

## METAPHORICAL FRAMING OF OBESITY IN ONLINE NEWS DISCOURSE

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**ABSTRACT.** *Metaphorical Framing of Obesity in Online News Discourse.* For people living with obesity, public discourse is replete with messages concerning the risks and warnings that their overweight and size pose to society and themselves. Moreover, bias and stigma are frequently associated with obesity, people suffering from it being perceived as unattractive, repulsive, and even responsible for their condition.

This paper is based on a content analysis of obesity discourse in Digi24 news published online between 2017 and 2022. It aims to find out how obesity is framed through metaphors and what its subsequent conceptualisations and evaluations are at the linguistic level (individual versus collective responsibility, positive versus negative evaluation), as well as at the level of associated imagery. Results demonstrate that Romanian online news metaphorically frames obesity in ways that both inform and reinforce stigma toward the persons living with it. Overcoming the limited understanding, stereotypes, and stigma surrounding obesity is a slow but essential process, to which online news can contribute by indirectly shaping public perceptions and societal attitudes towards obesity.

**Keywords:** *obesity, metaphorical framing, linguistics, online news discourse, image anchoring, stigmatisation*

**REZUMAT.** *Reprezentări metaforice ale obezității în discursul știrilor online.* Pentru persoanele care suferă de obezitate, discursul public este invadat de avertismente ce accentuează riscurile pe care obezitatea și dimensiunea corporală

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le reprezintă pentru sine și pentru societate. De asemenea, prejudecățile și stigmatizarea sunt frecvent asociate cu obezitatea, persoanele cu obezitate putând fi percepute ca neatrăgătoare, respingătoare chiar și responsabile pentru afecțiunea de care suferă.

Lucrarea de față este o analiză de conținut a discursului despre obezitate pe un eșantion de știri Digi24 publicate online între anii 2017 - 2022. Ea pune în lumină modul în care obezitatea este încadrată metaforic la nivel lingvistic și al imaginilor care ancorează discursul obezității dar și conceptualizările și evaluările acesteia pozitive sau negative: obezitatea ca responsabilitate individuală versus colectivă. Renunțarea la percepțiile limitate legate de obezitate este un proces lent dar esențial la care discursul știrilor online poate contribui prin modelarea acestora.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *obezitate, cadre metaforice, lingvistică, discursul știrilor online, ancorare prin imagini, stigmatizare*

## 1. Introduction

Obesity is a chronic, multifactorial disease involving a combination of various comorbidities and worldwide spread, which can induce a physical, psycho-emotional or occupational imbalance and whose management takes time and requires specific individual and group interventions ([https://connected4health.pixel-online.org/index\\_nogranated.php](https://connected4health.pixel-online.org/index_nogranated.php)). Obesity stigma and negative stereotypes that are damaging to the health, dignity, and quality of life of people with obesity also abound and are perpetuated through the public discourse (Puhl and Heuer 2010; Foster et al. 2003).

According to the literature, “the obesity epidemic discourse has replaced that of AIDS as the most vilified disease of our century” (Harjunen 2016, 47). It is, therefore, evident that obesity has become a stringent public health concern, and online media and news can play a key role in shaping public perceptions and societal attitudes towards obesity.

The objective of this paper is to analyse how obesity is represented in Romanian Digi24 online newsfeeds and to identify predominant metaphorical framings and their implications for understanding and perceiving obesity. To the best of our knowledge, there is no analysis of the metaphorical representation of obesity in Romanian online news discourse. A content discourse analysis framework was chosen to study the linguistic devices, more specifically, metaphor types (mapping positive versus negative evaluations and individual versus collective responsibility), alongside image anchorage and other disparate linguistic choices associated with them (modality, specialised terminology).

## 2. Metaphors we suffer by

There is a vast literature on metaphor and communication. We frequently use metaphors in everyday conversations because we think metaphorically (Landau and Keefer 2015, 131). Metaphors are employed to express feelings, emotions, and attitudes, and to conceptualise thought. In turn, metaphors work to create meanings and shape our cognitions, and thus we can discuss metaphor-enriched cognition (Landau, Meier, and Keefer 2010, 1046). Metaphor is a staple component of communication because it allows us to understand and communicate abstract concepts through concrete mappings.

In medical communication, disease may be metaphorically represented as a dangerous animal attacking, lurking in our DNA, and running in families. It can be *treacherous, insidious, tricky, merciless, cruel, ruthless, evil, aggressive, malignant* and *benign*. Virginia Woolf in her essay “On Being Ill” has remarked how pain cannot be rendered in sensible language when she stated, with a poetic resonance, that “The merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare, Donne, Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head [. . .] and language at once runs dry” (Woolf 1926). Later on, Elaine Scarry in her book *The Body in Pain* claimed that “pain destroys language” (Scarry 1985, 4).

Besides illness, metaphor as a cognitive and linguistic device is also used in relation to subjective and sensitive experiences such as death and dying, employed euphemistically in order to discuss and relate to complex and risky situations in a non-threatening and indirect manner. Thus, war terminology with all that it entails in terms of danger, risk, damage, weaponry, war loss or war winning after fighting a valiant battle, expresses the patients’ affliction, feelings, and attitudes towards their illness. According to how it is used, metaphor can favour, but also impede, medical communication, since, as Semino (2020, 3) apodictically puts it, the use of violence metaphors for cancer is potentially harmful to cancer patients.

In public communication, metaphor is a form of rhetoric that tries to persuade or dissuade people, steering them towards a particular reasoning and solution. By perceiving a health problem as a common enemy, for instance, public discourse metaphors attempt to persuade us to fight against it and eventually destroy it. If the health problem is perceived metaphorically as burden on the health system or as contagion, responsibility falls on the individual, patients feel responsible and, thus, incriminated. The present analysis will focus on the online news discourse from the perspective of metaphor framing and its image anchoring of one of the most severe afflictions of our modern times: obesity.

### 2.1. *Analysing metaphorical framing of obesity in online news*

The current paper is part of a metaphor-based content analysis of online Digi24 newsfeeds, covering the period between October 2017 and March 2022 (<https://www.digi24.ro/cautare?q=obezitate>). The corpus compilation was based on the keyword search: “obezitate”. It retrieved a total of 539 articles that referred to news on health, healthy/unhealthy eating, food, cancer, adolescents, etc. The articles ranged in length from 160 to 600 words.

Qualitative data analysis was performed manually, applying inductive in vivo coding (labels) and thematisation (Manning 2017), thus preserving the original words and phrases encountered in the news rather than the researcher’s own conceptual terms. The following research questions were formulated to address the core issues of metaphorical framing of obesity in online news:

Q1: What metaphors are employed to frame obesity?

Q2: What evaluations do they convey? and

Q3: What images anchor the obesity discourse?

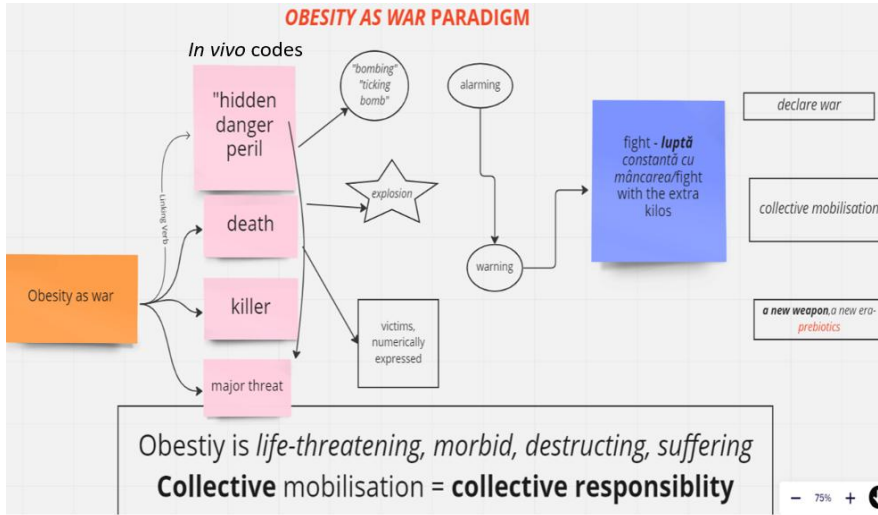
The working hypotheses are that, through its linguistic choices, Romanian news media shape understanding of obesity as: 1) a *collective endeavour* which is associated with a positive perception and determination to fight it, but, at the same time, 2) news communicates an *individual negative evaluation* associated with personal sin and blame that perpetuates obesity stigma.

Stigma communication theories (Smith, 2007; Barry et al, 2009) were employed to examine stigmatising metaphors associated with obesity in the selected newsfeeds corpus. The taxonomy was based on Barry et al. (2009), who distinguish the following types of obesity metaphors: a) sinful behaviours; b) disability; c) time crunch; d) obesogenic environment; e) obesity as a response to unrealistic messages of physical attractiveness. This categorisation distinguishes a continuum of blame, starting with individualistic (gluttony and food addiction) and ending with external, collective blame, the latter residing outside individual control (junk food advertising, the big industries). I have also employed Smith’s (2007) taxonomy, according to which metaphors fulfil the functions of stigma communication: they label, mark, assign personal responsibility, and link to peril the stigmatised person.

In terms of logistics, all translations from Romanian into English were performed by the author. Likewise, online news articles were coded, while those discussed herein were referenced as case studies in the final Primary resources section of the Works Cited.

Manual in vivo coding and thematisation (Manning 2017) was employed in order to preserve the authenticity of the newsfeed language and thus avoid researcher bias in developing initial concepts. The content analysis of metaphorical framings of the corpus resulted in the following major types: obesity as fight/war,

excess weight as a societal burden, obesity as epidemic, obesity as food addiction, obesogenic environment and food addiction, and obesity as economic construct. Figure 1 below illustrates the process of *in vivo* coding and inductive thematisation of the most frequent metaphorical framing of obesity, i.e. obesity as fight/war:



**Figure 1.** In vivo coding and thematisation of *Obesity as war/fight* (my compilation)

In the following sections, the metaphorical framings identified in the corpus will be detailed, together with image anchorage and disparate linguistic evidence such as terminology (semantic field) and modality, which support the current analysis and interpretation.

### 2.1.1. Obesity as fight

As in previous studies (Cotter, Samos, and Swinglehurst 2021), the most frequent thematic framing identified in the corpus was that of fight/war against obesity. Obesity rates have spiked “dramatically”, it is surrounded by “perils” and “danger”, and it represents one of the “most serious *threats* to people’s health” (*italics mine* for emphasis throughout the paper):

- Losing extra kilos as fight: Obesity is “a major threat” that evolves “rapidly”. People “*fight* with the extra kilos”; “I’m back to the feeling of constant *struggle* with food.”
- Obesity as hidden danger/dangerous: Obesity is “morbid”, and it is mapped as “danger” and a “ticking bomb”. “Obesity is *dangerous* at puberty”[1]; it is a “major *danger*” as there is “hidden *danger* behind the extra kilos”.

Even more, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, obesity is indirectly personified as “death” and “killer”:

- Death/mortality framework: “Obesity increases the risk of *death*” (headline) [2]; “Several diseases hide behind obesity,..... which increases the risk of *mortality* in case of infection with the coronavirus”[3]. “Researchers have found out why *obese* people are at higher risk of developing severe COVID-19 and *death*”[4]. From a pragma-linguistic perspective, through the use of endorsements from experts (i.e., *researchers*) and a dangling comparative (i.e., *at higher risk*), the online discourse intends the highest possible risk level to be read.
- Explosion framing of obesity is associated with its labelling as case: “The *cases* of obesity have not decreased [...] on the contrary, they have *exploded*”[5]. By considering people “cases” and “obese”, instead of employing people-first terms (i.e., people suffering from obesity), metaphors assign a label (Smith 2007), categorise, dehumanise, and reduce them to a situation.
- Weapon. The fight and weaponry metaphors are frequently employed but in conjunction with epistemic modality, which questions the success of such interventions: “A *new weapon* that *might* open a new era in the *fight against* obesity”[6]; “We *might* soon have a *new weapon to fight* against infantile obesity...”[7].
- Alarm. The online news frequently issues an “*alarm* signal” that the number of patients with obesity requiring emergency treatment has skyrocketed and that “obesity is life-threatening”. “Pandemic is putting children at *high risk* of obesity” as it has developed at “*alarming rates*” and has reached a “critical growth”: “*Alarm signal*. Increasingly more patients with morbid obesity arrive at the Emergency Department (News headline) [8]”.

Since obesity is a salient social concern, metaphorical framings of war/fight and all its associated mappings from the semantic field of hidden danger, weapon, alarm, explosion, and mortality are expected to influence the way in which people think about obesity, lowering its rates. Nonetheless, the epistemic modality inherent in the verb (i.e., *might* soon have a new weapon) acts as a downtoner of the verb force. By fighting against obesity, health authorities underline that collective responsibility and mobilisation are crucial. Fear of the hidden danger and death is an effective tactic for spurring people into action. However, even though the fight metaphor is intended to influence public opinion towards a collective response, fight is generally construed as

damage, destruction, aftermath and suffering. Such negative implicatures are to be blocked in the 'obesity as fight' metaphor, should the public discourse framing achieve its mobilising purpose. Thus, although fighting or declaring war on disease is not a novel metaphor, it is one intended to have a new positive contextual implication that transcends its negative power.

### 2.1.2. *Excess weight as societal burden*

Within the general fight against obesity, the situation when a medical term is employed, i.e., "excess weight" instead of "fat" or "obesity" (RO: *exces de greutate/greutate în exces*) deserves special consideration. On the one hand, "excess weight" or other professional terminology that makes patients vulnerable is intended to sound neutral versus the negatively loaded term "fat" or "obese": "Patients with *excess weight* are more predisposed to suffer from a severe form of COVID-19", "Young people are more *vulnerable*"[9]. On the other hand, "excess weight" is perceived as a burden on the system and the healthcare workers. COVID-19 patients with underlying obesity needed "extra equipment", "extra team members", and "extra effort" to be transported to hospital, placing considerable strain on healthcare staff, underlining that the experience was painful for both patients and physicians. This type of discourse blames the sufferer and induces a feeling of guilt, which is evident in the negative judgment:

.....*extra equipment* and *extra effort* were needed from everyone's part... it put the medical staff to a *heavy test* - most of them weighed over 200 kilos. For these patients, *additional crews* were needed to transport them to hospital. [10]

Patients who represent a major threat to the healthcare staff and are a different type of helpless and incapable victim are likely to induce disease avoidance and reluctance response in medical staff, patients themselves, and people in general:

Evaluating and treating morbidly obese patients requires *extra effort* from everyone.....The experience *marks* both the doctor and the patient .... They feel *helpless*. [10]

This negative evaluation of obesity as societal burden assigns blame and individual responsibility to patients with obesity, is weight-stigmatising and runs contrary to the positive *fight-as-collective-responsibility* in the metaphorical framing of obesity.

### 2.1.3. Obesity as economic construct

A further type of metaphorical framing of obesity is that of economic construct expressed through terminology belonging to the stock market and industrial semantic field (quota, cost, pressure on the health budgets, fuel, trend) that imply objective, collective measures and responsibility:

- quota, trend - obesity is “maintained at high *quotas*” ..... and it represents “a worrying *trend*” [22],
- food as fuel is associated with business/marketing measures:

“....nutritious and healthy food should be available, quality *fuel* for the body.”

The shift of responsibility from the patient to the external economic and marketing environment is evident in the association of obesity with the obesogenic environment. At the linguistic level, this shift is achieved in conjunction with:

- passive agency: “the consumer *is sold* juices, and sweets with over 300 calories and large amounts of sugar, even though this is forbidden by law in educational units”,
- impersonal verbal constructions (passive reflexive in Romanian: *se cere*, subjunctive), without explicitly mentioning the agent: “advertising of ultraprocessed foods should be banned..... sweets should not be displayed at cash desks in supermarkets ....”. These constructions are often used in official language, scientific texts, or news reporting to express necessity, obligation, and to avoid responsibility.

The obesogenic environment is commonly associated with sub-themes belonging to the semantic categories of:

- war: alarm/ing, warning: “These are *alarming* figures, which in the near future will but increase and trigger one of the most severe challenges for our public health.” [23],
- “cost, major pressure on the health budget.” [23]

Although linked directly with ultraprocessed foods and therefore, external responsibility of the obesogenic environment (“increase in consumption of ultraprocessed food”), by associating obesity with personal unhealthy eating habits, as well as assigning blame for the pressure exerted on the health budget and society, obesity also falls inside the paradigm of individual responsibility:

“it implies a *burden for society*..... [for] the cost of medical therapies, .... [it] *costs governments loads of money*, causes *economic loss*.... and decrease of productivity.” [23]



#### 2.1.4. Obesity as epidemic contagion

Obesity as an infectious disease and pandemic, or the obesity epidemic, represents another frequent metaphorical framing (Boero 2007; Hilton, Patterson, and Teyhan 2012). Epidemic grounds the obesity metaphor by transferring one property (quantity) from vehicle (pandemic) to tenor (obesity): “Obesity has to be regarded as *an infectious disease*”[11].

Obesity as pandemic and global complex health challenge adds to its numerical and spread interpretation (“*global complex health challenges* as obesity”[12]). The “plague” or “epidemic” framings of obesity underline the potential devastation of the threat. However, using contagion for something which is not can socially isolate people living with obesity from the general population (e.g., obesity versus normal weight). It is a potential segregation that is harmful and contributes to stigmatisation (Sontag 2002, 133-4, 149).

Saying that “Europe is confronted with an obesity epidemic”[13] may entail its contagious interpretation, involving societal causes, measures of control and isolation and hence the need to avoid obesity and people who live with it. The “contagion” reading in the obesity as epidemic metaphor, as in the excerpt from the online news discourse below, is negative, promoting fear of catching it and, therefore, avoidance of people with obesity:

Subheading: “If we are surrounded by people who are overweight, we are more likely to gain weight ourselves. // Body text: “*The idea that obesity can spread like the flu or chickenpox sounds strange*, but a study of military families in the United States shows it is true.”[14]

Lieberman, Tybur, and Latneret (2012) warned against reacting towards patients with obesity as if they were suffering from infectious diseases, whereas Park, Van Leeuwen, and Chochorelou (2013) claimed that participants in their study had increased discomfort levels at the prospect of having physical contact with a person with obesity. Such perceptions build on a negative bias that causes viewers to react unfavourably, with negative emotions such as disgust, fear or behavioural attitudes (rejection) and discomfort towards otherwise healthy individuals (Park, Van Leeuwen, and Chochorelou 2013). That this interpretation of stigma offers social power and induces a tendency to separate from the stigmatised is evident in an online article which, in order to distance itself from the possible negative perception of obesity as contagion, underlines that “obesity is *nontransmissible*” [15].

To conclude, framed as pandemic, obesity is a cause of alarm, but it also highlights the need for concerted efforts and measures of control. Nevertheless, infectious diseases are a distinct domain in medicine; therefore, the interpretation of obesity as contagion and avoidance is stigmatising and, consequently, should be reconsidered.

### 3. Metaphors we eat by – Obesity and food as drug, addiction, and sport

Alongside obesity metaphors, there are metaphors we eat by, i.e., related to food and diet. A specific metaphorical framing of food in the surveyed corpus is that of peace, comfort, self-medication, and drugs. Metaphors from the semantic sphere of food as drug, food as addiction, food as the new smoking, and food as sport and entertainment encourage the perception of obesity as sinful behaviour:

- Obesity as addiction – “Obesity is *the new smoking*. Foods are no longer our daily nourishment..... but *comfort* and *drug*, food is *self-medication*” [16, 17],
- Food as sport, entertainment: “Chubby and cute does not mean healthy”; “Stuffing with food is the parents’ and grandparents’ favourite *sport*.” [18]

The negative conceptualisation of food as sinful behaviour with its sub-categorisation as parents’ sinful behaviour towards their children – chubby *and cute*/(RO: *grăsuț și frumos*) – is supported by adjacent metaphors from the field of fight, i.e., threat, alarming: “obesity is one of the *biggest threats* to human health, ..... it has been increasing *alarmingly* among children” [19].

In framing obesity as a sin or addiction to food, with people not trying harder to get healthier, it is implied that obesity is within personal control and responsibility. Likewise, parents and grandparents are to be blamed for their sinful behaviours towards their children and grandchildren.

Regarding the choices from the lexical field of obesity, these can range from positive or euphemistic to loaded. The use of medical terminology (medical jargon) has euphemistic connotations in the noun phrases: extra kilos, excess of fat, excess weight, putting on weight, corpulence (RO: kilograme în plus, exces de grăsime, greutate în exces, îngrășare, corpolență). Likewise, the corresponding adjectives – overweight/supraponderal, corpulent/corpolent, larger persons/persoane corpolente, do not sound pejorative and do not add stigmatising labels, as it happens especially in the context of pediatric obesity, where labels like fatty and big belly perpetuate the negative load and reinforce obesity stigmatisation (Flint and Reale 2014, 1925):

- derogatory terms: fatty/”graso”, fat and pretty/”gras și frumos” [20],
- antithetic ironic juxtaposition and inherent negative value judgment: big bellies, small brains/”burți mari, creier mic”. [21]

#### 4. Obesity discourse and image anchorage – Dehumanised body parts

The images anchoring the obesity discourse in the analysed corpus (N=29 case studies) were categorised according to a grid that included the presence (+) or absence (-) of the following variables:

- a) person and age: adult male [M]/Adult female[F]/child [C] or teenager [T];
- b) cropped, headless body;
- c) body part with obesity: central [cent], extremities [ext], upper [up];
- d) eating junk food/engorging [Junk];
- e) obesity/fat;
- f) faceless individual, back towards the camera;
- g) inappropriately fitting clothes, disgraceful;
- h) sedentary versus active;
- i) neuter image/other (Table 1):

**Table 1.** Categorisation grid employed for interpretation of image anchorage in the corpus - cases 1-14 out of 29 (my compilation)

.	(M)/(F) /(C) (T) (a)	Croppe d (b)	Body part (c)	Junk (d)	Fat +/- (e)	Faceless (f)	Disgrace ful (g)	Sed/Act (h)	Other (i)
1	T	+	cent	-	-	+	-	sed	
2	M	+	centl	-	+	+	-	act	sport
3	M	+	cent	-	+	+	-	sed	
4	C	+	cent	+	+	+	-	sed	
5									Healthy food
6	M	+	ext	-	+	+	-	sed	
7	C	+	ext	-	+	+	-	sed	
8	M	-	up	-	+	-	-	sed	ICU
9	-								ICU
10	M	-	up	-	+	-	-	sed	ICU
11	M+F+C	-		-	+	+	+	sed	
12	M	+	cent	-	+	+	+	sed	
13	M	+	cent	-	+	+	+	sed	
14	M+F+C	-		-	+	+	+	sed	

In the entire corpus, images of adult males (44.8%) and children/teenagers (44.8%), rather than females with obesity, anchor the textual metaphors. Apart from an empirically evident small number of images related to sport, healthy food, and active people, in the surveyed corpus of online news, visual exposure to obesity was most commonly instantiated through objectified, dehumanised

imagery, neatly cropped, headless men and women (48.2%) with central obesity, visceral or belly fat and adipose tissue (51%), and a focus on other fat body parts.

This type of image anchorage of obesity for the textual content underlines a simplified and simplistic perception of obesity, demonstrating poor coverage of factors beyond personal responsibility. Such representations of the human body affected by obesity are a mark or visual cue likely to trigger aversive responses (Park, Schaller, and Crandall 2007; Smith 2012) and to lead to exclusionary and stigmatising attitudes towards people with obesity (Buckels and Trapnell 2013).

Presenting people with obesity as an object with the intention of rendering a symbol of a collective problem, albeit a stringent and severe health issue, can have damaging effects and a negative impact on individuals suffering from obesity. While technically this presentation is a legal way of representing real people, i.e. cropping out the head for anonymisation and privacy, it is not present in the case of slender bodies, where, on the contrary, the faces are the focus. A curtailed trunk can be interpreted, therefore, as a metaphoric representation of no mouth and, thus, no voice, no head, no opinions or ideas.

Alternatives to headless body images that anchor obesity messages are the faceless persons with their backs to the camera (65%), associated with an “ashamed” interpretation, somehow at par with the sinful behaviour category identified at the level of the textual metaphor. [24, 25, 26] (Pop 2022, 21)

Other positions in which people living with obesity are visually depicted in the studied corpus include:

- engorging junk food (20%), likely to even further increase repulsion and aversion (Puhl et al. 2013) [27];
- fatty thrombophlebitic legs [7];
- showing a bare abdomen, with body parts and junk food priming [2], [12], [18], [21];
- sedentary, lazy (79%) [22];
- helpless [28];
- dressed in inappropriately fitting clothing, disgraceful (31%) and, most commonly, headless [12], [13], [21], [22], [29].

## Discussion

Roland Barthes (as cited in Acetoso 2017, 1) asserted that “language is never innocent”: it can seduce or it can wound. Starting from the premise that public perceptions can be shaped through metaphors, this article has analysed how obesity is framed in a corpus of Digi24 online news articles, in order to understand how it is locally communicated and evaluated.

Based on content analysis of metaphorical framing in the corpus, and in line with the hypotheses of news position towards obesity, either as collective or individual responsibility, positive or negative perception, the following most frequent categories have been identified, described and illustrated: obesity as fight (i.e., major threat, hidden danger, ticking bomb, explosion, weapon, fight, victims); obesity as societal burden; obesity as economic construct; obesity as epidemic: contagion; obesity as food addiction, and food as sport.

Through the decision to fight against obesity, it is evident that there is great determination in the public online Romanian news discourse to eliminate it. The predominance of the “fight” metaphor, with all its dangers, weaponry, and victims, demonstrates that obesity is seen as an outside, collective evil, and therefore, assigned a positive evaluation.

Furthermore, obesity is assigned individual responsibility and thus a negative, blaming and stigmatising evaluation through its mapping as societal burden and cost on the health system.

The “epidemic” metaphorical mappings of obesity as globally virulent, threatening, and uncontrollable are meant to warn against the obesity pandemic - if one is not careful, one can become obese. However, perceiving obesity as contagion, which it is not, assigns personal responsibility and stigma, and it can trigger avoidance and stereotypical attitudes such as isolation and removal from groups of persons living with it.

Images that anchor textual meanings of metaphorical framing overtly link interpretations to bias and stigmatisation. Although images of active and sports-involved persons with obesity are present, depictions of headless and idle people represent the pervasive imagery associated with obesity. Whether for reasons of privacy laws, consideration, and civility, and therefore, well-intended, when these images refer to bulging stomachs and individuals gulping junk food, they can have a dehumanising, damaging effect.

## Conclusion

The analysis of Romanian online newsfeeds reveals that, while obesity is predominantly framed through collective risks and societal struggles, it is also associated with individual vulnerability, exposure to harm, negative portrayals, and stigma. At the visual level, online news discourse reinforces stigmatising representations of bodies affected by obesity, thereby amplifying social marginalisation. By examining both the messages about obesity and their linguistic realisation, discourse analysis can raise critical awareness of the stigma attached to obesity and contribute to reshaping public understanding of the condition. To conclude, journalists and policymakers in particular could refine their communication by adopting less stigmatising discourse strategies when reporting on issues related to obesity.

## WORKS CITED

### Primary resources – Online news case studies

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