

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION IN DIGITAL JOURNALISM: PRACTICES AND IMPACT IN ONLINE PRESS

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Abstract: Media consumers are increasingly turning to online news sources, accessing journalism through websites, search engines, and social networks. In this context, the visibility of journalistic content in search engine results becomes crucial for digital press outlets. This paper examines the integration of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in digital journalism, outlining current practices (on-page, technical, and off-page SEO) and how newsrooms incorporate optimization while upholding editorial mission. The study highlights the need for a balance between SEO and journalistic ethics is emphasized, along with the importance of professional training in SEO and diversifying traffic sources.

Keywords: *search engine optimization; online press; on-page SEO; technical SEO; off-page SEO; Google algorithms.*

Over the past two decades, journalism has undergone a profound transformation under the influence of digitalization and the internet. Audiences now consume news predominantly online, through news websites, search engines, and social media platforms, which has intensified competition for users' attention in the digital space. In this context, the visibility of journalistic content on digital platforms has become crucial for the survival and success of media institutions. Search engines—particularly Google—act as a primary gateway to news for a large share of the online audience. Consequently, the need has emerged to integrate search engine optimization (SEO) practices into editorial strategies in order to ensure that articles achieve the highest possible visibility in search engine results pages.

SEO represents a set of techniques aimed at improving a website's visibility in organic (non-paid) search engine results, with the goal of ranking as high as possible for relevant queries and thus attracting a larger readership. It is a component of Search Engine Marketing (SEM), which defines the steps necessary to increase a site's organic relevance through link building, the creation of high-quality content, or submission to search engines (Potts, 2007). Therefore, in the era of digital journalism, search engine optimization is no longer optional but has become an essential component of distributing journalistic content to a broad audience. Today,

SEO is considered a key competence of the modern journalist. The basic principles of SEO optimization applied in journalism can be grouped into three interdependent categories: on-page SEO, technical SEO, and off-page SEO.

On-page SEO refers to the optimization of internal elements of each article or news page. This includes the use of relevant keywords in titles and body text, the writing of clear and descriptive headlines and subheadings aligned with the terms users are likely to search for, the creation of high-quality and well-structured textual content, and the optimization of HTML elements such as title tags, meta descriptions, and URLs. On-page SEO also involves inserting internal links to related articles (to encourage navigation and increase time spent on the site) and the correct use of meta tags and structured data (such as schema.org for news articles), enabling search engines to better understand the content and relevance of a page. In the journalistic context, emphasis is placed on the natural integration of keywords into the text—avoiding unnatural keyword stuffing—and on ensuring a logical structure, with paragraphs and subheadings that make the article easy to navigate for both readers and search engine crawlers (Giomelakis, Karypidou & Veglis, 2019).

Technical SEO addresses the infrastructure and performance aspects of a news website that influence content indexing and ranking. Essential elements include optimizing page load speed (as faster sites provide a better user experience and are favored by algorithms), ensuring mobile compatibility, using the secure HTTPS protocol, and maintaining clean HTML code that is accessible to search engines. Technical SEO also involves generating and updating a sitemap file and a robots.txt file, as well as implementing structured data that provides search engines with clear information about the content (title, author, date, media outlet, image, etc.). All of these technical elements create the foundation upon which on-page and off-page optimizations can be effective - a news site with technical issues (errors, slow loading times, poor navigation) risks being penalized in rankings regardless of content quality. In short, technical SEO ensures that a website “speaks the language” of search engines, offering them easy access and clear signals about its content.

Off-page SEO covers actions external to the website that aim to increase the authority and reputation of a news source on the web. The primary factor is the backlink profile—the number and quality of websites that link to the publication’s articles or domain. In the case of media institutions, such links may originate from citations by other outlets, news aggregators, blogs, forums, or social media platforms where content is shared. Search engines interpret these external links as votes of trust: the more a news site is cited by credible and diverse sources, the greater its domain authority and the higher the likelihood that its articles will rank well. Off-page SEO practices therefore include an active presence on social media platforms, inclusion in services such as Google News and other

aggregators, and the cultivation of a strong brand image that encourages direct user searches (for example, readers explicitly searching for the publication's name). Thus, off-page SEO focuses on strengthening the online reputation of the media institution, complementing on-page and technical optimizations (Beel, Gipp & Wilde, 2010).

Search engines - and Google in particular - constantly adjust their algorithms with the stated aim of providing users with results that are as relevant and useful as possible. One example is the update to search algorithms and quality rater guidelines in 2019, when Google announced that it would highlight and keep for longer at the top of results those articles that represent original reporting (Google Post, 2019). The purpose of this change was to give credit to the primary source of a news story—the material that “set the tone” for a narrative—so that users can more easily find verified core information, while newsrooms that produced the original content benefit from increased visibility.

At the same time, Google has articulated more clearly the principles underlying content quality assessment, summarized in the E-E-A-T concept—Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness. This acronym originates from Google's human quality rater guidelines and defines the factors algorithms consider when determining whether a page provides reliable and valuable information to users (Google Search Central). In practice, for news organizations, this means that original reporting authored by reputable journalists, supported by clear evidence of expertise and adherence to ethical standards, will enjoy a competitive advantage in rankings. For example, having author pages that demonstrate experience, citing verifiable sources, correcting errors, and maintaining a positive publication history (awards, professional recognition) all contribute to E-E-A-T signals and can positively influence search visibility.

The integration of search engine optimization techniques into newsroom activities has today become a structural component of digital journalistic production. The Agroexpert portal, launched in 2017 and focused on specialized communication in the agricultural sector, provides a clear example of adaptation to these requirements. In 2024, the Agroexpert editorial team initiated a process of editorial modernization based on the standardization of technical publishing procedures, centered on a well-defined SEO strategy. The need for this intervention is explained by the dependence of niche platforms on organic traffic, in the absence of a generalist audience and high volumes of social distribution.

The implementation of the SEO strategy at Agroexpert involved reconfiguring the editorial workflow by introducing additional technical elements at the stages of editing, validation, and publication of materials. One of the main changes was the adoption of the previously mentioned dual-title system. The short title, displayed on the homepage, is designed primarily for visual impact and navigation, while the full (meta) title of the

article meets criteria of algorithmic relevance, semantic density, and alignment with users’ search patterns.

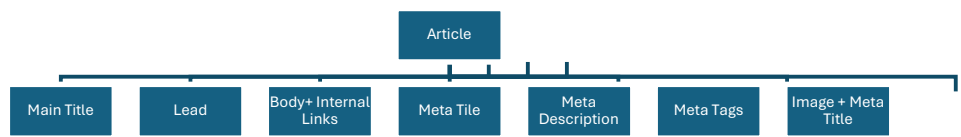


Figure 1. Elements of an SEO-Optimized Article (AGROEXPERT)

Thus, the editorial function of attracting readers through a concise headline is combined with the function of efficient indexing in search engines through an alternative, SEO-optimized title. In addition, the meta description associated with each article was standardized to approximately 150-160 characters (in line with Google’s recommendations), including agriculture-related keywords to maximize the likelihood of attractive display in thematic search results.

Beyond the structure of headlines, the newsroom introduced a standardized set of mandatory components for every published piece: a lead (introduction) with a dual role - both narrative (for the reader) and algorithmic (for indexing), an internal text structure that includes subheadings and internal hyperlinks to related articles, and standardized thematic labels (tags). As a result, materials include references to context, statistical data, previous analyses, and thematic dossiers, which both extend the reader’s information pathway and transmit algorithmic signals regarding the semantic relationships between content items. In the specialized literature, this practice is considered a key factor in building a site’s topical authority, particularly in domains that require professional expertise, such as agriculture.

Another element introduced in 2024 was the optimization of visual and multimedia content management. Photo files began to be renamed according to technical conventions that include keywords describing the subject and context of the image, thereby increasing the likelihood that they would be indexed in Google Images and appear in relevant image searches. Attention was also given to image alt text attributes, which were used to succinctly describe visual content in a manner intelligible to algorithms.

The effects of implementing these procedures became quantifiable shortly thereafter. Starting in September 2024, traffic originating from search engines became the primary source of access to the platform, surpassing traffic generated by social media networks. Figure 2 illustrates the evolution of the share of various traffic channels for Agroexpert, highlighting the rise in sessions from organic searches. This development indicates the portal’s transition from a traditional distribution model based on social media to one oriented predominantly toward semantic relevance (search visibility). In other words, well-optimized SEO content

began to “work on its own” in favor of the newsroom, bringing interested readers directly from Google without reliance on manual distribution via Facebook or other networks. This outcome validates the effectiveness of the editorial intervention and the SEO procedures integrated into the journalistic workflow, demonstrating that even a niche media institution can compete for online visibility through optimized specialized content.

It should be noted that this trend is not isolated but rather part of a broader context within the digital media industry. Globally, recent data show that traffic from social networks to news websites has been in steady decline (for example, visits from Facebook to news publishers have decreased by approximately 50% compared to 2019). At the same time, traffic from organic search remains a relatively stable and essential channel, accounting for around 19% of site visits across a sample of more than 500 publishers in 2023, with Google dominating as the search engine, generating approximately 96% of this traffic (Press Gazette, 2025). This confirms that as social media referrals decline, search engine optimization becomes increasingly important for publishers seeking to maintain and grow their online audiences.

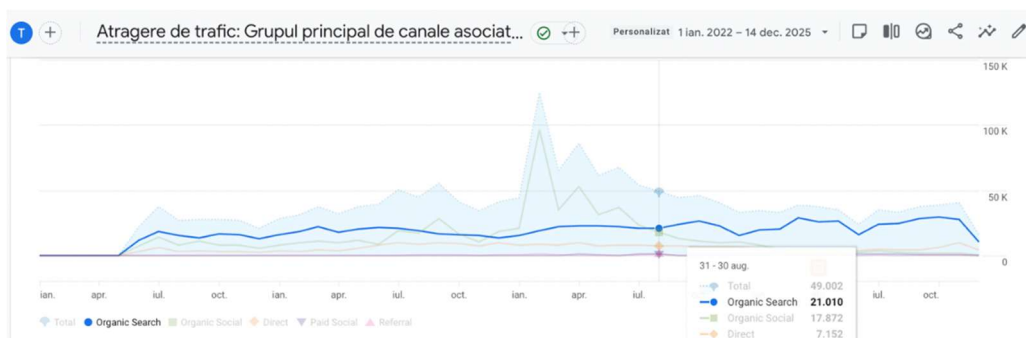


Figura 2. Evoluția traficului în funcție de grupul principal de canale asociat sesiunii (AGROEXPERT)

The Agroexpert case can be interpreted as an example of how niche media institutions adapt to the requirements of contemporary digital infrastructure. The results obtained suggest that SEO efforts deliver tangible benefits without replacing traditional journalistic principles, instead complementing them. The practices adopted by the newsroom demonstrate that technical and editorial optimization for search engines does not compromise content quality; on the contrary, it ensures that high-quality journalism reaches the relevant audience. The specialized literature supports this view: SEO itself is editorially value-neutral and does not force journalists to “dilute” content or write exclusively for traffic. In conclusion, the integration of SEO into journalistic practice has become a necessary condition for the success of the press in the online environment. Examples such as Agroexpert illustrate that niche publications can keep pace with major news organizations by adopting

international optimization standards and leveraging their strengths—topical expertise and original content—within the digital ecosystem. As search engine algorithms continue to evolve to reward valuable and trustworthy content, newsrooms that combine the principles of quality journalism with SEO techniques will be best positioned to expand their audience and influence. Ultimately, SEO does not replace journalism; it ensures that relevant information reaches its target audience.

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THE SOCIALIST FEMINIST PRESS— THE DEBUT OF “FEMEIA” MAGAZINE¹

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Abstract: This analysis examines the debut issue of the Romanian magazine “Femeia” (The Woman) in July 1946, a period of impending socialist transition. It argues that the publication, while superficially an apolitical entertainment weekly focused on romance, fashion, and Hollywood, functioned as a potent vehicle for conservative, capitalist values and gender stereotypes. The article deconstructs the magazine’s format—highlighting its familiar tone, signature columnist “Monica,” and engaging mix of surveys and human-interest stories—to reveal how its professional and appealing presentation naturalized a traditional ideology.

Beneath its lighthearted content, “Femeia” reinforced a narrow, domestic sphere for women, excluded the elderly, and sensationalized topics like prostitution. While directly addressing the upcoming 1948 elections and women’s political role through curated questionnaires, the magazine’s underlying credo and clichés ultimately upheld patriarchal norms. The study concludes that “Femeia”’s 1946 iteration represents a form of effective, normalized propaganda, where entertainment subtly affirms existing power structures and social roles, contrasting with the overtly political propaganda attributed to its later socialist-era versions.

Keywords: *feminism, socialism, propaganda*

Introduction: Women’s Press in the East—Between Neglect and Integration

It is important to begin by situating the present research within the broader theoretical field of studies related to women’s magazines. The first observation concerns the theoretical imbalance between the analyses devoted to women’s press in the West and the scarcity of such studies in the former socialist space.

While publications addressing women in the USA or Western Europe have enjoyed extensive analytical attention, with numerous studies focusing on their evolution and the types of messages they amplified (McCracken, 1993; Zuckerman, 1998; Ballaster et al., 1991; Braithwaite, 1996; Ferguson, 1983), considerably less attention has been paid to the socialist women’s press. Naturally, specialized literature

¹ The ideas presented in this article were previously explored in the article “Presa feministă socialistă - Debutul Revistei *Femeia*”. *Anthropos. Revista de filosofie, arte și umanioare* nr. 1/2025.

dedicated to these publications does exist, but it is smaller in scale compared to that devoted to Western women's magazines (Ghodsee, 2019; Atwood, 1999).

There are numerous elements that explain the disparity in academic attention given to women's magazines from former socialist countries. Firstly, the difference in the success of the magazines themselves, which enjoyed wide circulation in Western countries. Furthermore, publishers, universities, and the theoretical apparatus developed in the West tended to view their own cultural products primarily with a critical eye. The language barrier, lack of access to archives, and not least, the categorization of the socialist press as mere "propaganda," have all contributed to a much lower interest in this type of media discourse. While Western publications benefit from numerous analyses, monographs, historical, semiotic, or comparative studies, the work written by Lynne Atwood remains a singular effort in the field of publications from the former socialist space. There is also a disparity in the analysis of women's press in former socialist countries reflected among researchers themselves: there are fewer researchers from the East who penetrate the Western academic field, and when they do, they often find themselves compelled to integrate the experience from their own countries into Western theoretical frameworks.

A less cited element resulting in the disproportionality of analytical concerns regarding women's press relates to the absence of self-critical examination in former socialist countries. While in the West there was great openness to analyzing the press from various perspectives, and the refinement and infinite nuances of this analysis gave rise to a vast and complex literature, the socialist press was not analyzed as propaganda. On the contrary, it was considered that it "expressed the truth and contributed to the formation of class consciousness." However, under conditions where the press became an organ of truth, analysis of it as a form of persuasion, as an instrument for shaping a feminine ideal, "gender norms," and recipes guaranteeing social acceptability was absent. It was only after the fall of the Berlin Wall that the press in former socialist countries became accessible to critical reflection. The experienced eye of Western researchers found in this press a terrain worthy of exploration. However, as mentioned, local research, especially that based on Francophone theoretical frameworks, has struggled to find its way into the references cited by these works (Rovența-Frumușani, 2022). The fall of the Berlin Wall often meant, as stated, a framing of Eastern experiences within Western theoretical frameworks. We consider it absolutely necessary to develop the critical self-reflection initiated after 1989 by researchers in Romania, to bring theory closer to the research subject.

In this sense, it is important to dismantle from the outset a strong prejudice concerning the press intended for women. It is seen as "propaganda." In the strict sense of the term—the propagation of a

message—yes, it is an instrument of propaganda. But in the same sense, any message amplified by the mass media is propaganda (Ellul, 1973). Without entering the difficult terrain of defining the term propaganda, we must begin our analytical exercise regarding the debut of “Femeia” magazine by understanding that mass persuasion has a force of propagation, of amplification, whether it openly assumes this or hides it.

Furthermore, the 1950s are a particularly interesting period, given the scale that women’s magazines and the press in general acquired during this time of post-war economic boom. Consequently, we have a vast specialized literature concerning how the ideal of femininity was shaped and transmitted through these press organs. As expected, the Cold War and differing ideological orientations would decisively leave their mark on how women’s magazines functioned. The very objective of the press intended for women was different. In the West, it concerned the placement and marketing of products, while in the former socialist countries, it was about other types of goals: promoting a more complex image of women, linking the feminine ideal to professional success, and forming class consciousness.

In the effort to rewrite the history of socialism in a rather negative key, the fact that the women’s press in the countries of the former Soviet bloc openly assumed much more progressive ideals tends to be overlooked. However, as our analysis will show, in the first two years of “Femeia”’s publication, the style, headlines, press genres, type of writing, topics addressed—absolutely everything seemed to make the magazine hard to distinguish from a magazine like Vogue in the USA, for instance.

The first issues of the Woman magazine 1946

The debut years of “Femeia” magazine – 1946, 1947 – are the period when the magazine is a “classic” one. Obsessively dominated by themes related to love and sexuality, the magazine slips in a few articles about successful women and a few ideas about profession and its importance. Otherwise, it is a magazine that could be reprinted today without shocking through its “socialist” content.

The inaugural issue of “Femeia” (The Woman) magazine, published on Friday, July 12, 1946, emerged during a complex and transitional socio-political juncture in Romania. Notably, its content reflects a deliberate disengagement from the contemporaneous political tensions, wherein King Michael I still held the throne—his abdication would occur in December 1947—and traditional political parties, while under pressure, had not yet been fully dissolved by the consolidating communist regime (Deletant, 1999; Petrescu, 2014). This publication strategy appears particularly conspicuous given the high political stakes surrounding the potential mobilization of the women’s electorate in the lead-up to the manipulated 1946 elections and the subsequent establishment of a communist People’s Republic in 1948. It is important to notice that the first two years after WWII

when the *Woman* magazine was published marked a period of uncertainty when the communists were trying to attract the Romanians to win the elections of 1949. As researchers show, they were walking a fine line, since they were counting on the women's votes but were very cautious about upholding radical feminists ideals in a very backward and conservative country. (Jinga, 2015).

Contrasting with these underlying political struggles, the magazine's format and content positioned it firmly within the realm of popular, apolitical entertainment. Published weekly in an eight-page A3 newspaper format on low-quality paper, "*Femeia*" utilized a visual grammar typical of leisure publications: bold decorative fonts, strategic use of red ink, and prominent illustrations. Its masthead, rendered in bold black handwritten letters on a green rectangle, introduced a publication whose first cover featured a female silhouette in a windswept beach dress and wide-brimmed hat—an image emphasizing leisure and femininity. The content further sustained this focus, predominantly featuring human-interest stories, clichéd narratives on women's societal roles, and discussions of intimacy, celebrity culture, fashion, and domestic advice, such as weight-loss recipes.

Moreover, the magazine uses commercial techniques to attract the reader by placing only small excerpts from interesting articles on the front page and continuing them on page seven. A survey of the headlines from the first issues leads us toward the realm of sensationalism. Here are a few examples from issue no. 4: "Romantic advice: let's say 'no'"; "Men of Today"; "My Husband Will Leave Me"; "A Woman Criminologist"; "Behind the Scenes of Censorship in American Cinemas"; "My Diary: Suicide for Love"; "French Stars"; "Women on Dangerous Slopes.". (*The Woman* magazine, no. 4, 1946)

Consequently, "*Femeia*" from this period can be interpreted not as a political document but as a human-interest brochure. Its enduring interest for contemporary readers lies precisely in this dissonance—its presentation of conventional, even stereotypical, feminine topics as a pervasive normality, thereby obscuring the profound political transformation unfolding within Romanian society

A review of the first issues reveals a consistent magazine format. The front page employs a "hook" technique, featuring teasers of articles that are continued on page seven.

The publication lacks an introduction of its editorial team; instead, the central figure is "Monica." She opens the magazine with her personal credo, conducts surveys, and responds to readers' letters. Her tone is deliberately intimate, explicitly positioning herself as a confidante to whom readers should open their hearts. On page two, in a column titled "The Letter Box," Monica addresses her audience in an article called "Dear Future Friends," aiming to foster a sense of closeness. The eight-page magazine contains a total of 34 articles organized into recurring columns.

These include a brief editorial by Monica; impressionistic pieces on life, women, love, and relationships by journalist Sorin Carnabel (spanning pages one and seven); discussions on controversial romantic topics in “Monica’s Problem” (also spanning pages one and seven); and a collection of opinions on marriage, jealousy, and first love under the title “Monica Conducts a Survey.”

Other regular features are “The Children’s Corner,” “The Joke Bag,” and “Ionica and Dănuț.” An entire page (page six) is dedicated to film and Hollywood stars, with Monica also contributing reviews. The column “The Monkey Box,” signed “Cobra,” offers merciless criticism of local shows and actresses. The humorous adventures of “coana Luxița,” written from the perspective of a well-to-do lady recounting her misadventures—such as being mistaken for a prostitute or attending a “swing” dance party—add a layer of benign irony and familiar charm to the publication.

The sole reference to the upcoming elections appears within Monica’s survey, posing questions that, tellingly, remain relevant today, highlighting the slow evolution of mentalities compared to technical progress. Monica poses several questions to actress Dina Cocea, including: whether political discernment is male-exclusive or if feminine qualities make women more suitable; if political engagement leads women to neglect the home; how mass female participation would influence political life; if women in politics should also serve in the military; if opposing political views between spouses cause discord; and what would happen if men ceded power to women temporarily. Author Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu answers similar questions in another issue. While some responses may seem progressive, they are framed by Monica’s opening editorial, which strikes an undeniably conservative note. After optimistic platitudes about creating an interesting magazine and the “free woman” bringing a message of peace, Monica states: “I believe in marriage, which is a great trial (...) I adore children. I believe in God, in honor, and in the future of my country.” (Revista “Femeia”, no. 1, July 1946).

Thus, the magazine was edited by women with a conservative mindset who were nonetheless talented journalists, skilled at attracting an audience with humor, provocative questions, surveys, and human-interest stories that remain engaging even today.

However, beneath its entertaining style tailored for a public seeking light topics, the magazine systematically reinforces gender stereotypes. Its content focuses almost exclusively on love and romance, implicitly targeting young and very young women. Discussions revolve around whether to confess past relationships to a partner, if jealousy justifies divorce, or how to balance profession and family. While an article like “Rely Only on Yourself” (Issue 2) encourages women to enter the workforce, and others advise leaving unloving husbands or making marital compromises, the overarching narrative is limited. Monica’s surveys probe whether modern love is stronger, if one can love multiple times with equal

intensity, and how to protect children from heartbreak—never addressing the lives of elderly women, who are entirely absent from its pages.

Furthermore, the articles predominantly feature women as civil servants or, more rarely, workers—a reflection of high rural female illiteracy at the time. Women are overwhelmingly portrayed in the roles of wife, mistress, prostitute, or actress. The treatment of prostitution is particularly problematic. The “coana Luxița” episode humorously depicts her being mistaken for a prostitute during a police raid, using this to critique the treatment of women as “objects” by male politicians—a critique that remains pertinent seventy years later. A “Report from the joyless life of young *déclassé* women” sensationally exposes the identities and photographs of women arrested for prostitution, blending pity with exhibitionism while blatantly disregarding their privacy or consent.

The 1946 “Femeia” exhibits strong American influence. Page six, “Woman and Spectacle,” is filled with Hollywood star photos and gossip, while the second issue features a translated excerpt from Eleanor Roosevelt’s memoirs. Self-help columns offer psychological tests to assess one’s personality or capacity for enjoyment. The “Monkey Box” column, signed “Cobra,” employs derogatory language, as in its scornful review of an aging actress, contrasting her with a French star who gracefully retired.

Clichés about men backstage at female performances or men envying women’s summer attire fill the pages. Reading it, one might imagine Romania in its most serene times, as the content scarcely ventures beyond the romantic lives of young women, gossip, actor profiles, and the inevitable beauty, weight-loss, and sewing patterns occupying the final page.

Conclusion

In scholarly literature, “Femeia” from the 1950s is often quickly labeled a propaganda tool of the socialist regime. Yet, the propagandistic nature of the 1946 entertainment magazine is seldom questioned, likely because its format—friendly tone, humor, and professional layout—has become so normalized in women’s magazines that its underlying messages, stereotypes, and power dynamics go unexamined. This very normalization makes its “propaganda”—reinforcing traditional gender roles and social hierarchies—infinately more effective. It is not absent; it is skillfully concealed.

In essence, the socialist-era debut of “Femeia” is as capitalist and conservative as possible. Meticulously crafted for marketability, it is a magazine designed to please, attract, and retain its audience while being saturated with the clichés of a traditional society that confines women to the romanticized domestic sphere—despite its pompous proclamations about feminine freedom and affirmation in all fields.

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