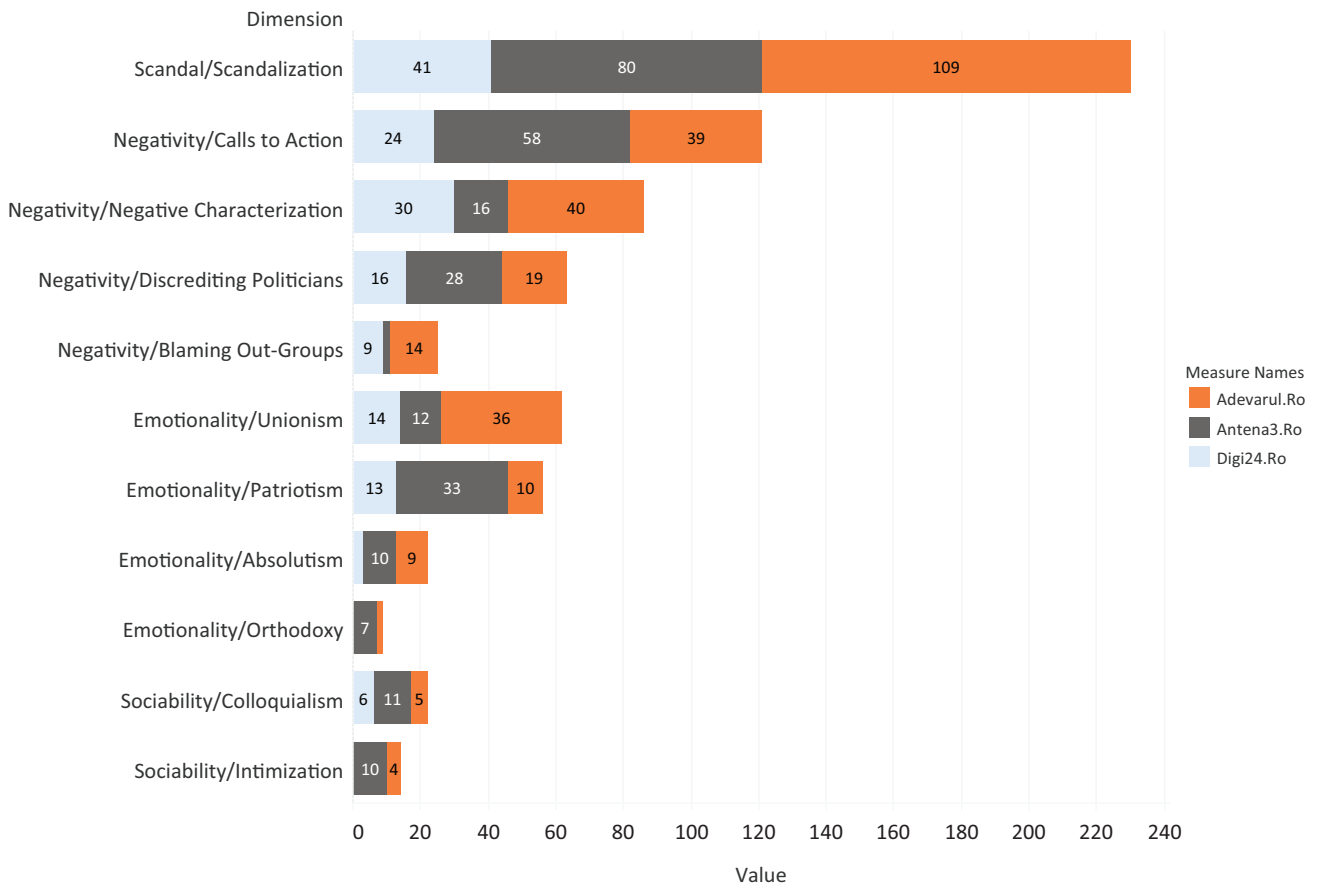

Figure 2. Thematic distribution of headlines (C1).

for perpetrator-victim reversal," blaming elites and out-groups, as exemplified through FPÖ's Haider and HC Strache's successful scandalization and subsequent scapegoating strategies.

4.2. George Simion's Populist Discourse: Content and Style

The analysis of George Simion's populist content within his authored texts on *Adevărul.ro* news platform (12,364 coded segments) and his Telegram channel (2,653 coded segments) indicates the presence of all populist elements defined in the literature (Figure 3).

There are several definitions of "us" (Figure 3), constructed in both corpora: people-centric "us," referring to the pious, hardworking, "golden" (based on the acronym AUR, which also translates to gold) Romanian citizens or minorities from abroad and diaspora members, who are seen as an aggregate of ordinary and honest people with a common set of wishes and values; "us," the proudly patriotic folk who inhabit "our homeland" (40.59% of coded segments C2; 18.78% C3a); "us" as AUR and George Simion, the self-proclaimed simple "man of the people," who fights for and champions the unity of all Romanians and their values (liberty, the nation, faith, and the traditional family), and "allies" ("Union Friends" organization, the Romanian Orthodox Church). These definitions are congruent with other findings on populist content elements within populist rhetoric, such as the Us/We and Homeland rhetoric, the emphasis on the sovereignty of the people, as well the construction of the populist leader's capacity as best representing the people's will, widely exemplified within analyses on Nigel Farage or Silvio Berlusconi's discourse (Mazzoleni, 2014).

The people's sovereignty is undermined by "them," defined by Simion as the "corrupt political elite," such as the "traitorous" and "ignorant" president of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, or the "diseased" Traian Băsescu, former president of Romania and honorary president of the People's Movement Party (PMP), a center-right unionist party that Simion accuses of the same inefficiency in moving things along as its leader was in running the country. His anti-elitism is further extended to the largest parties: The National Liberal Party (PNL), The Social Democratic Party (PSD), who, together with the entire Government, the Parliament, and the "system," are blamed for their "so-called democratic," "thieving," and "abusive" methods of governing that he equates with Nicolae Ceaușescu's communist dictatorship. Other entities that Simion scapegoats as impediments to the economic, ethnic, and territorial sovereignty of the people are the globalization-centric discourses of the EU and the "corrupt," "dishonest," and "separatist" Hungarian politicians and people who inhabit Romania and "disrespect" the "mother-tongue"/Romanian language, a stigmatizing othering discourse that was previously a staple of Romanian populist Vadim Tudor's discourse (Corbu et al., 2017).

The most prevalent issue that Simion references is the Unification of Romania and The Republic of Moldova, under the slogan "Bessarabia is Romania," which he frames as the solution to most political and economic issues that the Romanian people face (Table 2).

He invokes certain historic moments as examples of times when "our motherland's heroes" unified "our homeland territories": "The Little Union" of the Romanian Principalities Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 and "The Great Union" of 1918, when territories such as Bessarabia (today's Republic of Moldova), Bukovina, and Transylvania were united as the Kingdom of Romania. He calls on God and his heroes, the "founding fathers" of Romania, back to Dacian and Thracian ancestors,
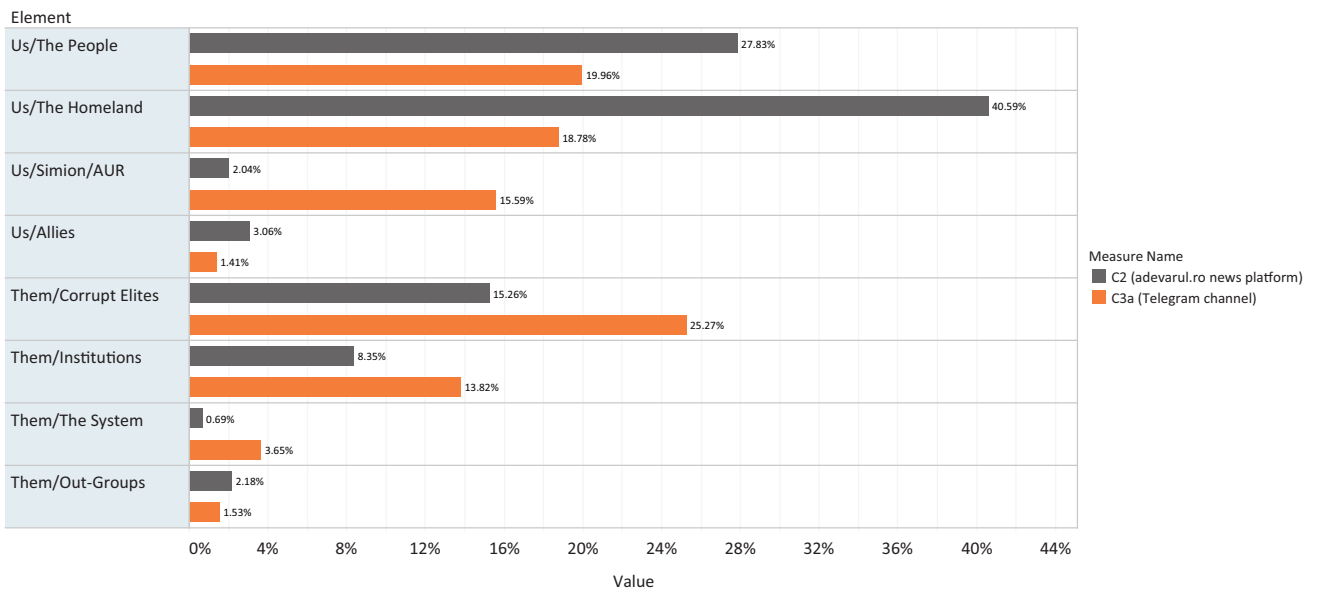

Figure 3. Us vs. them dichotomy in George Simion's discourse (comparison C2–C3a).

Table 2. Most prevalent issues (C2 and C3a).

Issue	C2 (*Adevărul.ro* news platform)	Frequency	C3a (Telegram text messages)	Frequency
1	Unification	32.78%	Politics	29.91%
2	Politics	21.31%	Protests	12.89%
3	History	15.68%	Orthodoxy	11.73%
4	Protests	8.19%	Covid-19	7.43%
5	Economy	4.34%	Unification	5.78%
6	Orthodoxy	3.58%	The System	5.12%
7	The Media	1.99%	History	3.96%
8	Romanian language	1.86%	Freedom	3.30%
9	The System	1.55%	Economy	2.64%
10	Identity	1.37%	Family	2.31%

sometimes by quoting iconic poet Mihai Eminescu, to legitimize the ideal of a united "Great Romania."

The master populist frame is seen in all these elements, woven together through verbs used to tell the Simion-filtered story of how things used to be, how they are, and how they could/should be. Although calls to action through protest are widespread throughout both corpora, instigations towards going "out into the streets" and shouting "down with Iohannis," "the Government," "with Cîțu," and "with the dictatorship" are more widespread on Telegram (12.89%), where

he also openly opposes anti-Covid-19 vaccination and references the traditional family (2.31%) as the ideal Romanian way of life. In doing so, he others sexual minorities and shames those who advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual education, since "us Romanians are overwhelmingly on normality's side, and wish to protect our children from harmful ideologies," a narrative that foregrounds traditional values, in line with East European populism (Aalberg et al., 2017; Soare & Tufiș, 2021).

This content is expressed through highly emotional and colloquial style (Figure 4), seen in vulgar language
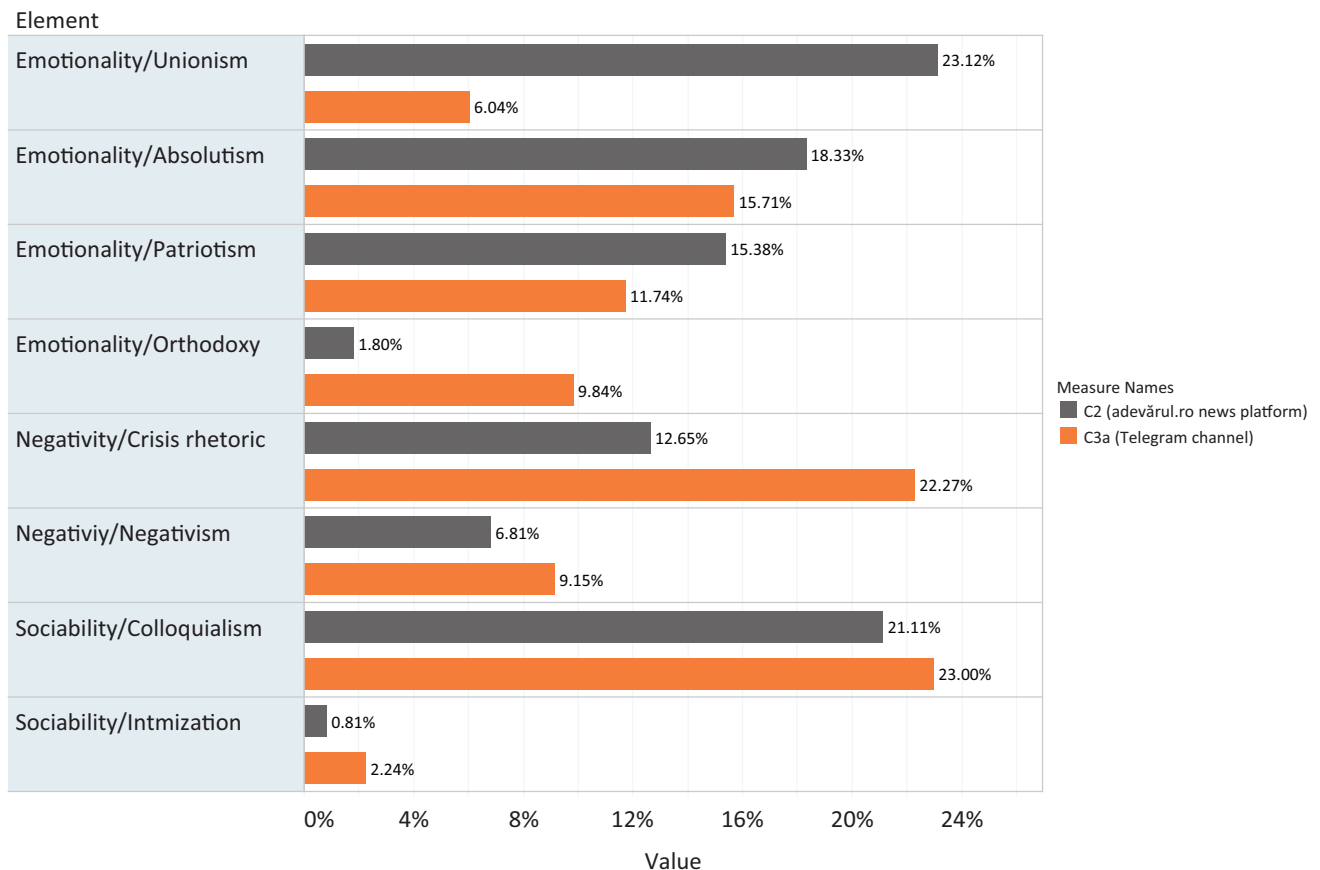
Figure 4. George Simion's Populist Communication Style (C2 and C3a).

("asshole," "bastards," "thugs"), sarcasm, and rhetorical questions ("are these thieves so stupid as to send in the prosecutors?"). This is weaved in with strong negativity, congruent with other findings on Romanian populism (Corbu et al., 2017), seen in negativism directed at targets ("corrupt," "liar," "malevolent") and crisis rhetoric ("fight," "conflict," "war").

Simion's emotionality is multi-dimensional: Unionism stands out ("our power is in the Unification!") as a historic ideal since the USSR annexation of Bessarabia and of Northern Bukovina following the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, signed on August 23rd, 1939, that is further enhanced by sentiments of patriotism; absolutism is seen in his assertive tone and problem/solution, accepting/rejecting discursive dichotomies, and Orthodoxy is more prevalent on Telegram, to connect with the pious Romanian folk ("our prayers to God," "God bless Romania!"; "God will give us a united Romania"). This mix of unionism, Orthodoxy, and people-centrism is congruent with other research that underlines the religious character of Romanian populism (Asavei, 2022; Corbu et al., 2017).

4.3. George Simion's Visual Communication Style on Telegram

The visual content (*n* = 383) shared by George Simion on @SusținătoriGeorgeSimion channel consists of original photographs (63%), posters (24%), media clippings (8%), and other illustrations (5%). Over half the image corpus (51.95%) features the image of George Simion, found mostly in photographs (selfies and individual/group portraits) and posters (cropped portraits added to templates reflecting the visual identity of the party).

The analysis reveals a multifaceted identity of Simion the celebrity politician, consistent with previous research on the image construction of political leaders (Grabe & Bucy, 2011): the "populist campaigner," represented through performed ordinariness, as the "man on the street" blending in with simple people, wearing traditional folk shirts or casual attire (Figure 5), complemented by the image of the "ideal candidate," a type of presidentialization through performed extraordinariness (Moffit, 2016), constructed here within the image of a compassionate leader surrounded and seemingly beloved by either masses of Romanian supporters or small groups of people in need (unemployed, low-income families, children, old people), or more rarely, when in Parliament or party-related settings, through fashion—black suit and white shirt (Figure 6)—a dress code associated with statesmanship and power.

This manifold image construction of the politician is complemented by national and Orthodox symbols. The recurrent national symbols are the national flag, folk costumes, monuments/tombs of war heroes and prominent historical figures such as Stephan the Great, known for defeating a large Ottoman army in the Battle of Vaslui in 1475; Michael the Brave who was the first to briefly reign over all principalities inhabited by Romanians in 1600; or Avram Iancu, a Transylvanian lawyer who played an important role during the Austrian Empire Revolutions of 1848–1849. The rhetorical appeal to such historical narratives within populist communication, defined as mythopoesis, serves to legitimize nationalist sentiments, often observed within post-communist territories' populism, heavily informed by anti-communist and anti-Soviet stances (Wodak, 2015). Furthermore, present-day heroes are also used here to reinforce the

Figure 5. Example of visual representation constructing the "populist campaigner" image (C3b).

Figure 6. Example of visual representation constructing the "ideal candidate" image (C3b).
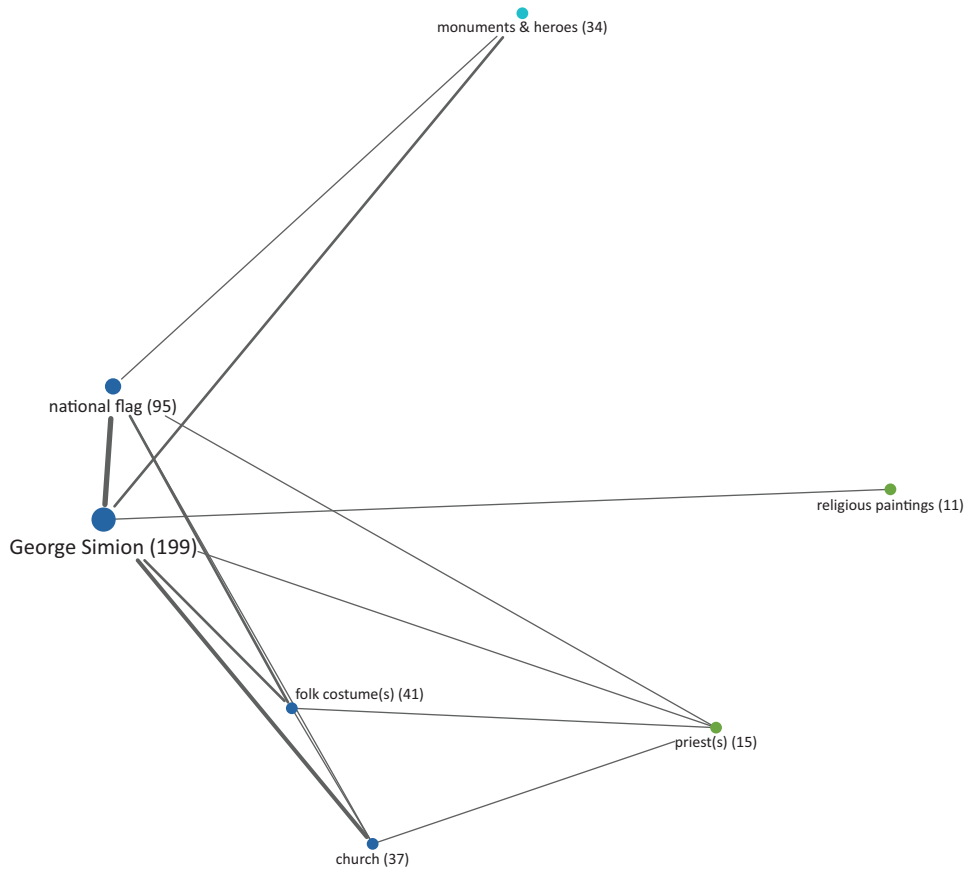
Figure 7. Network of co-occurrences: George Simion's image and national/Orthodox symbols (C3b).

national self-esteem, such as famous (retired) football players Gheorghe Hagi and Gică Popescu, or the gold medal-winning rowing team. Consistent with the values promoted by his party, Simion often appears in the presence of Orthodox symbols such as religious paintings, Orthodox priests, churches, and monasteries (Figure 7).

The posters within the corpus function as visual triggers aimed at grabbing the audience's attention, as the saturated, yellow backgrounds with black and red texts, and the edited photographs of various politicians who are framed as corrupt, inefficient dictators (Figure 8), serve to encourage and call upon the public to meet, protest, march, or vote.

Overall, the image corpus analysis reveals a message construction consistent with the AUR party values, emphasizing the Orthodox faith, nationhood, promoting liberty, and the traditional family. These values are visually packaged as represented by George Simion, the charismatic, compassionate leader, the ideal candidate: a populist campaigner who works to eliminate the corrupt elite and restore popular sovereignty.

5. Conclusions

As a political strategy, scandalization generates the necessary attention and visibility, as well as the tension that allows populist leaders to dress themselves as saviors or problem solvers. This process of adapting to the logic

Figure 8. Example of "call to action" poster (C3b).

of politainment is reflected in our findings on George Simion's mediatization, who sets the agenda through violent performances within public conflicts, which he justifies as a problem-solving tool, proposing a "patriotic

violence'' approach to politics, thus forcing the news media into a "no-win" predicament. Hence, journalists end up reporting on his deeds. His newsworthiness is seen in editorial choices of vivid words, in some cases doubled by arresting quotes that construct the vocabulary of the conflict news value, reinforced by emotionality and negativity features, which work to disseminate not just his scandalous aggressive behavior, but also his populism. The AUR leader's discourse on multiple platforms politicizes diverse issues by blaming the political elite for various crises. His unionism and patriotism are complemented by a multifaceted politician image as "an ideal candidate" and "populist campaigner," dimensions of the well-balanced performances of ordinariness and extraordinariness of a celebrity populist. Our findings show that Simion engages in an illocutionary act of a discursively constructed complete populism while celebritizing himself through spectacle and scandalization by violence and vulgarism. His anti-elitism, authoritarianism, and nativism are congruent with the radical right populism of post-communist Eastern Europe, discursively built here around the glorification of a potentially united "homeland," a democratic space that reflects the unadulterated will of the ordinary and virtuous "golden" Orthodox Romanian people.

While Christianity is increasingly central to European populism, moving away from anticlerical stances towards "Christian roots" (as observed in Marine Le Pen or Norbert Hofer's [FPÖ candidate] presidential campaign discourses), Northern and Western European populism is predominantly secular and identitarian in its Christianism (Brubaker, 2017), defined through its othering of Islam, less so through religious worship. By contrast, East European populism is distinctly nationalist regarding religion, as exemplified through Orbán's discourse which emphasizes the importance of Christianity's role in preserving nationhood, an attitude seen in Simion's rhetoric, yet specifically infused with religious ethos here. His "Romanianism" is reflected in his unionism and in the endorsement of Orthodoxy and the traditional family. This discourse foregrounds a complex ideal portrait of the "good Romanian," which he further legitimizes through moral evaluation of political actors and out-groups (ethnic and sexual minorities). The prevalence of call-to-action discourse on Telegram constructs and supports the image of the problem-solver, crisis manager, and providential savior whose proposed solution (unification) is legitimized through mythopoesis.

The results of the analysis of George Simion's multimodal performance show that his communication strategies are congruent with existing literature and previous findings on other populists' political approaches (scandalization, performed ordinariness and extraordinariness through fashion, rhetoric, and communication style, politicization of various issues, anti-elitism, othering, mythopoesis). At the same time, these strategies are adapted to the idiosyncracies of an Orthodox Eastern European former communist country with native language-speaking populations living outside the current borders. By building on the definition of populism as an expression of communication content and style, as well as political strategy, while honing in on the textual and visual performance of one populist leader, our research is limited by its focus on a single case study. However, our proposed methodological and analytical approach can be employed as a model for future research concerned with the multimodal performance of populist leaders in the context of platform-mediated populist communication, by identifying main discursive features through corpus linguistic analysis complemented by thematic analysis and combined with semiotic visual analysis. Our multifaceted approach aims to contribute to the diversification of approaches to the construction of newsworthiness and performance to match specific themes, in this case, politainment and celebrity populism.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Aalberg, T., Esser, F., Reinemann, C., Strömbäck, J., & de Vreese, C. H. (2017). *Populist political communication in Europe*. Routledge.

Albertazzi, D. (2007). Addressing "the people": A comparative study of the Lega Nord's and Lega dei Ticinesi's political rhetoric and styles of propaganda. *Modern Italy*, *12*(3), 327–347.

Altheide, D. L., & Snow, R. P. (1979). *Media logic*. SAGE.

Archetti, C. (2014). *Politicians, personal image and the construction of political identity: A comparative study of the UK and Italy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Asavei, M. A. (2022). Radical right populist entrepreneurs and the use of religious representations through popular culture: George Becali as the "saviour of Romania." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *25*(1), 43–60.

Barthes, R. (1991). *Mythologies*. The Noonday Press. (Original work published 1957)

Bartoszewicz, M. G. (2019). Celebrity populism: A look at Poland and the Czech Republic. *European Politics and Society*, *20*(4), 470–485.

Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2014). Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analyzing news discourse in critical discourse analysis and beyond. *Discourse and Society*, *25*(2), 135–158.

Blassnig, S., Büchel, F., Ernst, N., & Engesser, S. (2019). Populism and informal fallacies: An analysis of right-wing populist rhetoric in election campaigns. *Argumentation*, *33*(1), 107–136.

Bobba, G., & Hubé, N. (2021). *Populism and the politicization of the Covid-19 crisis in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bracciale, R., & Martella, A. (2017). Define the populist

political communication style: The case of Italian political leaders on Twitter. *Information, Communication and Society*, *20*(9), 1310–1329.

Brubaker, R. (2017). Between nationalism and civilizationism: The European populist moment in comparative perspective. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *40*(8), 1191–1226.

Caiani, M., & della Porta, D. (2011). The elitist populism of the extreme right: A frame analysis of extreme right-wing discourses in Italy and Germany. *Acta Politica*, *46*, 180–202.

Cine este George Simion, marea surpriza a alegerilor parlamentare. Ce avere are liderul AUR [Who is George Simion, the grand surprise of parliamentary elections. What is the AUR leader's fortune]. (2021, December 7). *Digi24.ro*. https://www.digi24.ro/alegeri-parlamentare-2020/cine-este-george-simion-marea-surpriza-a-alegerilor-parlamentare-ce-avere-are-liderul-aur-1413762

Corbu, N., Balaban-Bălaș, D., & Negrea-Busuioc, E. (2017). Populist ideology without teeth. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 326–338). Routlege.

Cottle, S. (2006). Mediatized rituals: Beyond manufacturing consent. *Media, Culture and Society*, *28*(3), 411–432.

Datts, M. (2020). Social media, populism, and migration. *Media and Communication*, *8*(4), 73–83.

Debord, G. (1995). *The society of the spectacle*. Zone Books.

de Vreese, C. H., Esser, F., Aalberg, T., Reinemann, C., & Stanyer, J. (2018). Populism as an expression of political communication content and style: A new perspective. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, *23*(4), 423–438.

Doiciar, C., & Crețan, R. (2021). Pandemic populism: Covid-19 and the rise of the nationalist AUR party in Romania. *Geographica Pannonica*, *25*(4), 243–259.

Dörner, A., & Vogt, L. (2002). Wahlkampf im Unterhaltungszeitalter [Political campaigns in the age of entertainment]. In M. Machnig (Ed.), *Politik—Medien—Wähler* [Politics—Media—Voters] (pp. 9–21). Leske + Budrich.

Duffy, B. E., & Pooley, J. (2019). Idols of promotion: The triumph of self-branding in an age of precarity. *Journal of Communication*, *69*(1), 26–48.

Engesser, S., Ernst, N., Esser, F., & Büchel, F. (2017). Populism and social media: How politicians spread a fragmented ideology. *Information, Communication and Society*, *20*(8), 1109–1126.

Ernst, N., Esser, F., Blassnig, S., & Engesser, S. (2019). Favorable opportunity structures for populist communication: Comparing different types of politicians and issues in social media, television and the press. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, *24*(2), 165–188.

Evans, J., & Baronavski, C. (2018). *How do European countries differ in religious commitment? Use our interactive map to find out.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment

Fati, S. (2022, February 8). AUR inaugurează politica violenței patriotice: până când? [AUR inaugurates the politics of patriotic violence: Until when?]. *DW*. https://www.dw.com/ro/aur-inaugureaz%C4%83-politica-violen%C8%9Bei-patriotice-p%C3%A2n%C4%83-c%C3%A2nd/a-60694255

Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news. *Journal of Peace Research*, *2*(1), 64–91.

Gherghina, S., & Mișcoiu, S. (2022). Faith in a new party: The involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the 2020 election campaign. *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, *23*(2), 226–242.

Goffman, E. (1956). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. University of Edinburgh.

Grabe, M. E., & Bucy, E. (2011). Image bite analysis of political visuals: Understanding the visual framing process in election news. In E. Bucy & L. Holbert (Eds.), *The sourcebook for political communication research* (pp. 209–237). Routledge.

Gross, P., & Tismaneanu, V. (2005). The end of postcommunism in Romania. *Journal of Democracy*, *16*(2), 146–162.

Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2016). What is news? News values revisited (again). *Journalism Studies*, *18*(12), 1470–1488.

Heinisch, R., & Mazzoleni, O. (2017). Analyzing and explaining populism: Bringing frame, actor and context back. In R. Heinisch, C. Holtz-Bacha, & O. Mazzoleni (Eds.), *Political populism: A handbook* (pp. 105–122). Nomos.

Highfield, T., & Leaver, T. (2016). Instagrammatics and digital methods: Studying visual social media, from selfies and GIFs to memes and emoji. *Communication Research and Practice*, *2*(1), 47–62.

Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, *46*(3), 319–345.

Marincea, A., & Popovici, V. (2022). *Calling fascism by its name: The rise of the radical right and organizing leftist resistance in Romania*. Lefteast. https://lefteast.org/radical-right-leftist-resistance-romania

Mazzoleni, G. (2008). Populism and the media. In D. Albertazzi & D. McDonnell (Eds.), *Twenty-first century populism* (pp. 49–64). Palgrave Macmillan.

Mazzoleni, G. (2014). Mediatization and political populism. In F. Esser & J. Strömbäck (Eds.), *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies* (pp. 42–56). Palgrave Macmillan.

Moffit, B. (2016). *The global rise of populism: Performance, political style, and representation*. Stanford University Press.

Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Wilk, P. (2021). Casual, collo-quial, commonsensical: A news values stylistic analy-sis of a populist newsfeed. *Journalism Studies*, *22*(6), 760–779.

Mudde, C. (2015). Populist radical right parties in Europe today. In J. Abromeit, Y. Norman, G. Marotta, & B. M. Chesterton (Eds.), *Transformations of populism in Europe and the Americas: History and recent ten-dencies* (pp. 295–307). Bloomsbury Academic.

Mudde, C. (2019). *The far right today*. Polity Press.

Norocel, O. C. (2010). Romania is a family and it needs a strict father: Conceptual metaphors at work in radical right populist discourses. *Nationalities Papers*, *38*(5), 705–721.

Ofițeru, A. (2020, December 9). Fenomenul AUR în social-media. Înainte de alegeri, pagina lui George Simion avea 4 milioane de interacțiuni pe Facebook fără bani, a lui Klaus Iohannis, 700.000! [The AUR phenomenon within social media. Before elections, George Simion's Facebook page had 4 million inter-actions without money, while Klaus Iohannis' page, 700.000!]. *Libertatea.ro.* https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/fenomenul-aur-in-social-media-inainte-de-alegeri-pagina-lui-george-simion-avea-4-milioane-de-interactiuni-pe-facebook-fara-bani-a-lui-klaus-iohannis-700-000-3319917

Popescu, L., & Vesalon, L. (2022). "They all are the red plague": Anti-communism and the Romanian radical right populists. *East European Politics*, *38*, Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2086862

Riegert, K., & Collins, S. (2015). Politainment. In G. Maz-zoleni (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of politi-cal communication* (pp. 1–11). John Wiley & Sons.

Rodriguez, L., & Dimitrova, D. V. (2011). The levels of visual framing. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, *30*(1), 48–65.

Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. SAGE.

Schmidt, F. (2020). Party populism and media access: The news value of populist communication and how it is handled by the mass media. *International Journal of Communication*, *14*(1), 2360–2382.

Simion, G. [@SustinatoriGeorgeSimion]. (2021, Novem-ber 25). Dacă va cădea Facebook, ne trebuie alterna-tive. De aceea vă rog: Instalați telegram și intrați pe grupul de susținători [If Facebook falls, we need alter-natives. That's why I ask: Install telegram and get on the group] [Telemetrio post]. Telemetrio.

Sirbu, C. (2022, February 20). George Simion vrea să ajungă președintele României cu ajutorul unui fost consultant PSD. Obiectivul liderului AUR pentru alegerile din 2024 [George Simion wants to become

president of Romania with the help of a former PSD consultant]. *Ziare*. https://ziare.com/george-simion/george-imion-alegeri-prezidentiale-2024-fost-consultant-psd-1726365

Soare, S., & Tufis, C. D. (2021). No populism's land? Religion and gender in Romanian politics. *Identities*, *28*(1), 112–130.

Solovev, K., & Pröllochs, N. (2022). Hate speech in the political discourse on social media: Disparities across parties, gender, and ethnicity. In F. Lafor-est, R. Troncy, E. Simperl, D. Agarwal, I. Herman, & L. Medini (Eds.), *WWW '22: Proceedings of the ACM Web Conference 2022* (pp. 3656–3661). Association for Computing Machinery.

Street, J. (2004). Celebrity politicians: Popular culture and political representation. *Political Studies Associ-ation*, *6*(4), 435–452.

Street, J. (2019). What is Donald Trump? Forms of "celebrity" in celebrity politics. *Political Studies Review*, *17*(1), 3–13.

Thorpe, N. (2012). Romania: A brief political chronology. *Hungarian Review*, *3*(5), 22–28.

Turcescu, L., & Stan, L. (2005). Religion, politics and sexuality in Romania. *Europe-Asia Studies*, *57*(2), 291–310.

Urman, A., & Katz, S. (2020). What they do in the shad-ows: Examining the far-right networks on Telegram. *Information, Communication and Society*, *23*(7), 904–923.

Van Dijck, J., de Winkel, T., & Schäfer, M. T. (2021). Deplatformization and the governance of the plat-form ecosystem. *New Media and Society*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211045662

Vorberg, L., & Zeitler, A. (2019). "This is (not) entertain-ment!": Media constructions of political scandal dis-courses in the 2016 US presidential election. *Media, Culture and Society*, *41*(4), 417–432.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2018). Media coverage of shifting emotional regimes: Donald Trump's angry populism. *Media, Culture and Society*, *40*(5), 766–778.

Werkmann, C., & Gherghina, S. (2018). Organized for par-liament? Explaining the electoral success of radical right parties in post-communist Europe. *Government and Opposition*, *53*(3), 461–485.

White, D. M. (1950). The "gate keeper": A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism and Mass Commu-nication Quarterly*, *27*(4), 383–390.

Wodak, R. (2015). *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. SAGE.

Wodak, R., & Koller, V. (2008). *Handbook of communica-tion in the public sphere*. De Gruyter.

About the Authors

Teodora-Elena Grapă holds a master's degree in media communication and is currently a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Political and Communication Sciences from Babes-Bolyai University, Romania, where she is working on her dissertation on the discursive and narrative dimensions of Romanian online news media and their underlying mythologies. Her research interests include critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, and multimodal approaches to news content, social media, and political communication.

Andreea-Alina Mogoș is an associate professor at the Department of Journalism and Digital Media. In 2009, she earned a PhD in sociology at Babeș-Bolyai University and a PhD in information and communication sciences at Université Paris 8 Vincennes—Saint-Denis with the thesis *Media Representations of the Romanians in the French Daily Newspapers*, having obtained her habilitation in 2016. Her research interests focus on the mixed-methods approach of the textual and visual media frames and representations, and the media genre's transformation.