

THE RHETORIC OF CIVIC ACTIVISM AND THE REPORTING OF DEVIATIONS FROM NORMS: *DECLIC* COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract: *The aim of this research is to analyse digital activism as embodied by the Romanian civic organisation Declic¹. In 2023, nineteen civic information and awareness campaigns achieved communication effectiveness through successful legislative actions as well as political resignations, in favor of the public affected by certain political decisions. The present study aims to analyze the rhetoric of civic activism within communication campaigns, both in the digital space - on the website of the Declic organization and on its Facebook and Instagram pages - and in the physical space, through the civic mobilization of the public online, the signing of petitions, and the organization of protests against abuses or deviations at the political level. Thus, the rhetoric of public activism is constructed through the ethos of public communication and through various discursive strategies - from the power of speech acts and rhetorical figures to intertextuality and lateral thinking - which expose and denounce political deviations.*

Keywords: digital activism; communication campaign; rhetoric; Declic organization; deviations from norms.

Introduction

In this paper, we aim to analyze the petitions initiated by the civic organization Declic at the political level, as well as the communication strategies used in the organization's campaigns. Declic advocates for a fairer society and represents a form of digital activism that uses the Internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilization and political action. Declic employs communication technologies such as email, websites, and social networks for various forms of civic activism, with the goal of achieving rapid and effective communication addressed to a diverse and wide-ranging audience.

The content analysis is based on the Declic organization's website and its social media pages (such as Facebook and Instagram) during the period from January 1, 2023, to January 1, 2024, in order to understand the techniques and methods through which the organization chooses to promote the importance of the causes it advocates, as well as the extent to which these efforts succeed in mobilizing the public and achieving political impact through petition success, as a result of community involvement.

¹ Romanian civil organization specialised in digital activism on matters of public interest.

Digital Activism

One of the forms of activism taking place today is digital activism, which operates on the Internet and through digital media in order to generate the mass mobilization that society needs to bring about change. The first forms of this type of activism appeared in the 1980s and continue to this day in modern societies, through blogs and social networks. The Internet's main strength lies in its ability to instantly distribute a wide variety of information to a massive audience, regardless of borders.² Among the techniques used by digital activists are email campaigns, text messages, web posts, online petitions on platforms, and blog posts.³ Activism is defined as “the doctrine or practice of vigorous action or involvement as a means of achieving a political or other goal, sometimes through demonstrations, protests, etc.”⁴, although some theorists argue that it may not be the correct term to use in the case of activism that relies on technology for action, the area in which digital activism takes place refers both to the digital technology that enables communication with the public within a call for change and to the economic, social, and political context in which it occurs (Sivitanides 2).

These actions include both the digital version of traditional activism, such as petitions and protests, as well as offline activism activities (Özkulaa 60–84). Digital activism, from a theoretical perspective, still raises questions, as the term evolves alongside technological development. Many theorists argue that we cannot separate online and offline activities, and the line that divides them is unclear. One factor that complicates providing a clear definition of the term is “combination of two elements that are complex concepts on their own: the internet (or digital technology) and activism” (Özkulaa 60–84).

Social networks offer countless opportunities for online activism. The primary advantage they provide is the ability for users to share their thoughts and feelings about various experiences and then connect them to collective causes. In this way, members of the online community can offer support and have the opportunity to organize events and activities to raise awareness of the issue. Another benefit is the ability of social networks to involve individuals who are not online in this collective negotiation that can affect them (Greijdanus *et al.* 49–54). Communities of activists that exist exclusively online are very rare because the online world is interconnected with the offline world. Although offline protests are promoted and organized online, they remain inseparable (Greijdanus *et al.* 49–54).

The etymology of the term “activism” originated from the desire to promote a policy of support for Germany in wartime, thus reflecting a pro-

² “Digital Activism.” Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/digital-activism>, accessed on 25.12.23.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ www.dictionary.com, accessed in January 2024.

German sentiment or activity. In the 1920s, the term referred to the policy of active participation within a specific sphere of activity, alongside “the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change” (Treré, Kaun 197–198). Thus, we observe that in the past, activism was associated with mobilizing citizens for national industrialization and for pro-German activities during the First World War. Today, the term encompasses a wide range of citizen activities of a political nature, from protests and revolutionary movements to everyday practices. After 1990, activism became more moderate compared to its more radical forms in the past (Treré, Kaun 197–198).

The rise in social media use, according to Kavanaugh (qtd. in Van Laer 408), demonstrates that the Internet facilitates the exchange of information and social relationships while simultaneously increasing face-to-face interactions. This gives rise to processes through which strong and weak ties are formed between various groups of individuals who connect on platforms. These ties serve different purposes: “Strong ties are perhaps more effective when it comes to activation, but it is the weak ties that enable information to travel beyond group boundaries” (Wellman *apud* Van Laer 408). Wellman demonstrated that the Internet has become a new form of social infrastructure and can serve the purpose of efficiently mobilizing citizens for protests.

Theoretical studies on the Internet show that it offers interactivity, access, and usability, and theorists are optimistic about the Internet’s potential to promote civic participation: “The literature discusses the possibilities of the Internet to cultivate social contact, mobilize political opinion, socialize and educate people, facilitate self-presentation, and enhance the contact between citizens and their political representatives through ‘e-democracy’ projects” (Hirzalla, van Zoonen 482).

Communication Campaigns

Communication campaigns have undergone a transformation, moving from the paradigm of social control to the framework of the process paradigm. Within this framework, the focus is on clarifying objectives and the role of the public, adapting strategies according to audience differences, coordinating activities, monitoring potential weaknesses in the campaign, and transferring the success of one campaign to another (Paisley *apud* Cmeciu 13). According to Newsom, Scott, and Turk, communication campaigns represent the deployment of extensive, coordinated efforts aimed at achieving specific objectives or sets of objectives, providing an organization with the opportunity to realize its plans (Coman 65).

Public relations, whether traditional or digital, share a common component: the persuasive aspect, rather than manipulation: “we lead

someone to believe, to do, to want something” (Grize *apud* Cmeciu 14). In Michael Levine’s view, public relations specialists do not persuade people directly; instead, they provide a conducive framework for individuals to persuade themselves, acting merely as advisers. The author highlights the process of self-persuasion, which revolves around the idea of co-creation, where the public engages in recollection and experiences a sense of continuity, giving them the freedom to choose (Ficeac *apud* Cmeciu 14).

Within the category of social responsibility campaigns, we find socially themed campaigns, which follow two directions (Moffitt *apud* Cmeciu 27): campaigns aimed at attracting donors for social or environmental causes, and campaigns in which profit-oriented organizations support social initiatives. Awareness campaigns fall under the typology of public relations campaigns according to their objectives. These campaigns focus on a single activity carried out through an event already familiar to the target audience. A campaign is considered successful when the public recognizes the proposed theme.

Informational campaigns aim to introduce new topics and information to the public. Public relations specialists seek to educate the audience through the information and facts presented. Public education campaigns are initiated by public institutions, non-profit organizations, or various other groups involved in lobbying or advocacy, and can cover medical, social, or other themes, aiming to change behavior by involving the target audience in new actions or in correcting undesirable behavior (Cmeciu 30).

Public communication campaigns use marketing strategies like those employed in advertising and are also considered “social marketing” programs. Often, the objective of a social marketing campaign is to encourage people to stop doing something (such as smoking or using drugs) and to start doing something else (such as purchasing a product) (Cmeciu 365). Harold Mendelsohn, from the University of Denver, stated in 1973 that informational campaigns, based on solid mass communication research regarding the audience and messages, can increase knowledge and understanding, and some individuals may ultimately use this knowledge to change their behavior (Cmeciu 365). Social networks have created a phenomenon in which an organization must build relationships with stakeholders who have the power to influence organizational life. In strategic communication, dialogue and engagement are important, along with partnership, subtle and ethical influence. Emphasis is placed on earning respect through behavior rather than words. The focus is on the organization’s openness to utilizing as many media tools and digital skills as possible (Gregory, Anne 193).

Methodology

The content analysis focuses on a corpus composed of posts from the Declic organization's Facebook and Instagram pages during the period January 1, 2023 – January 1, 2024, the discourse on Declic's website, and the Declic 2023 Report. Attention was also given to news about the events that led to these campaigns, the campaigns themselves, the community blog, and the analysis of physical protests. The type and mode of communication, the rhetoric of images, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, post popularity, shares, and the components of physical protests were analyzed. The focus was on analyzing the campaigns promoted in 2023, considering their duration, the outcomes achieved, the targeted actors, the accuracy of the information, the factors that led to the campaigns, the deviations highlighted, societal effects, public figures criticized, the affected domains, the creativity of physical campaigns and the methods used to persuade the public to engage with the cause.

The research questions we sought to answer are: how many of Declic's campaigns achieved their objectives and informed and mobilized the community? What strategies were used to attract attention on social media? Did the Declic organization succeed in mobilizing the public both in digital and physical environment? What deviations from norms were reported by the Declic community? Which public actors were targeted?

The Rhetoric in Declic Campaigns

Declic⁵ is a civic organization from Romania with over 1 million members in Romania and the diaspora. It operates by mobilizing citizens, primarily through online petitions and awareness campaigns, and has succeeded in influencing legislative decisions, blocking controversial projects, and raising the visibility of social and environmental causes. Declic relies on the power of the community to fund civic causes through donations. It does not accept funding from political parties or companies that could influence the organization's scope, to remain independent.

The most frequently reported deviations by the Declic community on social media (Facebook and Instagram, in 2023) are Privileges, as unfair advantages or departures from the principles of equality (15%), and Indifference or Ignorance of the political class (15%). Privileges are granted only to certain social classes to the detriment of others; an example of this is the special pensions campaign. Next is Incompetence (13%), attributed to the political class and national leadership, as society faces many unfortunate events that especially affect citizens. Excessive promotion (10%) refers to

⁵ <https://www.declic.ro>

gambling advertisements, which appeared frequently in social media posts. These are followed by Abuse (8%) and Corruption (8%), mentioned equally, where campaigns such as *The Horror Nursing Homes* can be noted. Failure to ensure a decent standard of living (7%) and Environmental aggressions (7%) have a similar number of posts, followed by calls for attention regarding Wrong public policies (6%) applied in society. Further, there are posts characterized by a sense of Injustice (5%) felt within society by the community, and finally, the least mentioned deviations are Censorship (2%), Covert advertising (2%), and Broken promises (2%).

Following the content analysis, of the 31 petitions launched by Declic in 2023, 11 achieved their proposed objectives within the same year. Another 8 campaigns considered successful were initiated between 2019 and 2023, when they produced tangible effects in society. Below, we list all 19 successful campaigns of the Declic organization.

Successful campaigning 2019 - 2023

Campaign	Cause	Action	Effect
1. August 10 Case	Uncertainties and delays in the investigation. Those who ordered peaceful protesters to be gassed and beaten escaped any charges. The case of August 10, 2017, was initially closed by DIICOT prosecutors.	Campaign ran for 5 years	The perpetrators of August 10 were sent to trial.
2. Special Pensions Reform	Major financial crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic. Citizens with special pensions favored.	Campaign ran for 3 years	Police officers, military personnel, aviators, and magistrates will not receive pensions higher than their salaries.
3. Threshold Law	Theft under 250,000 lei would have been punished with a simple fine.	Campaign lasted 1 year	The threshold law was not adopted.
4. Anti-Rape Law	Sexual assault	Campaign lasted 2 years	The anti-rape law was amended.
5. Illegal Logging	Forest exploitation. Lack of an effective system to monitor timber transport and illegal logging. Conflict of interest.	Campaign ran since 2020	Logging was blocked.

<p><i>6. Rovina Mining Project</i></p>	<p>Lack of cross-border impact assessments, irregularities in the authorization process, absence of an adequate impact study, irreversible destruction in the Apuseni Mountains.</p>	<p>Campaign ran since 2022</p>	<p>Environmental permit for excavation was canceled.</p>
<p><i>7. Homes of Horror</i></p>	<p>Illegal practices in elderly care homes.</p>	<p>Campaign ran for 1 year</p>	<p>Human rights organizations can monitor social centers. Ministers Firea and Budăi resigned.</p>
<p><i>8. Free Access to Forests</i></p>	<p>Access restrictions</p>	<p>Campaign in 2023</p>	<p>Right to freely enter forests maintained.</p>
<p><i>9. Deposit-Return System</i></p>	<p>Incompetence in waste management</p>	<p>Campaign ran for 5 years</p>	<p>The Deposit-Return System (SGR) was implemented.</p>
<p><i>10. “Gheorghe Ursu” Case</i></p>	<p>Decades-long court battle by Andrei Ursu, Gheorghe Ursu's son, who died following severe beatings in communist prison.</p>	<p>Campaign in 2023</p>	<p>Prosecutor's office requested case review.</p>
<p><i>11. Raising Teachers' Salaries</i></p>	<p>Insufficient salaries, economic context. Solidarity with teachers' strike.</p>	<p>Campaign in 2023</p>	<p>Salaries increased.</p>
<p><i>12. Education Laws</i></p>	<p>Non-publication of laws</p>	<p>Campaign in 2023</p>	<p>Draft laws published.</p>
<p><i>13. Recovery, Not Stigmatization</i></p>	<p>Need for recovery centers and drug testing</p>	<p>Campaign in 2023</p>	<p>Creation of an anti-drug curriculum to support students.</p>
<p><i>14. Public Building Reinforcement</i></p>	<p>Seismic context in Romania and the state of unconsolidated, degraded, or marked buildings. Earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.</p>	<p>Campaign in 2023</p>	<p>Government begins reinforcing public buildings at seismic risk.</p>
<p><i>15. Protecting Monuments</i></p>	<p>Degradation and neglect of cultural heritage</p>	<p>Campaign in 2023</p>	<p>Adoption of legislation to protect historical monuments. Campaign started from the adoption of the law establishing the “National Program for Removing Immovable Cultural Heritage from Danger” and the amendment of Article 51 of Law 422/2001 on the</p>

			protection of historical monuments by the Romanian Senate.
16. Tree Protection	Cluj-Napoca City Hall planned to relocate trees	Campaign in 2023	City Hall abandoned relocation plans.
17. Brașov Airport	Decision to maintain 7:00–19:00 schedule	Campaign in 2023	Airport operating hours extended.
18. Virginity Certificates	The World Health Organization considers them a human rights violation	Campaign ran since 2022	Virginity certificates were officially eliminated in Romania.
19. National Cancer Control Plan	Romania was supposed to have a functional plan by July 2023, but Health Minister Alexandru Rafila blocked the lifesaving program for cancer patients and did not publish the implementation norms by Government Decision.	Campaign ran for 1 year	Plan adopted, with several norms coming into effect.

Informative and mobilizing posts, an analysis of deviations from the norms

IMAGE	CAMPAIGN	SUBJECT	INTERACTION	DETAILS
 <p>Image text: The Hunger Games Gen Z fills the comments section of influencers who advertise gambling games with images of empty plates, as a sign of their</p>	1. Ban Gambling Ads	The post advocates for the ban of aggressive gambling ads, metaphorically titled “The Hunger Games.”	3,753 Instagram likes, 234 Facebook likes	Meaning: The image with empty plates and cutlery metaphorically symbolizes the “hunger” of influencers willing to promote these

“empathy” for their hunger for money.
Sign the petition to ban gambling ads

companies. The reference to the famous movie “The Hunger Games” is an analogy (specific to lateral thinking) and a form of intertextuality that deliberately attracts user attention through familiarity and popularity. The repeated plates and black-and-white contrast are psychological techniques for involuntarily attention capture.



Image text: Romania's Voice advertises Superbet even in daytime. Write them a message now

2. Ban Gambling Ads Informs the public that the show “Vocea României” advertised Superbet, even during daytime. 4,618 Instagram likes, 70 Facebook likes Meaning: The post accuses norm deviation s by the TV show. The two screenshots feature Smiley and Pavel Bartoș, well- known figures, with the gambling ad visible behind them.



Image text: 10.000 euros fine for masked advertising for betting in the *Chef's Showdown* show. There were thousands of complaints

3. Ban Gambling Ads Informs the public about disguised advertising on the TV show “Chefi la cuțite,” which was fined €10,000. 2,795 Instagram likes, 80 Facebook likes Meaning: Screenshots accuse disguised advertising on guests' shirts referencing a gambling website. The text indicates a perlocutionary speech act: “€10,000 fine for disguised advertisement” on a TV show.



BANI PENTRU CENZURĂ DA, PENTRU EDUCAȚIE BA

Ligia Deca povestește cum angajații din minister șterg comentariile negative la adresa ei: „**DACĂ N-APUCĂ SĂ LE ȘTEARGĂ REPEDE, AM O ZI PROASTĂ**”

HotNews.ro

Banner (yellow and black): “Money for censorship, yes; for education, no”

Main text: “Ligia Deca talks about how ministry employees delete negative comments on the website: ‘...if it doesn’t get deleted quickly, I have a bad day.’”

4. Education Laws Metaphori c and satirical content: “Ligia Deca explains how ministry employees delete negative comments about her.” 603 Instagram likes, 3.3K Facebook likes, 704 Facebook comments Meaning: Black/re d fonts on a yellow background and attract attention. The satire accuses political censorshi p as a norm deviation through an implicit illocution ary speech act: “Money for censorship, yes.”



Proiectul cu reclama la jocuri de noroc a ajuns la Comisia Juridică, dar...

Image text: The project for gambling has reached the Judicial Committee but...

5. Excessive Gambling Ads Image of the Parliament building with edited gambling ads. 4,207 Instagram likes, 1K Facebook likes, 107 comments, 75 shares Meaning: Parliament becomes a billboard for slot machines in Declic's visual satire, highlighting the excessive promotion of gambling



Image text: What if mental health were a priority for the Ministry of Health?

6. Mental Health Awareness Images describing context and situation. 3,830 Instagram likes Meaning: Black font on yellow background captures attention psychologically; the paradoxical question challenges the audience (lateral thinking strategy), highlighting political indifference.



Yellow banner: Parliamentarians, stop gambling the fate of dependents!
Alexandru, a 19-year-old student, set himself on fire in front of a betting shop near his high school, after losing all his money

7. Ban Gambling Ads Shows a gambling enthusiast and the real impact of gambling on consumers. 4,478 Instagram likes, 57 Facebook likes, 5 comments, 14 shares Meaning: The image features a gambler in a betting house with text over a yellow background accusing parliamentarians of gambling with addicts' fates. The shocking representation: “Alexandru



Breaking News: Victory! The special pensions of parliamentarians have been eliminated! The pressure worked: over 174,000 declic members signed the petition. (text on the building:) Cut the special pensions for real!

8. Elimination of Special Pensions

Image shows the Parliament building with the Declic campaign message projected.

3,833 Instagram likes, 200 Facebook likes, 19 comments, 23 shares

ru, a 19-year-old student, set himself on fire in front of a betting house near his school after losing all his money."

Meaning: Community celebrates the removal of special pensions via projection on the Palace of the Parliament. Perlocutionary speech act: "Victory! Parliamentarians' special pensions eliminated," noting 174,000 Declic members signed the petition.



Image text: Breaking News, Gabriela Firea has quit

9. Homes of Horror

Image of physical protest against abuses in elderly homes.

3,607 Instagram likes, 407 Facebook likes

Meaning: Perlocutionary speech act: Minister's resignation, Declic's success, and community mobilization in the streets.



10. Ban Gambling Ads

Campaign includes posters and billboards nationwide calling for the ban of gambling ads.

2,785 Instagram likes, 3K Facebook likes

Meaning: Two images feature politicians Marcel Ciolacu and Alfred Simonis, called to action via illocutionary *exercitive* speech act: “Ciolacu & Simonis, act now.” Other images show the *exercitive* force of the message: “Ban gambling and sports



Image text: Victory: we have stopped the increase of special pensions in 2024!

11. Elimination of Special Pensions Declic announces it stopped the 2024 special pension increase. 2,119 Instagram likes, 254 Facebook likes betting ads.” Meaning/ Character: Marian Enache, President of the CCR, appears. The perlocutionary speech act signals campaign success: “Victory, we stopped the 2024 special pension increase.”



Image text: Victory. Final vote: any sexual act of an adult with a person under 16 will be considered rape.

12. Strengthening Anti-Rape Law Posted on the occasion of adopting the new anti-rape law. 11,838 Instagram likes, 9.2K Facebook likes, 670 shares, 401 comments Meaning: Words “victory” and “final vote” indicate perlocutionary speech acts: campaign objective s achieved in Parliament: “Any sexual act by an adult with a



Image text: Ciucă and Bode are asking for prison for peaceful protesters. Sign the petition!

12. Freedom of expression The campaign fights against the restriction of the freedom to protest. 542 Instagram likes, 3.7k likes, 667 comments, 1.3k Facebook shares

minor under 16 will be considered rape.” The image of a girl highlights sexual abuse against children.

Meaning: the image urges the public to sign the petition against the decisions of certain politicians that limit freedom of expression. Through implicit verdictive speech acts, politicians Ciucă and Bode, who appear laughing in the image, are accused.



Image text: First aid maneuvers save lives!
But they must be taught even in school.
Sign the petition!

13. Introduction of First Aid Courses in Schools In the photo, we see a group of young people practicing/learning first aid techniques that can save a person's life. 809 Instagram likes, 2.6K likes, 183 comments, 1.2K Facebook shares

Meaning: Through this awareness campaign, Declic seeks to demonstrate the necessity of learning first aid techniques from school age.



Image text: Raise teachers' salaries!



Image text: We do not want to be caught under rubble
Sign the petition!



Image text: Protect the vulnerable ones from nursing homes
Sign the petition!

14. Raise Teachers' Salaries

Image from a physical protest. 1,658 Instagram likes, 4.2K likes, 544 comments, 484 Facebook shares

Meaning: The image of the protests highlights the low incomes of teachers and, through implicit *exercitive* speech acts, demands: “Raise teachers’ salaries” and “Sign the petition.”

15. Strengthening Public Buildings

Following the devastating earthquakes in Turkey, there is a desire to start action in case of a potential catastrophe. 1,959 Instagram likes, 4.3K likes, 613 comments, 495 Facebook shares

Meaning: By analogy (a part of lateral thinking), the image presents a building in Turkey affected by the earthquake to raise awareness of the seismic risk for unreinforced buildings.

16. Horror Nursing Homes

The post consists of a collage of three photos from the investigated nursing homes. 726 Instagram likes, 2.7K likes, 417 comments, 669 Facebook shares

Meaning: The exercitive illocutionary speech acts “Protect vulnerable people” and “Sign the petition” reinforce the message through their illocutionary force. The rhetoric of the images (syntax) includes a close-up and a detailed shot of the abused elderly,



Image text: 153 people are dying from cancer every day in Romania
Sign the petition!
Rafila, stop blocking the National Plan for Combating Cancer



Image text:
#They all knew
#[They are] Some monsters

17.	The National Plan for Combating Cancer	The campaign fights for the implementation of the National Plan for Combating Cancer.	551 Instagram likes, 6.5K comments, 1.6K Facebook shares	as well as a wide shot showing the authorities. Meaning: A comic strip-style image (syntax as a rhetorical figure) featuring Minister Alexandru Rafila and the texts “153 people die of cancer every day in Romania,” “Rafila, stop blocking the National Plan for Combating Cancer,” signals, through verdictive illocutionary speech acts, the abuses and negligence of the political class.
18.	The Horror Nursing Homes	Campaign launched following the scandal caused by irregularities found in three care centers for people with disabilities in Ilfov.	1,192 Instagram likes, 7.7K comments, 1.2K Facebook shares	Meaning: The image with ministers Gabriela Firea and Marius Budăi and the texts “They all knew / Some monsters” signals, through implicit verdictive illocutionary speech acts, the abuses of the political class and urges users to sign the petition.

 <p>Image text: Schweighofer lawyer should leave the Parliament! Sign the petition! Corporations should not pass legislation!</p>	<p>19. In addition to her position in Parliament, Cristina Trăilă, as a lawyer, represents the interests of the Schweighofer forestry company. 898 Instagram likes, 2.8K Facebook shares Meaning: The image of Cristina Trăilă, with piles of cut wood in the background, alludes-through implicit verdictive illocutionary speech acts-to the illegalities (conflict of interest) of the Schweighofer forestry company.</p>
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Rhetoric, a tool of persuasive communication in civic awareness campaigns, is first constructed through an appeal to moral norms, that is, through the *ethos* of communication (Meyer 15), according to ethical principles based on truth, equal opportunity, freedom of information and expression, respect for moral and legal norms, and the awareness of reason, as stipulated in European constitutions and conventions. At the same time, rhetoric stimulates attention and mobilizes the public through rational arguments, via *logos* (the rational argument, Meyer 15), by bringing certain societal irregularities to public attention, through their exposure, in order to transform them into social action. Through the *pathos* of rhetoric, the appeal to collective emotion is activated.

On the one hand, for rhetorical purposes, emotional arguments complement rational ones:

- Metaphors in texts and images (*pathos*) trigger cognitive participation;
- Syntax or the technique of image collage generates symbolic tension and lateral thinking (Barthes 21–26); the obtuse meaning or connotative level produces aesthetic pleasure;
- Irony or intelligent humor captures the public's attention;
- Redundancy or repetition (Todoran 52–65) reinforces the message, increases memorability, and serves as an involuntary form of attention-getting;
- Intertextuality (Roșca 25) voluntarily captures attention through the familiarity (Todoran 65–76) of well-known characters or popular films (*The Hunger Games*);
- Paradoxical constructions and the use of analogies specific to lateral thinking (de Bono *apud* Preda 73) persuade the public through surprise,

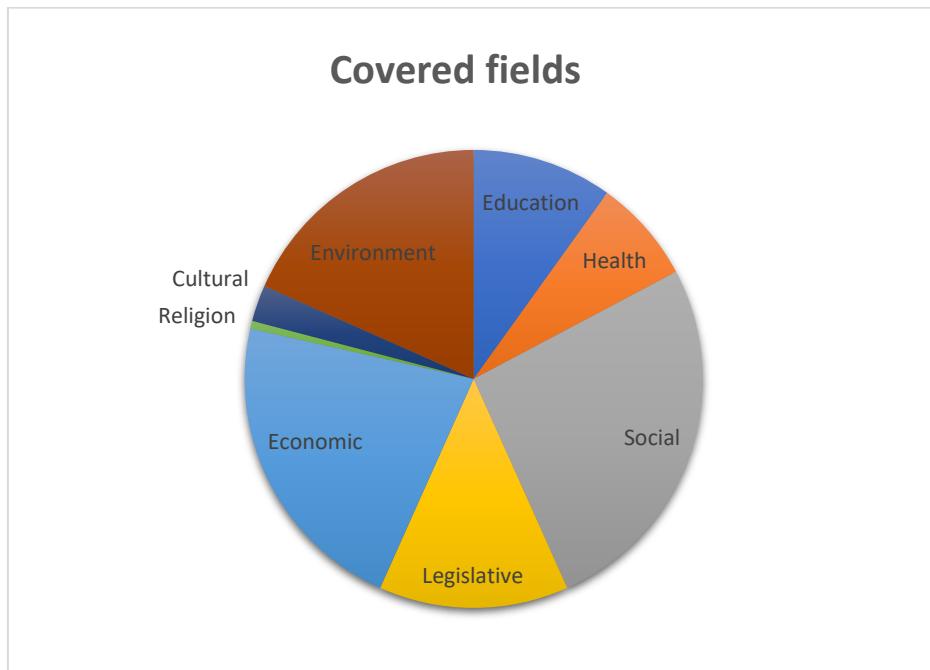
without explicit arguments, activating the obtuse dimension of the image—the meaning that is discovered by the viewer;

- The visual argument (*pathos*), through the symbolism of referents and colors in images posted on social networks, can be observed in the repeated use of black and red fonts on a yellow background and white fonts on a red background.

On the other hand, the messages are also performative speech acts: through implicit *verdictive illocutionary acts* (by which the speaker delivers a verdict or an official judgment that influences others' behavior; Austin 152), the Declic community accuses the political class of deviations from legal norms (accusations of corruption, covert advertising, abuse, etc.). Through implicit *exercitive illocutionary acts* (by which the speaker exercises authority, imposes, or influences; Austin 154–155), Declic conveys commands or exhortations: “Sign the petition”, “Ban gambling ads”, “Take action”, “Protect vulnerable people in nursing homes!”). Through *perlocutionary speech acts* (the speech act that shows the effect; Austin 121, 130), the Declic community announces the outcomes of its campaigns and their success (“Victory”, “Gabriela Firea has resigned”).

In its 2023 campaigns, Declic publicly accuses various public figures for decisions made or statements issued in the public sphere and exposes these deviations. Marcel Ciolacu is the politician receiving the most criticism (“Ciolacu, OUG and slot machines”, “Ciolacu’s trick: 13% equals 40%”, “Message for Marcel Ciolacu: make the anti-violence law a priority for the new Government”), followed by Ligia Deca (“Education laws kept secret”, “Ligia Deca, the minister of national censorship”). Alexandru Rafila is the next political actor accused, in connection with decisions and shortcomings in the health sector (“Unblock the National Plan for Combating Cancer,” “Marcel Ciolacu and Alexandru Rafila are not respecting their own deadline for publishing the rules that would unblock the plan,” “We bring the dead to Marcel Ciolacu and Alexandru Rafila”). Next in line is Nicolae Ciucă (“Judicial first: the first climate lawsuit filed against the Romanian state”). Mircea Fechet also appears among the political actors accused in connection with decisions or lack thereof in environmental matters (“We want free access to forests”). Archbishop Teodosie is accused of corruption (“DNA, remove corruption from places of worship”), alongside Firea and Budăi (“Out with Budăi and Firea”), followed by Burnei (“Burnei must not be allowed to practice!”), Lucian Bode (“Dozens of citizens sang the plagiarists’ anthem at Cotroceni, *Plagiamus Igitur*”), and Lia Savonea (“Savonea released a rapist”), all of whom are called out for their public decisions and statements.

Covered Fields



Through its campaigns, the Declic community addresses multiple areas. The field with the most posts on social media is the social domain, followed by the economic one. These two are followed by dysfunctions in environmental protection, along with irregularities in the legislative area. The education sector is also subject to criticism and efforts for change, followed by posts addressing deviations in healthcare. At the end of the list are the alerts concerning the cultural sphere and the promotion of campaigns that shed light on problems related to the religious sphere.

Analysis of Protests

- The Protest for a Decent Minimum Wage

The protest for a decent minimum wage was triggered by the 1.9 million employees earning the minimum wage, who can barely afford a festive meal. In this context, Declic created a video that attracted attention through *intertextuality*, using reinterpreted Christmas carols aimed at Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu and the Minister of Labor and Social Solidarity, Simona Bucura Oprescu. Here are a few verses from the adapted carols: “Wake up, host from the Government, fair flowers white / From your eternal sleep, fair flowers white. / Tie now the minimum wage, fair flowers white / To the consumer basket, fair flowers white.” “An unenforced law / Appears in our wages / They’re still not tied / To the consumer basket / As required by the

EU.” “We have come to carol, lord, lord to proclaim / Let’s raise the wages, lord, lord to proclaim / So that in the new year, lord, lord to proclaim / They reach the European level, lord, lord to proclaim.”⁶ Declic stated that: “This creative form of protest could draw everyone’s attention and reorganize the public agenda - especially since we will also flood the internet with audio-video materials from our action.”⁷

- NO to Mining: Protest at the Ministry of Economy

Members of the Declic community asked the Minister of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, Ștefan-Radu Oprea, to reject the adoption of the European Regulation on Critical Raw Materials, arguing that it would allow mining in protected areas and the forced relocation of locals from these zones. The creative concept of the campaign was to bring obsolete electronic devices in front of the ministry-devices containing valuable metals that the industry could otherwise obtain through recycling. The Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) is a legislative project that allows the mining industry to accelerate the opening of new surface mines within the European Union.⁸

- National Plan for Combating Cancer

During Declic’s action at the Government, 153 bags symbolizing the “bodies” of cancer patients were laid out under the windows of politicians to increase pressure on the Ministry of Health to finalize all the regulations required for the National Plan for Combating Cancer. The 153 bags metaphorically represented the number of people who die of cancer every day in Romania. One member of the Declic community confessed on the blog: “I was worried that this image would be overwhelming and that I’d be alone in my effort, but I was pleasantly surprised. Many people fighting cancer or close to those suffering from the disease joined the protest.” The action led to immediate results. The day before the protest, Declic representatives were received by State Advisor Carmen Orban and the head of Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu’s Chancellery. On the day of the protest, the Ministry of Health issued a press release announcing that one more regulation had been approved, although the list of completed tasks was much shorter than that of

⁶ „Scoală, gazdă, din Guvern, florile dalbe/ Și din somnul tău etern, florile, florile dalbe./ Minimul să-l legi acum, florile dalbe/ Și de coșul de consum, florile, florile dalbe.”; *O lege neaplicată/ În salarii ni se-arată/ Nu-s legate acum/ De coșul de consum/ Cum ne cere UE.*; „Am plecat să colindăm, domn, domn să-nălțăm/ Salarii să majorăm, domn, domn să-nălțăm/ Să fie în nouă an, domn, domn să-nălțăm/ La nivel european, domn, domn să-nălțăm”. Declic susține că „Această modalitate creativă de protest ar putea atrage atenția tuturor și reorganiza agenda publică. Mai ales că vom împânzi și internetul cu materiale audio-video de la acțiunea noastră.”

⁷ The protest for a decent minimum wage, link: <https://www.declic.ro/o-lega-neaplicata-in-salarii-ni-se-arata/>

⁸ NO to mining, protest at the Ministry of the Economy, link: <https://www.declic.ro/m-a-sunat-ministrul-economiei/>

unfinalized ones. Journalists from several media outlets such as TVR, Euronews, Europa FM, RFI, Agerpres, as well as online publications like Recorder, G4Media, and Hotnews covered the protest. However, Declic claims that the Minister of Health tried to discredit the protest through channels like Digi24, România TV, and Antena 3, which ignored the demonstration in support of cancer patients. The Declic community created a short video summarizing the action to inform the public about the initiative.⁹

- Protest “Resuscitate First Aid Courses in Schools!”

Declic continued its series of protests advocating for the introduction of first aid courses in schools. The action was organized in front of the Ministry of Education, where Declic members performed live first aid demonstrations on mannequins (back blows, the Heimlich maneuver, and chest compressions) right on the sidewalk in front of the institution. The community fights to ensure that Education Minister Ligia Deca fulfills her obligation to organize first aid courses for students, teachers, and non-teaching staff in schools, starting this year.¹⁰

- Protest for the Dismissal of Ministers Firea and Budăi

A petition launched by Declic gathered over 27,000 signatures calling for the dismissal of Labor Minister Marius Budăi and Family Minister Gabriela Firea, following the scandal of abuses in three nursing homes in Voluntari and Ilfov, where elderly and disabled patients were beaten, starved, left with wounds down to the bone, and covered in filth. The protests in Victory Square were the next step for the community: “They knew-everyone knew. And they could have stopped the unspeakable cruelties in the Horror Nursing Homes. But they remained silent, and now they’re working hard to cover everything up. We cannot stay silent, we cannot stay home.” Their props included an oversized banner reading “Out with Budăi and Firea! #SomeMonsters #EveryoneKnew” and 500 black sheets of paper with the message “#EveryoneKnew.”¹¹

- Teachers’ Protest in Victory Square for Salary Increases in Education

Declic organized a solidarity protest in Victory Square demanding higher salaries for teachers: “I think it’s time to send a clear message to those in power: we’re not convinced by their hateful rhetoric meant to divide us. We continue to stand in solidarity with the teachers.”¹²

- “Cut the Special Pensions!” Protest

⁹ National Plan to Combat Cancer, link: <https://www.declic.ro/153-de-saci-cu-cadavre-intinsi-in-fata-guvernului/>

¹⁰ Resuscitate First Aid Courses in Schools, link: <https://www.declic.ro/resuscitam-cursuri-dprim-ajutor/>

¹¹ Out with Firea and Budăi, link: <https://www.declic.ro/protest-totii-stiau-afara-budai-firea/>

¹² Protest for raising teachers’ salaries, link: <https://www.declic.ro/profesorii-in-greva-marti/>

For this protest, Declic prepared three banners, each 30 meters long, with the message “Cut the Special Pensions!” and required at least 100 people to hold them in front of the Government. At that time, the campaign petition had gathered 150,000 signatures.¹³

- Protest at the College of Physicians Against Gheorghe Burnei

Declic planned the protest as follows: “An actor dressed as a butcher, stained with red ink, will represent Gheorghe Burnei. He will hold a foam scalpel crafted by an artist. We will display a banner reading ‘Burnei must not be allowed to practice!’” The protest was strategically scheduled for the same day that the surgeon was to be heard by the Bucharest College of Physicians.¹⁴

- Plagiarism Protest “*Plagiamus Igitur*”

Dozens of Declic members asked President Klaus Iohannis to dismiss the plagiarist minister Lucian Bode and performed the “Plagiarists’ Anthem” - *Plagiamus Igitur*. This ironic intertextual adaptation of *Gaudeamus Igitur* highlighted how the president’s project “Educated Romania” had turned into “Plagiarized Romania.” Protesters chanted: “Bode plagiarized and must be removed; Educated Romania, not Plagiarized Romania,” and “Bode, resign!” The lyrics of *Plagiamus Igitur* were written with the help of a humorist, and the anthem was filmed and promoted by the Declic Community on social media. The action followed the decision of Babeș-Bolyai University, which concluded that the Minister of Internal Affairs, Lucian Bode, had plagiarized his doctoral thesis. Lyrics sung by the citizens at Cotroceni: “*Plagiamus igitur / Impostores sumus / We copied and we stole / In the doctoral thesis / How pathetic! / We hold doctoral titles / With fake theses / Like military secrets / We keep them in drawers / For no one to see. / Vivat cacademia / Vivant impostores / Vivat Control+C key/ Vivat Control+V key/ Paper doctors!*”¹⁵

Conclusions

The content analysis of the corpus revealed a communication rhetoric that draws attention to the effects of social injustices. The means to draw attention to the misconduct of public actors are diverse: illocutionary verdictive and exercitive speech acts, perlocutionary acts, visual metaphors, intertextualityl irony, repetition, and elements of lateral thinking. All the above use both in online texts and images as well as during physical protests. Thus, social action is activated through communicative rhetoric: an entire Declic community emerges - online (through engagement on social media) and offline (through participation in protests) - that denounces

¹³ Cut the special pensions protest, link: <https://www.declic.ro/protest-declic-cu-mesaj-urias-pta-victoriei/>

¹⁴ Protest against Gheorghe Burnei, link: <https://www.declic.ro/protest-impotriva-lui-gheorghe-burnei/>

¹⁵ Protest about plagiarism, link: <https://www.declic.ro/plagiamus-igitur-protest-declic/>

injustices, abuses, and the indifference of political actors. Moreover, the analysis of the 19 successful campaigns shows that the Declic organization achieved the perlocutionary objectives for which the campaigns were launched: tightening anti-violence legislation, adoption of the National Plan for Combating Cancer, preserving the right of free access to forests, reforming special pensions, securing the resignation of political actors involved in abuses, blocking transports of illegally logged timber, canceling environmental permits, and approving a legislative project that annually safeguards 100 endangered historical monuments, among others. It is observed that the motivation behind launching campaigns varies from case to case. Thus, Declic initiated campaigns both following the proposal of a community member and in response to legal changes that would have restricted civil liberties, or as a reaction to natural disasters that prompted preventive measures against potential future crises.

The discourse of Declic campaigns in 2023 highlighted the deviations from legal norms within Romania's political actions and succeeded in mobilizing the public both on social media and in physical spaces. This resulted in the activation of online users, the organization of physical protests, and even the achievement of legislative changes.

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