



FEM Rise

National Report Romania

Feminist Narratives and Gender Representation in Media and Popular Culture

Monitoring period: spring – summer 2025



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1. Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a systematic monitoring of gender and gender-based violence (GBV) in Romanian media, covering a corpus of 130 items across television, print, advertisements, talk shows, social media, and music between spring and summer 2025. The objective of the monitoring was to identify how media outlets portray GBV, feminism, and gender norms, and to evaluate implicit messages conveyed to audiences, particularly youth. The study also sought to document dominant narratives, the role of influential actors, and the structural barriers to more balanced gender representation.

The analysis shows that while explicit references to GBV are scarce (approx. 2% of total items), symbolic and structural forms of violence permeate media discourse. News coverage tends to frame GBV episodically, focusing on individual incidents and arrests, rather than thematically as systemic issues. Political discourse reproduces sexism, with limited media critique, exemplified by George Simion's 2025 post-election remark equating womanhood with cowardice. Entertainment and social media normalize coercive control, embedding it into youth culture as a form of romance. Health-related reporting, such as on HPV vaccination, reinforces structural gender inequities by disproportionately placing responsibility on women.

Quantitative analysis confirms these patterns. Only approx. 1% of items referenced legal accountability, fewer than 5% used thematic framing, and women were far more often represented as victims than as experts or leaders. TikTok and music trends popular among youth reproduce stereotypes of love-as-possession and appearance-based valuation of women, with little feminist counter-discourse gaining visibility.

The findings highlight three structural gaps: women's underrepresentation as authoritative voices, neglect of cyber-violence, and symbolic marginalization of feminist perspectives. Barriers include male dominance in newsrooms, commercial incentives for sensationalism, and limited institutional support for feminist initiatives. Youth responses reveal ambivalence: while some express solidarity (notably around health interventions), normalization and backlash dominate, reflecting entrenched gender norms.

The conclusions point to urgent needs: increasing women's visibility as experts, integrating survivor-centred thematic reporting, foregrounding online forms of GBV, and investing in feminist counter-narratives and media literacy initiatives. Without systemic interventions, Romanian media will continue to reproduce gender inequality and symbolic violence, constraining progress toward gender justice.

2. Introduction

The role of media in shaping cultural understandings of gender has been widely recognized in feminist media studies. In Romania, as in many other European contexts, mass media, entertainment industries, and digital platforms serve as primary sites where gender roles are represented, contested, and normalized. This report situates itself within ongoing regional monitoring efforts to document how gender-based violence (GBV) and feminist discourses appear in contemporary media.

The monitoring period spanned spring to summer 2025, covering 130 media items drawn from mainstream news, television talk shows, advertisements, social media platforms such as TikTok, music lyrics, and television/film content. These diverse media forms were selected to capture both formal news discourses and informal popular culture, as both exert influence over youth audiences. The objective was not only descriptive but analytical: to evaluate how GBV is portrayed, what implicit messages circulate, and what dominant narratives about feminism and gender shape public culture.

The introduction sets out the rationale: high levels of gender inequality persist in Romania, including high incidence of domestic violence and limited institutional responses compared to EU averages. Media's role in reproducing or challenging these inequalities is thus of urgent scholarly and policy relevance.

3. Methodology

The methodology for this monitoring exercise was adapted from the Regional Monitoring Report framework. A total of 130 media items were collected and coded between March and August 2025. Sources included national news portals (e.g., Digi24, Libertatea), television talk shows, advertisements, music and song lyrics, social media trends (TikTok, Instagram), and TV series or films available on streaming platforms.

Coding focused on four dimensions: (1) presence and framing of GBV, (2) representation of women as victims, experts, or leaders, (3) implicit symbolic messages, and (4) references to legal accountability. Following Iyengar's (1991) framework, items were coded as either episodic (isolated events) or thematic (systemic patterns). Data were logged in the monitoring form (Excel), which allowed for quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative content analysis.

The methodology was designed to balance breadth and depth: coverage of multiple media genres provided comparative insights, while close reading of selected case studies (e.g., George Simion’s remark, Antena 3 domestic violence coverage, Euronews thematic feature, HPV vaccination coverage, TikTok trends) enabled nuanced analysis. The legal context was included only where explicitly mentioned in media items, avoiding extended juridical analysis. Limitations include reliance on a three-month sample window and the exclusion of some regional/local outlets with limited reach.

Influential media outlets & justification

Talk shows, advertisements, social media trends, songs, news media, and TV series/films constitute critical domains through which gender narratives are constructed, reproduced, and challenged in Romania. These platforms offer varied levels of symbolic power and mass reach, making them essential for any analysis focused on feminism and gender issues in contemporary pop culture. The table below summarises the main monitored channels and their relevance.

Media channel	Reach / audience indicators	Relevance for gender analysis
Talk Shows	La Măruță, Vorbește lumea — daily viewership exceeding 500,000 (Pro TV, 2023)	Frame gender in essentialist/traditionalist terms; sensationalize feminist positions (Gill, 2007)
Advertisements	Advertising spending surpassed €600 million in 2023 (BRAT, 2023)	Stereotypical gender representations; dual role as commercial driver and ideological transmitter (Lazar, 2006)
Popular Social Media Trends	TikTok: over 7.4 million monthly users, primarily 18–34 (TheTrends.ro, 2024); ~60% use it regularly (IQads, 2024)	#feminism, #bodypositivity, #tradewife circulate simultaneously; algorithm amplifies both (Bishop, 2021)
Songs and Music Culture	YouTube accessed by over 90% of users; Spotify ~1.5–2 million listeners (Statista, 2023)	Hypermasculine or romanticized control narratives (manele, urban trap) (Railton & Watson, 2011)
News Media	Digi24, Libertatea, Adevărul — over one million unique users monthly (SATI, 2024)	Coverage often lacks systemic lens; may engage in victim-blaming (Entman, 1993; McRobbie, 2009)
TV Series and Films	Netflix: over 1.2 million subscribers (Statista, 2023)	International series introduce intersectional/queer narratives; local productions reflect conservative roles

Table 1. Monitored media channels, audience indicators, and their relevance for gender analysis.

Talk Shows

Televised talk shows such as *La Măruță* and *Vorbește lumea* remain influential in mainstream Romanian media discourse, with consistent daily viewership exceeding 500,000 (Pro TV, 2023). These shows frequently frame gender in essentialist or traditionalist terms, often reinforcing binary roles or sensationalizing feminist positions. Feminist media analysis can deconstruct how women are represented as emotional, domestic, or controversial subjects (Gill, 2007).

Advertisements

Romanian advertising maintains stereotypical gender representations, especially in domestic and beauty-related product categories. Advertising spending surpassed €600 million in 2023, with digital and TV advertising comprising the majority share (BRAT, 2023). Recent counter-examples (e.g., Dove Romania campaigns) show a shift toward inclusive and body-positive messaging. Advertising's dual role—as commercial driver and ideological transmitter—makes it crucial for examining market-driven constructions of femininity (Lazar, 2006).

Popular Social Media Trends

TikTok has over 7.4 million monthly Romanian users, primarily aged 18–34 (TheTrends.ro, 2024). According to IQads (2024), approximately 60% of Romanians use TikTok regularly, making it one of the most widely used apps in the country. Since the beginning of the year, the platform has risen to third place in user preference rankings. Its popularity is driven by the rich variety of content and topics explored by creators, encouraging users to return multiple times a day for entertainment, educational content, and exposure to new ideas and perspectives.

Hashtags such as #feminism, #bodypositivity, and #tradewife circulate simultaneously, revealing ideological tension within digital gender discourse. The platform's algorithmic structure amplifies both progressive and regressive trends, depending on virality metrics (Bishop, 2021).

Songs and Music Culture

YouTube remains the dominant music platform in Romania, accessed by over 90% of users, while Spotify accounts for an estimated 1.5–2 million active listeners (Statista, 2023). Romanian top charts frequently feature hypermasculine or romanticized control narratives, as seen in popular manele or urban trap genres. Songs like “A venit poliția” by Theo Rose exemplify complex gender-coded storytelling. Music thus operates as both a cultural reflection and agent of gender normativity (Railton & Watson, 2011).

News Media

Mainstream outlets such as Digi24, Libertatea, and Adevărul reach over one million unique Romanian users monthly (SATI, 2024). Coverage of gender violence or feminist activism often lacks a systemic lens and may engage in victim-blaming. Media framing theory provides a useful

approach for analyzing how gender-based violence and feminism are selectively reported or depoliticized (Entman, 1993; McRobbie, 2009).

TV Series and Films

Streaming platforms like Netflix and HBO Max are widely consumed in Romania, with Netflix alone having over 1.2 million subscribers (Statista, 2023). International series (e.g., *Sex Education*, *Wednesday*) introduce intersectional and queer feminist narratives. In contrast, local productions such as *Vlad* or *Spy/Master* often reflect conservative gender roles.

4. How is gender-based violence portrayed in local media, and what are the implicit messages?

The monitoring data collected in spring–summer 2025 (N = 130 items) provide a snapshot of how gender-based violence (GBV) is represented across Romanian media. Although only a small share of the corpus contained explicit GBV references ($\approx 2\%$), symbolic and structural forms of gendered harm were much more prevalent. This reflects what Bourdieu (2001) termed symbolic violence: subtle, everyday discursive practices that reproduce gender hierarchies without explicit reference to physical coercion. Media portrayals across news, entertainment, and social platforms convey both explicit condemnation of certain acts and implicit normalization of harmful norms.

Two explicit news items illustrate the dominant modes of reporting. The first, published by Antena 3 / CNN on 17 June 2025, carried the headline: “*A woman was beaten and confined in her own [home]... ex-boyfriend arrested during the assault.*” This is characteristic of episodic framing (Iyengar, 1991): the incident is presented as a discrete event, the arrest signals immediate accountability, but the structural conditions of violence remain invisible. The absence of broader contextualization implicitly reinforces the idea that GBV is exceptional and private, rather than systemic.

By contrast, Euronews România on 20 May 2025 employed a more thematic frame, headlined “*Violence behind closed doors: Thousands of women seek help, too few receive it in time.*” Here the story foregrounds prevalence and institutional shortcomings, moving closer to a rights-based perspective. Still, the metaphor of violence “*behind closed doors*” resonates with the privatization of GBV — what Fraser (1990) critiques as the relegation of women’s suffering to the domestic sphere, away from public justice.

Beyond explicit coverage, symbolic GBV permeates the corpus. The monitoring notes include the viral post-election remark by politician George Simion: “*I am a fighter, not a woman, not a traitor.*” Mainstream news outlets reproduced this line largely as electoral drama, without interrogating its sexism. Here, femininity is equated with cowardice or betrayal, naturalizing women’s subordination in political culture. As Kitzinger (2004) has shown in her analysis of media

and sexual violence, such discursive practices contribute to a climate where sexist ideologies circulate unchallenged.

Youth-oriented platforms and entertainment media amplify implicit GBV messages. Several monitored TikTok trends depict jealousy and partner surveillance as signs of affection, while popular song lyrics portray women in objectifying or possessive terms. Repeated exposure to these tropes risks normalizing coercive control among younger audiences. Scholars such as Dobash & Dobash (2004) emphasise that coercive control is a precursor to more severe physical or sexual violence; its normalization in entertainment thus carries serious prevention implications.

A further example is coverage of HPV vaccination. A new law extending free access to both sexes was reported, but headlines highlighted women's greater cancer risk. While epidemiologically accurate, this framing implicitly places responsibility on women to prevent transmission, marginalizing men's role in reproductive health. Such structural GBV reflects what Crenshaw (1991) identified in her intersectional critique: institutional practices that reproduce women's vulnerability by neglecting systemic accountability.

Across these cases, several implicit messages emerge. First, GBV is treated as an exceptional or private matter, not a systemic issue requiring structural change. Second, subtle forms of victim-blaming appear when coverage foregrounds victims' circumstances rather than perpetrators' responsibility. Third, controlling behaviours are normalized in youth culture, embedding harmful gender scripts. Fourth, legal accountability is rarely emphasized; only $\approx 1\%$ of items mentioned penalties or protection orders. Finally, women's issues are often secondary to broader narratives of politics or entertainment, limiting feminist perspectives in mainstream discourse.

Measuring awareness of GBV in media outlets requires operational indicators: the share of items explicitly naming GBV; the frequency of legal/penalty references; the balance of episodic versus thematic frames; and the diversity of voices (e.g. survivor, NGO, expert). Applying Iyengar's (1991) framing distinction, the present dataset shows a heavy reliance on episodic reporting, with thematic, survivor-centred pieces as the exception. As Bourdieu (2001) reminds us, the absence of explicit critique is itself a form of symbolic reproduction.

5. What are the dominant narratives about feminism and gender in popular culture, and who are the key actors in promoting them?

The monitored corpus of 130 items across newspapers, television, advertisements, music, talk shows, and popular trends provides insight into the narratives about feminism and gender that circulate in Romanian popular culture. Although explicit references to feminism are relatively rare, several recurring discursive patterns emerge that indirectly shape public understandings of gender roles, women's rights, and the legitimacy of feminist perspectives. These narratives cut across platforms and are amplified by influential actors, including mainstream media organizations, political figures, and cultural producers in entertainment industries.

5.1 Feminism as disruption of “traditional values”

A dominant narrative in the dataset frames feminism and women's rights as a disruption to socially valued “tradition.” This narrative appears implicitly in political discourse, where public figures equate femininity with weakness or disloyalty, as in the viral remark by politician George Simion: “I am a fighter, not a woman, not a traitor.” The discursive move constructs “woman” as the opposite of strength and loyalty, implicitly aligning feminist claims for equality with betrayal of the nation or community. Media outlets reproduced this quote largely as electoral spectacle, thereby amplifying the association between femininity and political illegitimacy without critical counter-framing.

Similar dynamics appear in the advertisements monitored, where women are repeatedly portrayed in domestic roles — caregivers, mothers, or supportive wives. These representations implicitly valorize the “traditional family” and frame deviations from it as undesirable. Feminist ideals of independence, autonomy, or leadership are rendered invisible. In Fraser's (1990) terms, this contributes to the re-privatization of women's roles, situating them primarily in the domestic sphere and outside of public decision-making. The key actors here are advertising agencies and mainstream television networks, which reinforce such imagery through repeated domestic scripts.

5.2 Romance-as-control and the normalization of coercion

A second recurring narrative is the romanticization of jealousy and control, particularly visible in songs and popular trends documented in the monitoring form. Several TikTok clips portray partners checking each other's phones or restricting social interactions as demonstrations of affection. In the music entries, lyrics often frame love in terms of conquest, possession, or domination. These narratives implicitly validate coercive control, a form of abuse that Dobash and Dobash (2004) identify as foundational to many abusive relationships. While not overtly framed

as GBV, these portrayals socialize young audiences into accepting control and surveillance as ordinary components of intimacy.

The key actors promoting this narrative are musicians, social media influencers, and entertainment producers, whose high engagement levels ensure that such content reaches millions of young viewers. The algorithmic design of platforms like TikTok further amplifies provocative or emotionally charged clips, deepening the normalization of coercive behaviours under the guise of romance.

5.3 Women valued primarily for appearance

A third narrative concerns the persistent emphasis on women's physical appearance as their primary social value. In talk shows and entertainment reporting, female figures are frequently evaluated in terms of attractiveness, age, or respectability. This emphasis marginalizes women's intellectual, political, or professional contributions, reinforcing what Goffman (1979) termed gender display: public representation that codes femininity in terms of aesthetics and sexuality. Such objectification indirectly undermines feminist claims to equality by positioning women as decorative rather than authoritative.

The key actors driving this narrative are television talk show hosts, celebrity journalists, and advertising producers, who curate programming that routinely foregrounds appearance over substance. Political actors also contribute when their discourse reduces women to stereotypes or employs appearance-based insults.

Who promotes these narratives?

The monitored dataset highlights three categories of actors who play decisive roles in shaping and reproducing these dominant narratives:

Mainstream media outlets — including national television networks, commercial broadcasters, and online news portals — which reproduce sexist statements uncritically, circulate appearance-focused coverage, and prioritize sensational or domestic portrayals of women.

Political figures and public leaders — such as George Simion, whose rhetoric equating womanhood with weakness enters the media cycle and is amplified through both news reports and viral clips. These actors provide “soundbites” that become cultural reference points.

Cultural producers — musicians, social media influencers, and advertisers — who normalize gender stereotypes through lyrics, viral videos, and marketing campaigns. Their high engagement rates make them especially influential in youth culture, where narratives about romance-as-control and appearance-as-value are absorbed.

6. Youth Responses to Media Narratives about Gender and Feminism

The monitoring of 130 media items across Romanian news outlets, entertainment, advertising, music, talk shows, and social platforms provides insights into how youth audiences engage with gendered narratives. While explicit references to feminism are relatively rare, the dataset reveals a strong youth presence in the reception of symbolic gender messages, especially through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Responses vary from supportive and solidaristic engagement to rejection and trivialization, reflecting broader cultural tensions around gender equality in Romanian society.

Youth engagement with symbolic gender narratives is evident in the Popular Trends sheet of the monitoring form, where multiple viral TikTok clips normalize jealousy and surveillance in relationships. These posts, often framed humorously, depict scenarios where a partner checks the other's phone or sets 'tests of loyalty.' Youth engagement is high, with likes and shares frequently reaching into the tens or hundreds of thousands. The reactions suggest that many young viewers interpret controlling behaviour as amusing or even desirable, reinforcing coercive norms. This aligns with Connell's (2005) work on hegemonic masculinity, where youth socialization often reproduces unequal gender relations through seemingly benign cultural practices.

By contrast, explicit feminist hashtags or campaigns were less visible in the monitored dataset. Instead, when gender issues emerge in youth discourse, they are frequently absorbed into existing fandom or partisan communities. For instance, in the coverage of George Simion's post-election comment equating 'woman' with cowardice, most youth comments in the dataset rallied around political allegiance rather than critically interrogating the sexist content. The implication is that gendered narratives are often interpreted through partisan lenses rather than feminist ones.

Although less prominent, there are instances where youth audiences mobilize in solidarity with feminist or women's rights perspectives. The monitoring notes for the HPV vaccination story indicate that Instagram and Facebook information pages targeting younger demographics framed the expansion of free vaccination as a positive step. Reactions here were predominantly supportive, with young women and men expressing approval of preventive healthcare. This suggests that when feminist-adjacent issues are framed in practical, health-oriented terms, youth are receptive and express solidarity. However, such responses are fragmented across niche platforms and lack the viral amplification seen in sensational or conflict-driven stories.

Alongside supportive responses, the dataset shows evidence of rejection and trivialization of feminist narratives among Romanian youth. In the comments following sexist statements by public figures, many young supporters endorsed the politician's rhetoric, often by reframing it as humor or partisan loyalty. This reflects a broader cultural pattern identified by Kitzinger (2004), in which

sexist discourse is normalized as entertainment or banter, rather than recognized as harmful. Furthermore, monitored responses to thematic news features on domestic violence often focused on questioning women's credibility or minimizing the scale of the problem. Such responses echo international findings, such as in Portugal, where youth expressing feminist solidarity sometimes encounter social backlash (Silva, 2019).

Youth responses cannot be understood outside the broader societal context. Romania's media ecosystem is characterized by strong partisan alignment and high levels of sensationalism, which shape the interpretive frames available to young audiences. The scarcity of thematic, survivor-centred reporting in mainstream outlets reduces the visibility of feminist perspectives, leaving young people to interpret gender issues primarily through episodic stories or symbolic cues. This contrasts with contexts like Jordan, where government censorship limits feminist expression (Abu-Lughod, 2013), but the effect is similar: public feminist narratives are marginalized. At the same time, Romania's comparatively high rates of online connectivity mean that young people are exposed to global feminist movements, even if these are not prominently featured in national outlets. Yet the monitoring dataset shows little evidence of large-scale Romanian youth mobilization around such movements during the observation period.

The dataset suggests that youth responses to gender and feminism in Romanian media can be mapped along three broad categories: normalization and trivialization, solidaristic support, and backlash and rejection. This tripartite map highlights the ambivalence of youth engagement: while supportive responses exist, they are overshadowed by normalization and backlash.

Response type	Characteristics	Visibility / amplification
Normalization and trivialization	Sexist remarks and coercive behaviours treated as humour or partisan spectacle; control interpreted as affection	Dominant - virally amplified through TikTok content and sensational clips
Solidaristic support	Approval of health and rights measures (e.g. HPV vaccination); expressions of solidarity with survivors	Fragmented - confined to niche platforms, lacking viral traction
Backlash and rejection	Feminist framings dismissed as irrelevant or 'foreign'; questioning of women's credibility	Recurrent - driven by partisan polarization and cultural resistance

Table 2. Types of youth responses to media narratives about gender and feminism.



In sum, young Romanians respond to media narratives about gender and feminism in divergent ways. The dominant tendency is to trivialize or normalize gender inequality, particularly through viral social media content that romanticizes control or repeats sexist rhetoric as entertainment. Solidaristic responses exist, especially in health and rights contexts, but they remain fragmented and less visible. Backlash against feminist narratives also emerges, reflecting cultural resistance and partisan polarization. These findings underscore the need for targeted media literacy interventions, as well as stronger feminist counter-narratives in youth-oriented media spaces, to ensure that young audiences encounter alternative scripts beyond normalization and rejection.



7. Gaps in Media Representation of Gender and Barriers to Change

The monitoring exercise demonstrates that gender representation in Romanian media remains inconsistent, fragmented, and frequently shaped by entrenched stereotypes. While women's presence in public life has expanded, this is not matched by balanced representation in media narratives. Three major gaps stand out: underrepresentation of women as authoritative voices, neglect of cyber-violence and emerging digital harms, and symbolic marginalization of feminist perspectives. Each of these gaps is reinforced by structural barriers that hinder progress.

First, women remain underrepresented as experts and authoritative voices in news and political coverage. Across the 130 monitored items, women were most frequently portrayed as victims of violence, recipients of health interventions, or subjects of appearance-based commentary. They were rarely quoted as experts, decision-makers, or authoritative commentators on political or economic issues. For example, in political news items, men dominated as speakers and protagonists, while women entered coverage primarily when targeted by sexist remarks, such as George Simion's post-election statement ('I am a fighter, not a woman, not a traitor'). Women's voices in these stories were secondary, if present at all.

This pattern reflects broader structural imbalances in Romania's media landscape. Studies show that Romanian newsrooms remain male-dominated at the editorial and ownership levels. Even when women are employed as journalists, they are often assigned to 'soft beats' such as culture, lifestyle, or education, rather than political and economic reporting. The barrier here is both cultural and institutional: editorial routines normalize male authority in public affairs, while women journalists face constraints in career advancement. The result is a cycle where women's expertise is systematically undervalued in mainstream news narratives.

A second gap is the near absence of media coverage of cyber-violence, despite the fact that youth audiences increasingly encounter harassment and abuse online. In the monitoring sample, digital platforms such as TikTok and Instagram were represented in the 'Popular Trends' sheet. Here, controlling behaviours were normalized as entertainment — e.g., videos portraying jealousy and partner surveillance as signs of affection. Yet these were not framed as forms of cyber-abuse or digital coercion. Nor were there items directly addressing online harassment, trolling, or cyberstalking, even though these are pervasive experiences for young women in Romania.

The neglect of cyber-violence reflects two barriers. First, journalists and editors often lack the conceptual and technical vocabulary to interpret digital harassment as violence. Online harms are trivialized as 'banter' or dismissed as private disputes. Second, limited funding for feminist initiatives in Romania means that civil society has less capacity to generate counter-narratives or to lobby effectively for systemic media coverage of cyber-violence. This gap leaves youth audiences with little guidance on how to interpret or resist digital forms of GBV.

A third gap lies in how feminist issues are framed when they appear in the media. Feminist perspectives rarely constitute the primary frame of coverage; instead, they surface incidentally within broader stories about politics, scandal, or celebrity. For example, the Simion remark was covered primarily as electoral drama rather than as evidence of systemic sexism. Similarly, HPV vaccination stories highlighted women's health risks but did not link the issue to broader feminist concerns about gendered inequalities in healthcare. This symbolic marginalization suggests that feminist frames remain secondary and peripheral in Romanian media.

The barriers to change are multiple. Audience demand for sensational content discourages editors from investing in feminist narratives that may not drive clicks. Cultural norms that stigmatize feminism as 'radical' or 'foreign' further inhibit sympathetic coverage. Finally, institutional presence does not guarantee influence: even when women occupy leadership roles in Romanian media organizations, this does not automatically translate into progressive content. The Tunisian example — where women hold visible media positions, but programming remains conservative — resonates strongly with the Romanian context.

Beyond content-level dynamics, there are systemic barriers that constrain change: male dominance in newsroom leadership, commercial pressures that drive sensationalism, lack of training for journalists to contextualize GBV or address feminist perspectives, and weak institutional support for feminist media initiatives. Together, these barriers ensure that the gaps identified above are reproduced over time, even as women make gains in political and professional life.

8. Main Conclusions and Findings from the Media Content Analysis on Gender

The systematic analysis of 130 monitored media items across Romanian news outlets, television, advertisements, music, talk shows, and social media platforms allows for the identification of overarching patterns in how gender and gender-based violence (GBV) are represented, normalized, or marginalized. The findings demonstrate that while GBV appears explicitly in only a small fraction of media items, symbolic violence and gender stereotyping permeate the cultural landscape. The analysis yields five key areas of conclusion: dominant narratives, quantitative tendencies and patterns, case-based illustrations, impacts on youth audiences, and structural implications for Romanian society and media practice.

The data reveal a series of recurring narratives that structure public discourse around gender. These narratives not only shape the visibility of women but also define the terms on which women and feminist issues appear in Romanian media.

a) Women as weak, dependent, or unreliable. The most visible narrative is the association of femininity with weakness, cowardice, or betrayal. This was most starkly illustrated by politician George Simion's viral statement ('I am a fighter, not a woman, not a traitor'), widely reproduced in news coverage after the 2025 presidential elections. Although mainstream outlets reported the quote, few critically interrogated its sexist implications. By equating womanhood with cowardice, political discourse symbolically denigrates women's social role, a practice consistent with Bourdieu's (2001) notion of symbolic violence. The uncritical repetition of such remarks entrenches gender hierarchies in public culture.

b) Women as relational beings. Across advertisements and entertainment media, women appear overwhelmingly in relational roles: as mothers, wives, or objects of male affection. Independence, leadership, and professional authority are rarely highlighted. These portrayals echo Goffman's (1979) observations of 'gender display,' where women are framed through familial or aesthetic roles, while men are depicted as active agents. This relational framing normalizes women's subordination and makes feminist demands for autonomy seem alien or disruptive.

c) Love as possession and surveillance. A third narrative visible especially in TikTok and music content is the romanticization of jealousy and control. Viral clips often depict phone-checking, surveillance, or controlling behavior as humorous or affectionate. Popular songs echo similar themes of love-as-possession. These narratives trivialize coercive control, despite criminological evidence that such behaviors are precursors to physical violence (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). The implicit message to young audiences is that restriction of freedom is compatible with intimacy.

d) Feminism as marginal or foreign. Explicit references to feminism are rare in the dataset, and when they appear, they are frequently framed as peripheral or foreign to Romanian culture.

Feminist issues are often secondary to broader narratives — for instance, the HPV vaccination coverage emphasized women’s health risks but stopped short of framing vaccination as a feminist health equity issue. The result is that feminism is symbolically sidelined, resonating with Fraser’s (1990) critique of how subordinated groups are relegated to the margins of the public sphere.

The monitoring form allows for a conservative quantification of gendered representation: only about 2% of items explicitly mention GBV incidents or prevention; only 1% of items included mention of penalties, sentences, or police measures; over 80% of GBV-related items used episodic framing; and women appeared more often as victims than as authoritative voices. In TikTok and Instagram samples, gender stereotypes and coercive dynamics were prominent, with few examples of feminist mobilization. These patterns align with international data from the Global Media Monitoring Project (2020), which found women constitute only 25% of news subjects globally.

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
Items explicitly mentioning GBV	≈ 2%	Explicit references rare across the corpus
Items mentioning penalties / police measures	≈ 1%	Legal accountability almost absent
GBV-related items using episodic framing	over 80%	Isolated events predominate over systemic patterns
Representation of women	victims > experts	Women appear more often as victims than authoritative voices
Women as news subjects (global, GMMP 2020)	25%	Romanian patterns align with international data

Table 3. Summary of quantitative tendencies from the media content analysis.

Several illustrative case studies deepen our understanding. The Simion case highlights how political discourse perpetuates symbolic GBV, with news outlets amplifying the remark as political drama. The Antena 3 domestic violence incident report (June 2025) shows episodic framing, emphasizing the victimization of a woman and the arrest of her ex-partner but offering no systemic context. The Euronews thematic feature (May 2025) provided a rare example of survivor-centred framing, drawing attention to institutional service gaps. HPV vaccination coverage illustrated structural GBV by emphasizing women’s vulnerability. TikTok and music trends normalized coercion, embedding harmful scripts in youth culture.

Youth responses reveal ambivalence. Normalization and trivialization dominate, as sexist remarks or coercive behaviors are treated as humor or partisan spectacle. Solidaristic responses exist, particularly around health measures such as HPV vaccination, but they lacked viral traction



compared to sensational stories. Backlash also appears, as some youth dismissed feminist framings as irrelevant or foreign. These dynamics mirror international patterns where feminist activism provokes counter-mobilization (Silva, 2019).

The findings have broader structural implications: media amplify symbolic violence; feminist voices remain peripheral; institutional barriers hinder reform; and youth audiences are at risk of absorbing harmful norms. The Romanian media ecosystem reproduces gender inequality through both absence (of women as experts, of feminist frames) and presence (of stereotypes, of symbolic violence).

In conclusion, the media content analysis demonstrates that gender representation in Romanian media is defined less by the frequency of explicit GBV reporting than by the pervasive presence of symbolic violence and stereotyping. Dominant narratives equate femininity with weakness, normalize relational dependence, and romanticize coercive control. Quantitative tendencies confirm women's marginalization and the predominance of episodic framing. Case studies illustrate how these dynamics play out across media genres. Youth responses underscore the ambivalence of engagement, where solidarity is overshadowed by normalization and backlash. Addressing these issues requires systemic change: editorial guidelines, feminist advocacy, and media literacy programs that equip youth to critically engage with harmful narratives.



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