

Thinking Through Targeting: Social Media an Effective Tool for Influencing People and Society

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Abstract: Every day, a wide range of stakeholders target us on social media platforms in an attempt to influence our decisions and behaviour. These stakeholders might be politicians hoping to win over support from the public and secure votes, organizations trying to convey the benefits of their decisions and actions to us as citizens, or commercials trying to sell us something. We absorb new media content, and it can be difficult to distinguish between fake and real news in this redundant environment with widespread data invasion. Beginning with the INSCOP opinion survey from 2023, which investigates Romania's exposure to propaganda and disinformation, our goals are to analyse how audiences were affected by the disinformation narratives in Ukrainian war context, and look at the current social media trends related to this topic using the analytical techniques made available by new media instruments. We want to highlight how social media is the main channel used in Romania for disseminating false information, and we also want to draw attention to the connections that can be made between those who spread false information and the traits of the individuals they are trying to reach. The present paper is part of a larger PhD research program that focuses on consolidating a society's security culture through better institutional strategic communication; therefore, all the findings will be used to this end.

Keywords: Targeting audience, Social media, Disinformation, Narrative, Influence

1. Introduction

We witness social media weaponization. Over 61% of the global population uses social media, which means over 4.95 billion people spend an average of 2 hours 24 minutes per day on it. The Milgram experiment with six degrees of separation can be used to examine how many social media users connect instantly (Hâncean, 2018). Over 12 months (starting in October 2022), approximately 215 million new users have joined social media, resulting in annualized growth of 4.5%, at an average rate of 6.8 new users every single second. By 2023 global social media advertising spending is expected to reach \$207 billion, with the US spending \$72.33 billion, China \$71.38 billion, and the UK \$9.7 billion (Bagadiya, 2023). Even though we all know social media is important for communication, most of us don't see it as a tool for influence, manipulation, and targeting in order to change our behaviour or societal standards, and we don't even consider the possibility that we might be victims.

Think of social media in terms of its capacity to influence, as employed by a malicious actor to target a certain audience. Meta claims "5.3 billion global Internet users, with 3.71 billion using at least one Meta app per month." This means 70% of Internet users use Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, or WhatsApp, and many use multiple platforms. With over "1 billion Stories uploaded every day throughout Facebook and a potential advertising reach of 2.08 billion people" (Newbery, 2023), the influence is not only in the number of users but also in the massive amount of data and information. Most subjects are unprepared for what Bittman called the "evil doctor approach of disinformation" (Kalensky, 2022).

Imagine how quickly a brief targeting message can reach a large audience. Privacy delays source identification if the malign actor sends the message in large private groups and redistributes it in large public groups and pages, making it difficult to find the message's origin and spreading map to resend it to the initial audience. If you are not in the bubble, you will not find out about the message.

Manipulated, false, and misleading information can threaten public safety, community cohesion, trust in institutions and the media, public acceptance of science's role in policy development and implementation, economic prosperity, global influence, and government, constitution, and democratic processes (GCS, 2021). BREXIT, vaccination campaigns, and the US election and Cambridge Analytica scandal (Bârgăuanu, 2018) also seem to be examples. Algorithms and AI help companies exploit digital user behaviour to increase sales. A new level of consumerism in which users buy things they don't need and set the stage for algorithms to change their consumption patterns so that they require something that doesn't even exist on the market yet (Ioana, 2023).

2. The System in the System - how to fit the Audience Inside

Regardless of whether our objective is to safeguard the audience from being influenced and manipulated or if we assume the role of a malicious actor with the intent to project influence to affect behavior and decisions, it is imperative to master the art of the targeting process. This encompasses the techniques, tactics, and strategies

employed, along with a profound understanding of cultural nuances and specificities. Of paramount importance is a comprehensive knowledge of the information environment's dynamics and the ability to seamlessly integrate within the audience's context. We delve into the strategies employed by malicious actors in relation to current trends on social media platforms – encompassing everything from the deployment of chatbots and influencer marketing to the nuances of fact-checking.

2.1 Information Environment

Modern information environments are more complex due to the convergence of physical, cognitive (human-centric), and informational (data-centric) dimensions (FM 3-13, 2016), especially social media. Physical and virtual realities collide in this digital ecosystem, fostering disinformation. Social media influences global opinions. Disinformation campaigns change platform content and narratives. These efforts aim to sway public opinion and weaken society. Thus, understanding and navigating the many layers of the information environment requires a sophisticated strategy that considers physical presence, cognitive effect, and social media quality and purpose.

2.2 Characteristics of Audience and Target Analysis

When considering the influence of the target analysis audience (TAA), the notion may prompt us to consider psychological operations, which are defined as „*planned psychological activities that use various methods of communications and other means on a specific (approved) audience in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, thereby affecting the achievement of political and military objective*” (AJP-3.10.1, 2007). TAA is a planned process that changes audience perceptions and attitudes to achieve a goal, so audience is a mean.

Consider applying this strategy to a specific audience on one or more social media platforms. A textbook psychological operation has three main steps: set objectives and define target audiences (TA); create, approve, and deliver influence messages to TA; and evaluate effectiveness (FM3-05.302, 2005). The key is to calibrate the message on affecting behaviour because people focus more on values, particular individuals, items, phenomena, and circumstances that can generally meet their wants (UK GCS, 2022) and socio-cultural factors and prior experience influence decisions and actions.

We must analyse demographic profiles of individuals by age, gender, educational background, and geographical regions more susceptible to disinformation campaigns when analysing the targeting audience. Psychographics and behavioural patterns of targeted individuals are important because psychological traits, beliefs, values, and motives make some people more susceptible to disinformation. Understanding audiences, context, instruments, and adversary objectives is crucial to targeting audiences, which is done defensively to prevent malign influence and protect domestic audiences. Defensive or offensive actions target the opponent to diminish, reduce, or annihilate his ability to act (Nistor, 2023). We must study online behaviour, including social media use, conspiracy theories, and confirmation bias, which often differs from real life.

Moving from individuals to communities, certain communities and social groups are especially vulnerable to disinformation because of societal differences such as political polarization, ethnic and religious conflicts, and socioeconomic inequality. Groups act different from individuals and are characterized by „*impulsivity, mobility and irascibilities of the masses*”, (Le Bon, 2022), and this is especially true on social media, where certain groups are turned into communities based on similar interests, emotions, habits, and jobs.

2.3 Malicious Actors and Influence Strategies

We should consider state-sponsored actors, state actors, ideologically driven groups, and for-profit entities when considering malicious actors who use social media to spread false information and influence public opinion (Prier, 2017). To counter them, we must also investigate their motivations, affiliations, and goals. This will help us identify harmful actors' content generation methods, such as misleading narratives, conspiracy theories, and emotional messages. Provocateurs in online discussion forums, blogs, and social media can spread disinformation, as can governments, corporations, unethical news outlets, and others (Global Security Initiative, 2023). In 2018, Oxford University and Grafika (US) presented to the US Senate Intelligence Committee "that Russia's Internet Research Agency had launched an extended attack on the United States by using computational propaganda to misinform and polarize US voters" (Smith, 2019) using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube data.

The cyber domain extension changed how we see audiences and target audience processes because it has five layers—cognitive, service, semantic, and syntactic—that can manifest differently on devices, networks, and people, affecting target audience identities from rational to emotional, virtual or physical (Sartonen et al, 2016). Even when discussing information warfare or the exploitation of social media, the media is essential for audience targeting because it offers a means of both influencing people through hostile propaganda or malicious

information and counterinfluencing them by informing, educating, and debunking. In order to "persuade and induce the sympathy of potential allies, and simultaneously spread confusion, uncertainty, and distrust in the enemy's population," social media serves as both the environment and the means of doing so (Pelletier, 2022).

Other methods include manipulating social media algorithms to spread false narratives, impersonation and identity deception, using fake accounts to make the message seem credible, well-known, and trusted, and creating fictitious personas. Malicious actors use cognitive biases, emotional triggers, and fear, wrath, and empathy to manipulate and persuade audiences. The malicious influence could be a cross-border campaign, campaign in which actors seek to influence audiences in different countries. Those campaigns are often difficult to be linked with the end user beneficiary, because cybersecurity and hybrid warfare consists in multiple action, overlaid and covered, and there is the need to maintain the balance of international relations.

2.4 Trends in Social Media – From Chatbots and Deepfake to Microtargeting, Social Activism, Influencers Marketing and Fact Checking

Deepfakes and synthetic media are a major social media trend and concern. Deepfake, AI-generated realistic audio, video, and text content, can be used for political disinformation, fraud, and identity theft. AI can recognize speech, convert text to audio, and analyse feelings, "a processing of the inflections of our voices to the point where it knows when we are angry or joyful, angry or indifferent" (Măruță, 2023). AI generates text and images quickly, fuelling disinformation campaigns. Technology threatens reporting credibility by blurring fact and fiction. Adobe promised to remove the fake AI war photos from the Mideast and Ukraine after the Washington Post revealed them (Stein, 2024). Using chatbots to answer user questions instantly and increase customer interactions became common practice. The changing landscape of social media influence requires understanding how AI-driven interaction affects user behaviour and decision-making. Microtargeting and personalized content delivery are common on social media because highly performant algorithms and user data analysis enable tailored messages based on preferences, behaviours, and demographics. Influencer marketing targeted high-profile celebrities on social media, promising exclusivity, private jet travel, partying on a private island, and meeting the reality of crowded beaches, tropical rain, and casserole sandwiches. Billy McFarland, an influencer and marketer, launched a bold Instagram campaign that resulted in a scammer being sentenced to six years in prison and \$26 million in damages (Frier, 2020).

Social media remains crucial to activism and social movements. The Black Lives Matter movement and climate activism demonstrate social media's ability to mobilize large-scale social change campaigns. Measurement or limitation of harmful messages is difficult, especially for hate speech. Levy (2021) states that "Hate speech is still an issue on banning and implementing because of lack of context" because we must consider not only the ideology and intention of the message, but also the semantics, cultural, and social context of the environment. It's easy to see how difficult it is to assess because it's not just about the words, but also the pictures, videos, or combination of them (Levi, 2021). Social media platforms like Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok allow activists to organize protests and raise awareness. This type of influence campaigns also raises privacy concerns and questions about echo chambers and filter bubbles (Arguedas et al 2022) fuelled in part by confirmation bias, which favour info that reinforces existing beliefs (GCF Global, 2024).

Misinformation and disinformation persist on social media. Fighting disinformation has increased as malicious actors spread false narratives. Fact-checking groups, social media platforms, and independent fact-checkers debunk false statements. The UK Governmental Service Communication launched the RESIST 2 Counter Disinformation Toolkit (GCS, 2021) to teach subjects how to detect, warn, counter, and protect against disinformation. The approach has worked in Romania, where UK professionals trained MFA and MOD staff. The relationship between disinformation and fact-checking is crucial to understanding the social media ecosystem.

2.5 Combating Disinformation: The Changing Roles of Social Media, Government, and Non-Governmental Organizations

State institutions, non-governmental organizations, and network security are working to protect audience by educating them and developing detection and enforcement tools, awareness and education programs, or for combating disinformation. On the six months of 2022, Facebook took action on 2.8 billion fake accounts. A record of 2.2 billion fake profiles were removed by platform in the first quarter of 2019 (Dixon, 2023).

Rather than changing the underlying beliefs, social media platforms have implemented several measures to make people less likely to share misinformation under the principle of balance between free speech and protection of citizens' rights. Articles marked as "disputed" are displayed less prominently on Facebook, allowing

fewer people to view and share them. These articles are also labelled as "disputed" or "misleading", making them less socially acceptable to share (GCS Behavioural Science, 2022).

„Social media companies remain unable to prevent commercial manipulators from undermining platform integrity. Buying manipulation remains cheap. The price today is roughly one third of the price in 2018 (Fredheim et al, 2023). Overall, no platform has improved since 2021 and their ability to prevent manipulation has decreased.

Several sources can be researched to verify the veracity of information or news, including verification platforms (Munteanu, 2022) such as BBC Reality Check and AFP Fact Check - content in English- or Veridica, AFP Verified, and ANTI-FAKE - content in Romanian- (Eurocomunicare, 2022), a signal being that the news remains only online, not being broadcast in the mainstream media.

Regarding Shaping Europe's digital future, the EU consider that "large-scale disinformation campaigns are a major challenge for Europe and require a coordinated response from EU countries, EU institutions, online platforms, news media and EU citizens". Disinformation is addressed by several Commission initiatives: The Communication on 'tackling online disinformation: a European approach' provides tools to combat disinformation and protect EU values; the Action plan on disinformation: strengthens EU capability and cooperation in the fight against disinformation; and the European Democracy Action Plan: establishes online platform obligations and accountability (European Union, 2022).

State institutions, non-governmental organizations, and network security professionals are educating users and developing tools to identify and prevent disinformation, but the problem is significant and complicated. Social media platforms cannot prevent manipulation and commercial exploitation of their systems, even after detecting and reducing controversial content. Facebook's increased content removal shows a growing awareness and responsiveness to disinformation, but these platforms' manipulation-prevention efficiency has not improved.

Additionally, verification platforms and fact-checking services help consumers verify information. The ease with which these platforms can be manipulated and the need for ongoing technology and user education to combat disinformation are the ongoing challenges.

3. Research Statement (Question), Instruments and Methods

In our study, we will undertake a comprehensive analysis and correlation of datasets derived from a variety of sources, including: (1) a national opinion poll conducted by INSCOP, (2) three studies by Global Focus, and (3) data extracted from Crowdtangle, an analytical tool utilized for monitoring and analyzing social media channels.

1. The opinion poll, administered by INSCOP Research—a reputable public opinion research institute in Romania with over two decades of experience known for its methodological rigour—employed the interview research method via telephone questionnaires. The sample comprised 1,100 individuals, stratified to representatively cover significant socio-demographic categories (including sex, age, occupation) of the non-institutionalized Romanian population aged 18 and over. The poll achieved a maximum permissible error margin of $\pm 3.0\%$ and a confidence level of 95%. Commissioned by the New Strategy Center, this survey aimed to gather Romanians' perspectives on various issues, such as the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas conflict, and the country's membership in NATO and the EU.
2. Additionally, our research incorporates and correlates findings from three Global Focus studies, which are: (A) "Monitoring report on the evolution of the main pro-Kremlin voices on Facebook. Early warning" (2022), (B) "Propaganda Without Borders – A study of pro-Kremlin propaganda among far-right and radical voices in Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Serbia" (2022), and (C) "Resilience of the disinformation ecosystem: how pro-Russian voices adjust when banned by Facebook. Case study: Diana Sosoaca" (2023). These studies provide a statistical analysis of social media data, track the evolution of trends and tendencies, and deconstruct the process of disinformation narrative formation, from their amplified peak to the origin.
3. The detailed methodology of employing Crowdtangle, an analytical tool, is elaborated in Chapter 4 ("Case Analysis"). Rationale for Selection: The chosen analytical elements reflect the significant impact and relevance of the subject matter. Through the prism of Romanian public perception on pivotal issues, these studies not only furnish sociologically measured data but also offer insights into

methods of analysis, identification of trends, and recommendations for both understanding the target audience's process and devising strategies for the prevention and combat of misinformation trends.

The INSCOP national opinion poll, conducted in December 2023, measures Romanians' main concerns, the country's European and Euro-Atlantic orientation, how the perpetrators of the Ukraine war are perceived, and disinformation exposure. We plan to analyse how these figures are reflected in social media. We also want to track central narratives that have shaped Romanians' views and propaganda and disinformation since the Ukraine crisis began. We analyse pool data and correlate it with primary storylines in the Ukrainian war.

Working data from March and November 2023 Romanian INSCOP country survey

In November 2023, 49.8 % of Romanians saw Russia as the main aggressor in the Ukraine war, down 21.4 % from 71.2 % in May 2022. While US and Ukraine blame grew, those blaming increased from 10.4% in May 2022 to 14.6% in November 2023. While 64.7 % think Russia should withdraw and return occupied territories to Ukraine, 24.5 % think Ukraine must concede Russia significantly in order to resolve the conflict. Russia's chances of winning the war dropped 15.8% (from 50.3% in May 2022 to 34.5% in November 2023), while Ukraine's chances rose 6.5 %.

Romania perceives Russia as the biggest threat, with 56.4%, followed by Hungary (8.6%), the US (8.2%), China (6.6%), and Ukraine (4.0%). In response to the next question about Romania's relationship with the EU/USA, 57.9% believe Romania is a colony of both, while 35.4% disagree. Fifth in national concerns is the Ukraine conflict (9% in November 2023, down from 12% in May 2022), preceded by price increases (23.6%), corruption (21.5%), personal and family health (18.1%), and education (14.3%).

In terms of information sources about the Ukraine war, television is still the most popular (53.3%), followed by social media (16.5%), newspapers and websites (17.2%), and those who are uninterested in the subject (17.2%). (11.7 %). In terms of the accuracy of information circulating in Romania about the Ukraine war, 29.8% believe it is mostly true, 42.1% believe it is mostly false, and 20.8% do not follow the events. Regarding news source credibility, television is regarded as very reliable by 29.5% and untrustworthy by 67.8%; trust in websites and news websites increased from 15.2% in May 2022 to 21.9% in November 2023. Trust in news received on Facebook and other social networks increased from 7.8% to 11.6%, while 32.6% went from having very little trust (a drop from 84.8% to 55.8%) to being uninterested in responding or not following the subject.

4. Romanian Case

Despite the fact that 80% of Romanians believe the country should follow the West in terms of democracy and freedom, more than 60% of the most recent INSCOP respondents believe that "Romania became a UE and US colony." This data raises the question *"Could disinformation campaigns and ultranationalist narratives spreading on social media be influencing Romanians' attitudes in that direction?"*

We spoke with a research NGO that has access to social media monitoring technology to put this story to the test. We used Google trends to monitor how the interest in the Ukrainian conflict changed since the beginning of the war for a more accurate corroboration. The NGO Global Focus Center's senior analyst Rufin Zamfir prepared and extracted data from the program and coded the narrative *"Romania is a colony of the West/EU" disinformation narrative*, using Boolean operators, and we have created a string containing the coded context (European Union and other terms used by channels/pages/personalities spreading disinformation) and the coded subject (the alleged colony status): (occident OR Occidentului OR occidentul OR UE OR "Uniunea Europeana" OR "uniunii europene" OR Bruxelles OR Bruxellesul OR "Bruxelles-ul" OR "von der leyen" OR Ursula OR Borel OR borell OR Germania OR Franta OR Berlin OR berlinul OR Paris OR Parisului) AND (colonie OR colonia OR sclavi OR supusi OR sclavilor OR "de mana a doua" OR umiliti OR umilite OR vasala OR vasal OR vasali)" (Zamfir, 2024). After that, we ran it through Facebook, using CrowdTangle Program (Global Focus).

We also looked at Global Focus's "Monitoring report on the evolution of key pro-Kremlin voices on Facebook. Early warning "(Global Focus, 2022), a study that concentrates on current trends in pro-Kremlin narratives on Facebook in Romania, emphasizing the critical roles of specific far-right and pro-Russian actors and media outlets.

5. Findings, Results and Interpretation

The interest over Ukraine in Romania, as expressed in Google searches from the beginning of the war until today it naturally declined, not just as the general population lost interest in the war but as the general public started

to refine their searches (eg. and not referring generic on term „Ukraine”, by searching the places of the battles, or names of the military or political leaders).

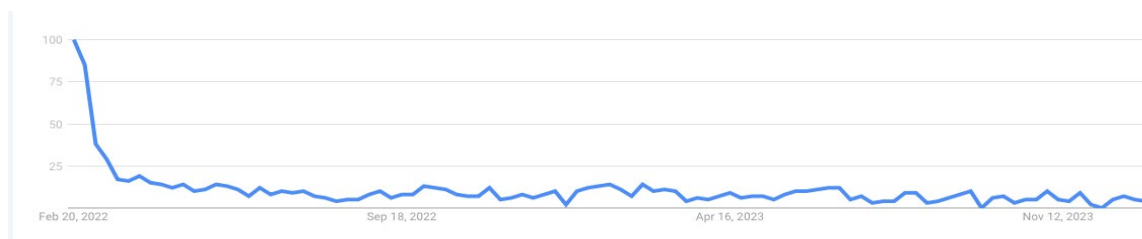


Figure 1: Interest in Ukraine War, from February 24th, 2022- January 13th, 2024, Source: from Google Trends, 2024

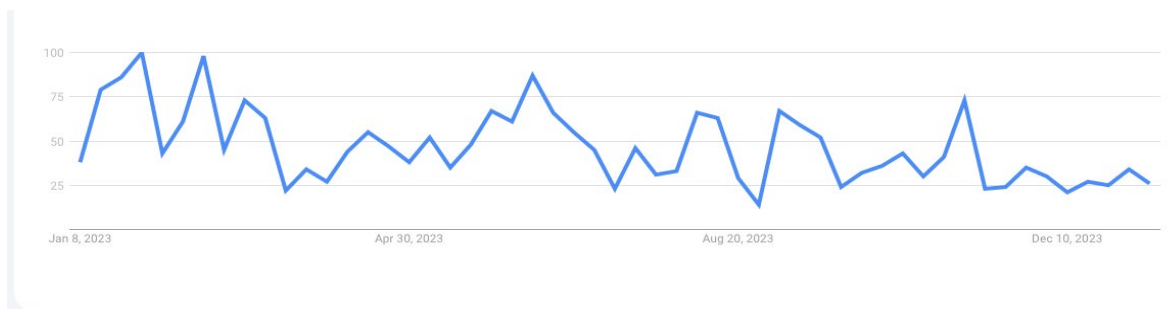


Figure 2: Interest in Ukraine War, detailed from January 8th, 2022- January 13th, 2024, Source: Google Trends, 2024

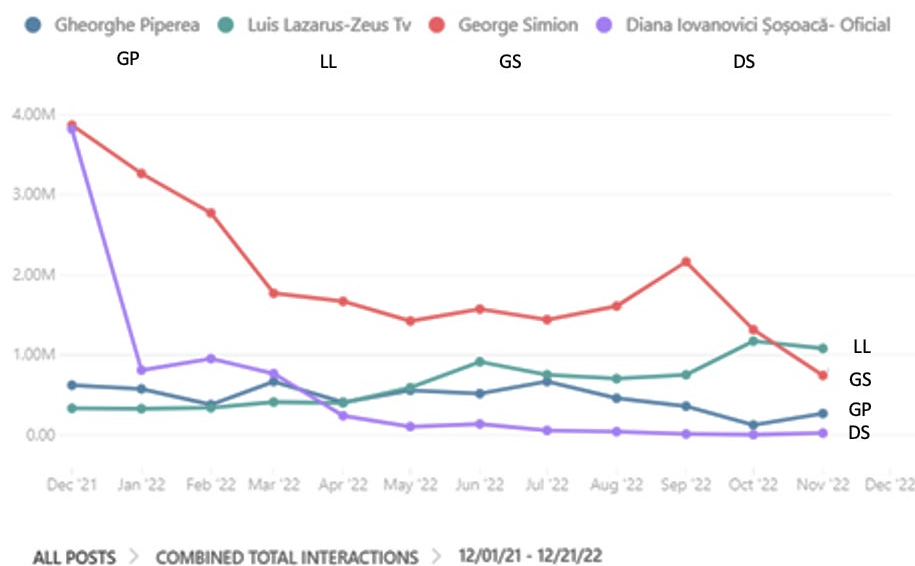


Figure 3: Evolution in 2022 of the main far right actors on Facebook. Extract from Crowdtangle. Source: Global Focus – „Monitoring report on the evolution of the main pro-Kremlin voices on Facebook”

Figure 3 highlights Zeus TV's rise as a prominent far-right and pro-Kremlin voice, surpassing Diana Şoşoacă and George Simion, between now and 2022. They criticize Ukraine rather than Russia in their pro-Russian positions. Although George Simion (GS) and Diana Şoşoacă (DS) were once considered prominent radicals, organizations like Zeus TV (LL) is gaining popularity. This requires a new approach to poisonous rhetoric and deception.

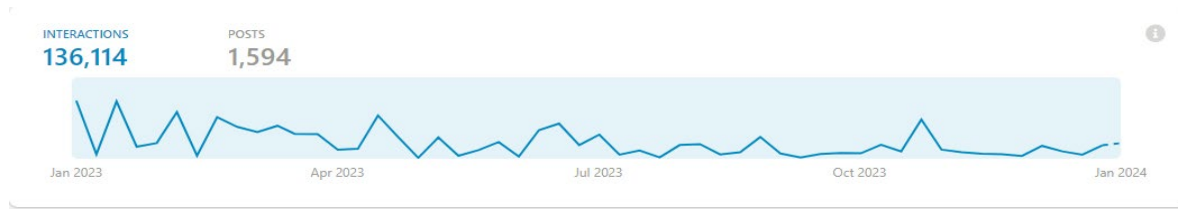


Figure 4: Facebook data on disinformation coded narrative “Romania is a colony of the West/EU” retrieved from Crowdtangle, 2024. Source: Global Focus

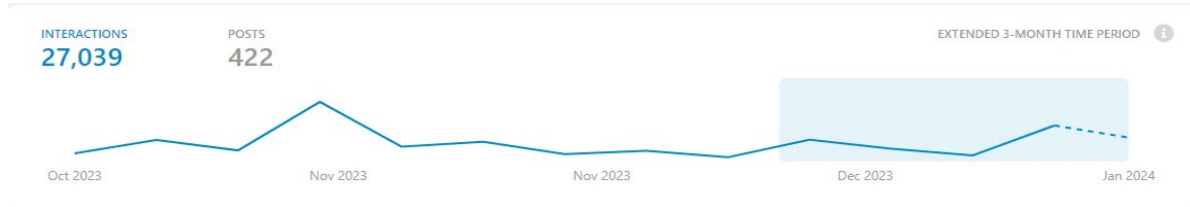


Figure 5: Facebook data on disinformation coded narrative “Romania is a colony of the West/EU” retrieved from Crowdtangle, 2024. Source: Global Focus

It appears the topic is soaring. Figure 5 demonstrated that in December 2023, at least one-third of all disinformation posts on Facebook occurred during a given year. Everything is linked and exploited to demonstrate Romania's status as an EU colony. "The leaders of the European Commission are nuts. George Simion, the president of the AUR political party, states that "they brought inflation, poverty, and a fake pandemic while Romania needs hospitals, roads, and half the country is impoverished" (Digi24, 2023). German protests were cited by pro-Russian Romanian senator Șoșoacă (SOS political party) as evidence of EU nefarious intentions (Șoșoacă, 2023). According to a 2022 study, Simion and Șoșoacă are regarded as the most dangerous far-right voices because they are pro-Kremlin, anti-Ukraine, and (Global Focus, 2022).

By cross-referencing national poll results with data gleaned from Google Trends and Crowdtangle we can see that popular opinion of the Ukraine war's main aggressor has changed significantly. Russia was blamed 21.4% less between May 2022 and November 2023, while the US and Ukraine were blamed more. The effectiveness of disinformation tactics, shifting geopolitical narratives, or war fatigue may have led to a more nuanced or muddled view of the fight. It also symbolizes public opinion's change in response to world events and media portrayals.

Romanians still considers Russia as the biggest threat, which supports the majority view that Russia should leave Ukraine. Most Romanians believe the EU and US dictate too much. This emotion, along with the Ukraine war being ranked lower than internal matters, shows how national identity, sovereignty, and media narratives interact. Television and, increasingly, social media are crucial to creating these impressions due to the public's mistrust of information.

Television remains the most popular source of Ukraine war information (53.3%), but 67.8% believe it is inaccurate. Social media (16.5%) and new media (17.2%) gain trust and credibility from 7.8% to 11.6% and 15.2% to 21.9%, respectively (new media). The findings emphasize television as the main source of Ukraine war information, despite the fact that most people distrust it. This contradiction may be due to a lack of reliable sources or overreliance on conventional media. The rise in trust in websites and social media for news is a progressive move toward digital sources, but they still struggle with credibility. This trend shows the changing media landscape and the difficulty of obtaining credible information. The public's mixed faith in different media reflects its struggles to fight disinformation and identify trustworthy news sources in a changing information landscape.

6. Conclusions

We must understand the complexity of the information environment and social media's role as a component of its physical, cognitive, and informational. It emphasizes the difficulty of fighting disinformation and deception and the use of psychological operations to influence audience behaviour. Malign actors shaping narratives and new technologies like deepfakes and microtargeting complicate matters. Despite these challenges, audience research and fact-checking reduce the impact of false narratives, showing the dynamic nature of disinformation and misinformation combat in the digital age.

To highlight the data's discrepancy, we used the misleading narrative "Romania has become a colony of the EU and the US." Despite the fact that 57.9% of Romanians answered YES to the question "Do you believe Romania has become a colony of the EU and the US?" an overwhelming majority of Romanians (56.6%) believe Russia is a real threat and that the pro-European and Euro-Atlantic path is the right direction, with 76.7% believing Romania should remain in the EU and NATO (79.8%). Malicious social media actions may explain this paradox. Meanwhile, the number of social media users has increased while the lack of interest in the issue has decreased.

Identification and mitigation of disinformation is difficult in the fast-changing world of social media, where users are constantly bombarded with information and disinformation is fought on an education gap. Closed accounts and strict regulations may seem like good solutions, but they are not enough. Education is the best option. It gives people the skills to navigate information overload. This process is like a skier masterfully navigating a mountain course between flags while maintaining speed and balance. Social media users don't have time to review every post. Therefore, they must learn to instinctively avoid harmful and malicious content. By teaching users the right skills, they can exercise their free will, balancing regulation and user satisfaction. This emphasises the need for a digitally literate society that can critically evaluate information and make informed decisions.

7. Suggestions and Recommendations

To combat disinformation, legal frameworks, education, transparency, and key player collaboration are needed. Governments and social media companies collaborate to create and enforce anti-disinformation rules that respect free speech. Educational programs that emphasize media literacy in curriculum and public awareness campaigns are crucial. This helps people analyse content and understand social media's complexity. Social media platforms must also follow ethical, transparent practices like content moderation, fact-checking, and content algorithm transparency. Civil society advocates for accountability and raises awareness of disinformation risks.

Governments, law enforcement, cybersecurity experts, social media companies, and civil society must work together to fight disinformation. This multidimensional strategy should improve authority cooperation to identify and respond to disinformation, cybersecurity to protect sensitive data, and digital literacy to build community resilience. These initiatives together protect individual rights and promote an educated, responsible society against disinformation in the digital age.

8. Way Ahead

The present paper is part of a larger PhD research program that focuses on consolidating a society's security culture through better institutional strategic communication. All the findings will be used to emphasize the strong links between communication, security culture and audience; how this can be targeted to be influenced and educated in order to increase resilience.

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