DEZINFORMATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE. THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC IF MOLDOVA

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Abstract. *Artificial Intelligence (AI) is playing an increasingly important role in shaping the information environment, and in the Republic of Moldova, where vulnerabilities to disinformation are high, it can have a direct impact on democratic processes, including elections. AI is used to rapidly generate fake news, manipulative images or videos that can influence public perceptions and voters' decisions. In elections, disinformation fueled by AI can distort public debate, polarize society and erode trust in electoral institutions and processes. The Republic of Moldova, in a sensitive geopolitical context and a fragmented political scene, provides fertile ground for AI manipulation. Orchestrated disinformation campaigns can use AI to target specific segments of voters, creating personalized messages that exploit their fears or beliefs. For example, spreading false narratives about candidates or parties can directly influence the outcome of an election. However, AI can also be an ally in detecting and combating these threats. Social platforms, supported by advanced algorithms, can identify and remove manipulative content. To protect elections, Moldova needs adapted legislation, increased media education and international partnerships to counter the harmful use of AI for electoral purposes.*

Keywords: *disinformation, artificial intelligence, Republic of Moldova, social media platforms, electoral process*

Propaganda, information manipulation, fake news and disinformation are not new. The phenomenon of disinformation has gained momentum in the 21st century, affecting more and more countries regardless of their level of economic and political development. According to the results of the World Economic Forum survey, disinformation ranks first among short-term technological risks, while cyber threats rank fourth (The Global Risks Report). The impact and scale of the phenomenon has been directly influenced by the development of artificial intelligence which facilitates the spread of disinformation.

Throughout history there have been quite a few examples when misinformation has been at the heart of different historical events to manipulate public opinion or to achieve political ends, from the disinformation campaign organized by Emperor Augustus against his adversaries in ancient Rome to the infodemics organized during the COVID-19 vaccination campaign. The way disinformation has been organized has

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changed a lot over the centuries, from spreading rumors to the use of advanced tactics of contemporary state and non-state actors. One of the best-known operations organized by a state actor is Operation Infecktion, organized by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, which aimed to discredit the United States by falsely suggesting that it had conceived of HIV/AIDS as a biological weapon (Bereskin, 2023: 6).

Throughout history, the way disinformation has been organized has changed a lot, but as in the past, the most well-known objectives are: destabilizing trust in institutions, polarizing public opinion and influencing political or economic decisions. Another frequently used aim is to create information chaos, so that users are overwhelmed by conflicting streams of data, causing them to lose their ability to critically evaluate information sources. This has been facilitated by the invention of the Internet and social networks, propaganda and disinformation became much less expensive, without a limit of broadcasting channels, being accessible to everyone and allowing anonymity. An ordinary citizen can be a creator and distributor of information and a participant in propaganda. The Internet and social networks have become the main spearheads of this new campaign, both of society and governmental campaigners. Also, blogs, fake websites are modern propaganda tools. Propaganda messages are repeated on the web, which exposes individuals to constant troll messages, which alter their behavior.

Social networks influence people's cognitive characteristics and cause them to select information that is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs, and to filter out what is inconsistent with them. Associated with propaganda, the phenomenon of fake news becomes a tool of propaganda, while the source is unknown, malicious and aims to misinform, manipulate, builds a one-dimensional monologue and polarizes society. YouTube, Facebook, Telegram and Tik Tok are fertile platforms for the global broadcasting of fake news.

While the recent research on the impact of social media platforms in spreading misinformation is mixed, it is essential to recognize their role nonetheless. Their algorithms, designed to maximize user engagement (Donovan, 2021) can amplify false information and extend its coverage (Is Social Media a Threat to Democracy?).

There is still disagreement among researchers on their impact, but already several studies suggest that these platforms also encourage echo chambers, or autonomous online communities of ideas similar to individuals. Echo chambers are worrying in the context of misinformation. Studies highlight that disinformation often has the effect of a 'preaching to the choir', reinforcing rather than changing individual attitudes. When individuals are repeatedly exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs, it can reinforce preconceived beliefs of misinformation, making them increasingly difficult to counter. As such, disinformation not only hinders critical thinking and the ability of citizens to discern authentic content, but potentially disempowers, polarizes and fragments the larger society (Bereskin, 2023: 10).

Disinformation is not an activity organized exclusively by state actors, there are enough examples where individuals organize disinformation actions. For example, in Macedonia, teenagers created fake news sites about American politics and generated viral revenue among specific political groups. The diversity of disinformation operatives is thus evident - from highly organized, state-sponsored operations such as the Internet Research Agency (IRA), which systematically orchestrated campaign, to ordinary

individuals. The IRA, a St. Petersburg-based entity, has engaged in extensive disinformation campaigns targeting both the United States and Europe. The IRA employs several strategies to influence the information space such as buying accounts or "stalking" to change narratives circulating in the information space. Robots are also used for this purpose, initially engaging in topics that are later distorted into narratives with a strong political and ideological charge.

The level of coordination among actors varies and can range from independent actors and highly organized efforts involving groups and state-sponsored agencies working in tandem, as well as more fragmented and ad hoc collaborations. Understanding the extent and nature of this coordination is crucial, as it influences the scale, sophistication, and impact of the tactics used in disinformation.

Alongside technological aspects, psychological aspects are factors that directly influence disinformation. Most often, the success of disinformation campaigns is ensured by appealing to emotions, because emotions, especially intense emotions, influence people's decisions and behavior faster than logical reasoning. More often than not, disinformation exploits fear, anger, pride, empathy or compassion to manipulate the public (Psihologia dezinformării în era digitală: strategii, tactici și impact). Appealing to emotions works well in the context of social networks, where algorithms favor content that triggers strong reactions, accentuating the effects of misinformation. Emotional messages are often more memorable and more likely to be shared, amplifying their impact on social platforms.

Since the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), including generative AI, the phenomenon of disinformation has amplified. Whereas the creation and dissemination of disinformation campaigns used to be campaigns were costly in terms of time and money, AI now facilitates the creation of misleading content on a large scale, thus increasing the risks of disinformation (Monteit, 2024: 33).

Artificial intelligence: concept and characteristics

Artificial intelligence began to take shape in the 1950s, when the famous mathematician who cracked the Enigma code during the Second World War - Alan Turing - devised the Turing test. A test that measured the ability of machines to behave as human-like as possible. Over time, a period of intense study and development has followed. From the chatbots Eliza and Perry, the Deep Blue supercomputer that won a game of chess against world champion Gary Kasparov, the development of algorithms capable of understanding and replaying human language, to Ghat GPT, which today has become the most searched topic on Wikipedia in 2023, and the most discussed AI system in history.

In her 2020 book" Deepfakes, generative artificial intelligence" expert Nina Schick warned that soon anyone with a smartphone will soon be able to produce Hollywood-level special effects with minimal skill or effort. 2023 saw a proliferation of their synthetic media or content - be it visual, auditory or multimodal - that has been created or modified using artificial intelligence (PAI's Responsible Practices). These models can either be tuned to generate a variety of highly realistic and convincing results that" can simulate artifacts, people or events", Deepfakes use deep learning, a subset of machine learning, to generate realistic videos or images in which people appear to say

or perform actions they never actually did. A viral image on the internet in 2023, generated by AI of Pope Francis in a white down jacket, has been described as the first real case of mass-scale AI misinformation and illustrated concerns about the hyper-realism of deepfake and the potentially abusive propensity for misuse.

The impact of AI on disinformation

The year 2024 saw increased attention on artificial intelligence, whether from the prospect of two researchers in the field being awarded Nobel Prizes, discussions on the influence of AI on electoral processes, or the impact it was having on education in general. In the first half of 2024, several papers have appeared analyzing the phenomenon and trying to identify the impact it has including on misinformation. Some researchers see generative AI as a source of danger in terms of misinformation (Poibeau) and those who believe that the emergence of generative systems does not fundamentally change the situation, either qualitatively or quantitatively (Simon, 2023).

According to existing definitions Generative Artificial Intelligence refers to the set of deep learning models capable of generating high quality text, images and other content from the data they have been trained on (Bennett, 2020). Two important characteristics of generative AI are its ability to generate plausible content and its ease of use and access to all profiles and purposes. Researchers who consider AI a danger for disinformation explain this by the intersection of the two dimensions.

The impact of AI on disinformation from the perspective of scientific research, news articles and social media

Argument	Explanation of the statement	Presupposed effect
1. Increasing disinformation	Because of its affordability and ease of use, generative AI can be used to create misinformation on a large scale with minimal cost to individuals or organizations.	Increasing the amount of disinformation allows malicious actors to "flood the zone" with false or misleading information, blurring factual information, or sowing confusion.
2. Increasing the quality of disinformation	Thanks to its technical capabilities and ease of use, generative AI can create higher quality misinformation.	Increasing the quality of misinformation leads to greater persuasiveness because the content is more plausible and harder to verify. It can contribute to an epistemic crisis.
3. Increasing personalization of disinformation	Due to its technical capabilities and ease of use, generative AI can create high quality misinformation	Increasing the persuasiveness of disinformation consumers, with the same results as above.

	customized to user preferences.	
4. Unintentional generation of plausible false information	AI can generate useful content (e.g. Code generation). However, it can also create seemingly plausible but completely inaccurate information that could be distributed unintentionally.	Misinforming users of generative AI and potentially those with whom they share information.

Source: Misinformation reloaded? Fears about the impact of generative AI on misinformation are overblown. https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/simon_generative_AI_fears_20231018.pdf

The dual nature of AI was explained by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his address to the Security Council, noting that while AI can accelerate human development, it also poses significant risks if used maliciously. He said, "The emergence of generative artificial intelligence could be a defining moment for disinformation and hate speech - undermining truth, facts and safety, adding a new dimension to the manipulation of human behavior and contributing to widespread polarization and instability (Can artificial intelligence (AI) influence elections).

According to the UNESCO Guide for Election Practitioners: 'Elections in Digital Times', AI has the potential to improve the efficiency and accuracy of elections. It reaches voters and engages more directly with them through personalized communication tailored to individual preferences and behavior. AI-powered chat bots can provide real-time information about polling stations, candidate platforms and voting procedures, making the election process more accessible and transparent. Artificial intelligence also improves data management by ensuring detailed election data is accurately collected, stored and analyzed, allowing officials to make quick decisions and identify trends effectively. Automated systems make election administration more efficient by managing large data sets quickly and accurately, significantly reducing human error. This leads to more reliable and faster results, thereby strengthening public confidence in the electoral process. In addition, AI strengthens election security by fortifying cyber security measures against cyber threats, ensuring the integrity and resilience of the electoral infrastructure by detecting anomalies and fraudulent activities (Can artificial intelligence (AI) influences elections).

Daniel Innerarity, in Artificial Intelligence and Democracy, observed that artificial intelligence can engage individual voters in the electoral process through chat bots and social media discussion forums. It can glean valuable information from user comments and enable real-time data analysis for campaign strategists to adjust their approach based on public opinion. But artificial intelligence carries greater risks. The increasing sophistication of AI-generated content makes disinformation more persuasive and has a stronger emotional impact. It is also easier to create and increasingly difficult to detect and counter. As AI technology advances, the distinction between genuine information and fakes becomes more complex (Innerarity). AI-generated deepfakes -

highly realistic but false audio, video and images - can be used to mislead voters and undermine trust in the electoral process. Deepfakes can make people appear to do or say things they never did. As highlighted by the UN Secretary-General, cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure based on artificial intelligence could seriously affect global peace and security, as the technical and financial barriers to accessing artificial intelligence tools are lowered (Can artificial intelligence (AI) influences elections?).

The use of artificial intelligence also involves the collection and analysis of large amounts of personal data, which raises privacy concerns and requires robust data protection measures to maintain voter confidence and comply with privacy legislation.

Deploying AI in elections raises numerous ethical issues, such as ensuring that AI systems are not biased and do not unfairly influence election results. It is also essential to establish who is responsible for overseeing the use of AI in electoral processes to ensure transparency and accountability. AI algorithms can be manipulated to favor certain candidates or parties, either intentionally or unintentionally. Bias in AI systems can result from the data used to train them or from the design of the algorithms. This can reinforce existing forms of discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping. Biased AI algorithms could incorrectly influence voter behavior, compromising the fairness of the electoral process. Created using AI, these hyper-fakes are becoming increasingly difficult to detect as image and sound quality improves with technological developments (Deep fake Detection Challenge Results).

Several international and regional organizations have initiated various ways of regulating IA. The United Nations (UN) has advocated for a comprehensive and collaborative approach to AI governance, focusing on setting global standards and ethical guidelines, developing national strategies, mitigating long-term global risks, addressing skills gaps, promoting international collaboration, developing regulatory frameworks, and raising public awareness. Artificial intelligence regulation is the development of public sector policies and laws to promote and regulate artificial intelligence and implicit algorithms, an emerging issue in jurisdictions globally. Between 2016 and 2020, more than 30 countries have adopted dedicated AI strategies. Most EU Member States have launched national AI strategies, as have Canada, China, India, Japan, Mauritius, Mauritius, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the USA and Vietnam. The Global Partnership for Artificial Intelligence was launched in June 2020, affirming the need for AI to be developed in line with human rights and democratic values to ensure public trust in the technology. In the US, Henry Kissinger, Eric Schmidt and Daniel Huttenlocher issued a joint statement on November 2021, calling for a government commission to regulate AI.

An advisory body on artificial intelligence was also launched at the UN, which includes experts from government, business, the technology community, civil society and academia. Its role is to support the international community's efforts to regulate artificial intelligence, and in early 2024, Volker Türk, the UN human rights chief, warned that powerful propaganda and disinformation campaigns could disrupt elections, mislead people and spread misogyny and hatred, and called for AI policies and practices anchored in human rights. In March 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, proposed by the United States and supported by more than 120 member states, promoting "safe, secure and trustworthy" AI systems that respect human rights

and contribute to sustainable development. The resolution calls on all stakeholders to refrain from using AI in ways that violate human rights and emphasizes the need to bridge the digital divide, in particular helping developing countries. Through the AI for Good Summits, the UN facilitates international collaboration, the exchange of best practices and the alignment of AI development with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In terms of regional actors, in May 2024, the Council of the European Union approved the "Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act" to harmonize the rules on artificial intelligence. This legislation aims to balance innovation, transparency, accountability and the protection of fundamental rights by classifying AI systems according to risk. High-risk AI systems will be subject to strict requirements, while extreme practices such as cognitive-behavioral manipulation and predictive policing will be banned.

The AI law will also be implemented from 2026 in the European Union. This legislation is part of the EU's wider regulatory strategy, which also includes the Code of Practice on Misinformation, which requires platforms to monitor political advertising, and the Digital Services Act, which sets the obligations for online services to ensure a safer digital environment.

Disinformation in Republic of Moldova and artificial intelligence

The information space of the Republic of Moldova abounds in elements of anti-Western propaganda and manipulation (especially about the European Union and NATO) and against the national interests of the Republic of Moldova. The narratives circulating in the information space (especially online) are strongly influenced by geopolitics, by the regional security environment, by the war in Ukraine and have grown substantially in the context of the election campaign in 2024 (Marzac, 2024).

The research and analyzes carried out by the experts over the years, have shown that: disinformation has a negative impact on national and human security, polarizes Moldovan society on various criteria, undermines/politically prevents the implementation of policies in the field of security and the democratic process, creates a "security trap" (it is not clear what is the direction and means of Ensuring security), influences the agenda and the decision-making process (e.g. preventing participation in pacification missions, collaboration with certain organizations or partners, implementation of development projects, development of defense capabilities, etc.), decreases trust in state institutions and creates non-compliance with the rules imposed by them (e.g. Pandemic period) (Marzac).

The society of the Republic of Moldova is heterogeneous, fragmented linguistically and religiously, including different ways of reporting on the major events that took place during the 20th century (for example, the Second World War, the collapse of the USSR, the expansion of NATO). A good part of the population is nostalgia for the Soviet period. There are also features of the environment that facilitate the reception of fake news or other forms of disinformation coming from Kremlin. One of the most significant and with a constant and considerable impact is the presence of the Russian-speaking community with all the political consequences that derive from it: political organization, ethnic parties, cultural leverage of Moscow, etc. Associated with the widespread knowledge of the Russian language among the population, these two factors

contribute to the creation of an information space favorable to the direct consumption of Russian media products, without additional translation costs. In the context of the exceptional situation, some TV channels have been closed, but a good part of them continue to operate online, a space where disinformation is facilitated by new technologies. Regardless of whether we are talking about news or entertainment shows, they present an image only in Russian version of various global or regional issues, being intensively promoted. The Republic of Moldova is one of the countries of the world where the mobile internet and the one through social networks is the one that works well and is accessible, but the information available in the online environment can be distorted, tainted by fake news, increasingly present, despite some measures taken in the context of the war in Ukraine. At the same time, new technologies have a significant contribution in the efforts to limit the effects of fake news by developing mechanisms for automatic verification of the credibility of information by evaluating the sources on the flow up to the original one.

In the document developed by the Intelligence and Security Service (SIS) "Evaluation of the involvement of the Russian Federation in the electoral processes of the Republic of Moldova in 2024-2025" (Evaluarea implicării Rusiei în procesele electorale) it is mentioned that the Russian Federation maintains as a strategic goal the attraction of the Republic of Moldova in its area of influence. In this vein, the tactical objectives pursued in the next two years are: 2024 – compromising the referendum for European integration, meddling in the presidential elections, as well as compromising the political candidates associated with it. 2025 – the accession of political parties that are under the influence of the Russian Federation in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova with the aim of creating a pro-Russian majority, or at least a moderate one in relation to European integration.

SIS mentions 3 ways of achieving these objectives: supporting political actors under the direct or indirect control of the Russian Federation, creating several crises, with different magnitudes, in several areas of socio-political life. The third way is the one under our analysis and refers to - large-scale informational attack to amplify the psychological effect of crises through the extensive use of social networks, especially Telegram channels, attempts to restore or build TV channels to propagate the necessary messages and the placement in the public space of false information, with major media impact (Evaluarea implicării Rusiei în procesele electorale).

The information space was during the year 2024 and will continue to be the main instrument of influence in the following year, managed both at the level of the Russian special services (propaganda centers controlled by them) and at the level of social-political actors in the Republic of Moldova (on its own), connected with the Russian factor. According to the opinion poll carried out in August, there is an increase in the number of Moldovans who are soaped on Telegram, TikTok, where there is an increase in the number of channels promoting propaganda (Tik Tok, ranking 3rd after Facebook and YouTube with 28%, as sources of information for Moldovans (Facebook – 69%. YouTube 65%)) (Sondaj IRI). For comparison, in January 2022, according to the results of a survey conducted by the sociological company iData, the top social networks were as follows: Facebook – 90.2%; Instagram – 45.9%; Odnoklassniki – 33.5%; Tik-Tok – 25.5%; Telegram – 18.5% (Top 5 rețele sociale folosite de moldoveni în ultima lună).

The Governmental Readiness Index for AI shows that the Republic of Moldova ranked 90th out of 193 countries evaluated in 2023, in contrast to 2021, when it ranked 86th and the country's vision of artificial intelligence was rated as zero (Government AI Readiness Index 2023). Analyzing the population's perception of artificial intelligence, according to a survey conducted in 2023, 45 percent of Moldovans do not fully understand the concept of "artificial intelligence" and only 15 percent can clearly say what it implies. The research also shows that 42 percent don't know what Chat GPT is and only 11 percent access this tool to accomplish their tasks. 18% of Moldovans believe that sooner or later artificial intelligence will put them out of work (Poll: Magenta Consulting).

In the context of the changes that have taken place in the field of technologies, the Republic of Moldova has proposed for consultation from February to March 2024 the "White Paper on Data Governance and Artificial Intelligence (White Paper)" a document that presents the vision of accelerating the creation of a data governance ecosystem and the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) for the Development of the Republic of Moldova, stated as follows: A data governance and AI ecosystem for sustained and sustainable growth centered on human needs.

The vision contains a commitment to sustainability, sustainable development and economic and social prosperity. It assumes confidence in the safety and reliability of AI, emphasizing the role of the state in overseeing ethical and responsible use of technology. The focus is on excellence in adopting innovative technologies and communicating the transformative impact of AI on economic growth and social welfare in the context of Moldova's alignment with technological progress and transition to a data and knowledge-based economy (Cartea Albă privind guvernanța datelor și inteligența artificială).

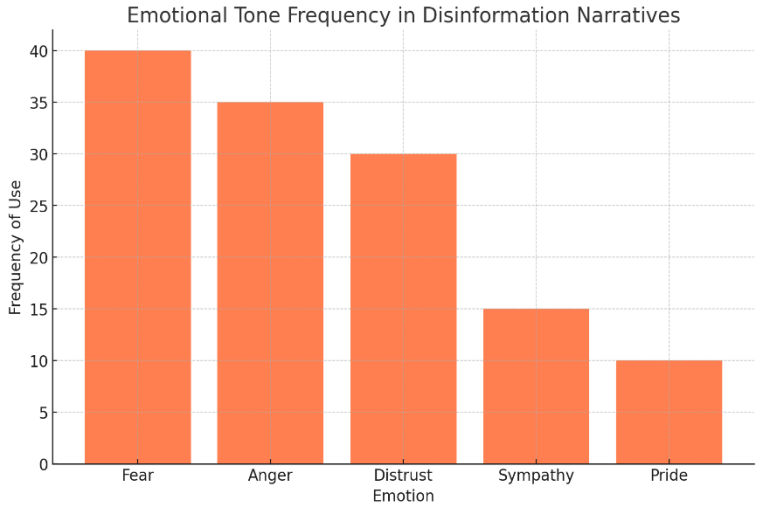
Referring to disinformation and artificial intelligence in the Republic of Moldova, we will mention the report of the analysis conducted by the American company OpenAI, specialized in artificial intelligence, presented on 30 May 2024 on how its artificial intelligence tools are used to spread disinformation or manipulate public opinion. According to this report in the Russian Federation, two operations have been identified in the Russian Federation to create and spread content critical of the US, Ukraine and the Baltic countries. In one of the operations, an open AI model was used to create a Telegram posting bot. In the case of China, it was used to generate texts in English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean, which were then posted on social networks such as Twitter or Medium. OpenAI's analysis also highlights how generative artificial intelligence is being incorporated into disinformation campaigns as a means of improving certain aspects of content generation, such as making more persuasive posts in foreign languages (AI and Covert Influence Operations: Latest Trends).

With reference to the Republic of Moldova, the report describes a Russian-based network, generically referred to as "Bad Grammar", which operated predominantly on Telegram and targeted audiences in Ukraine, Moldova, the Baltic countries and the US. OpenAI says it has banned several accounts that used its AI models to create fake comments that were then posted on Telegram, saying they were being used by people in Russia. The content posted by these accounts was in Russian and English, focusing on several political topics such as the war in Ukraine, the political situation in Moldova and the Baltic countries, as well as the US. Russian-language comments on Telegram

accused the presidents of Moldova and Ukraine of corruption, lack of popular support and "betraying" their own people in the West. English-language comments instead focused on topics such as immigration, economic hardship and current events, often arguing why the US should stop supporting Ukraine (Confirmat: Inteligența Artificială, folosită pentru a dezinforma în Moldova și Ucraina).

Monitoring disinformation in the online space of the Republic of Moldova in the period October - December 2024 with the help of artificial intelligence

In October, Telegram (8.6 mln. views) was the most commonly used platform to distribute fake narratives due to its structural advantages that facilitate the dissemination of targeted narratives. On the other hand, Facebook (10 mln. Views), which is the most widely used social media platform in the Republic of Moldova, have generally targeted different audiences, while YouTube and TikTok have been mainly aimed at young people.

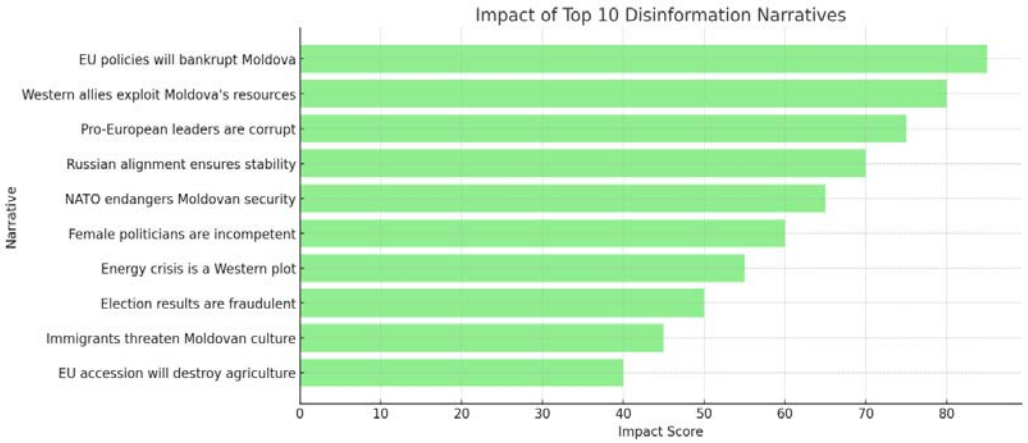


Source: *Disinformation monitor on social media. Using AI power tools to assess the scale and impact of disinformation*, https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Disinformation-Report_octombrie.pdf

Among the most manipulated and exploited emotions were fear and anger, used to polarize the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, very actively promoted, combined with amplification of distrust in state institutions. The most widely distributed false narratives were those in the economic and security fields, gender-based and cultural misinformation, which, although present, still ranked second. The chart shows that fear (40%) and anger (35%) were the most frequently invoked emotions in disinformation content, distrust (30%) was another key factor, aimed at undermining trust in pro-European leaders and institutions, sympathy (15%) and pride (10%) were rarely used, often associated with narratives portraying alignment with Russia as culturally or historically favorable. Emotional manipulation through fear and anger effectively polarizes audiences, making them more vulnerable to divisive narratives. These

emotions also encourage the rapid dissemination of content, as users feel compelled to share emotionally charged posts (Disinformation monitor on social media. Using AI power tools to assess the scale and impact of disinformation).

Among the actors behind these disinformation companies, the Russian Federation was the first to use state media and organized coordinated campaigns to shape narratives in the online space. The Republic of Belarus has also supported disinformation campaigns, acting as a regional amplifier for Russian narratives. And last but not least we are referring to local pro-Russian groups and troll farms that played auxiliary roles, focusing on misinforming the general public.



Sourse*: Desinformation monitor on social media. Using AI power tools to assess the scale and impact of disinformation*, https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Disinformation-Report_octombrie.pdf

The most impactful narratives in the context of the referendum and elections were those related to the European Union, for example - "EU policies will bankrupt Moldova" had the biggest impact, resonating with economic anxieties - "Western allies will exploit Moldova's resources", "Pro-European leaders are corrupt and compromised" - EU membership affects agriculture, etc. Among narratives with moderate impact, we highlight those promoting Russia - "Alignment with Russia ensures stability", mostly present on Telegram and local pro-Russian channels, which invoked pride and sympathy based on historical and cultural ties to reinforce narratives about the cultural and political superiority of the Russian Federation among the targeted groups. Followed by the narrative that - "NATO is jeopardizing Moldova's security", mostly present on Telegram and Facebook, aimed to induce fear by exploiting Moldova's neutral position and military vulnerabilities. The presence of candidates in the electoral campaign was also targeted with disinformation. The promotion of the gender-based disinformation narrative - "Female politicians are incompetent", was quite intensively promoted especially on Telegram and Instagram, aimed to discourage female candidates and perpetuate existing stereotypes in society.

Narratives with low impact in October were those related to the energy crisis - "The energy crisis is a Western plot" and exploited the rise in energy prices, followed by

election fraud ("The election results are rigged") inciting protests, and the destructive effects Moldova's accession to the European Union will have on agriculture ("EU accession will destroy agriculture and property rights"), which targeted rural farmers (Disinformation monitor on social media. Using AI power tools to assess the scale and impact of disinformation).

The disinformation landscape in Moldova in November and December 2024 was marked by a strategic and coordinated effort to exploit societal vulnerabilities and amplify public discontent. Using - key platforms such as Telegram, Facebook and TikTok, disinformation campaigns targeted economic, security and cultural anxieties to polarize public opinion and undermine trust in democratic institutions. Although economic and security themes persisted, the energy crisis became a dominant topic in the winter months, exploiting public dissatisfaction with rising costs. At the same time, anti-government narratives intensified, aligning with public frustration with the alleged shortcomings of the leadership. Fear was the dominant emotion, particularly in narratives about NATO, energy prices and government actions. Mistrust complemented fear, undermining confidence in institutions and policies. Nostalgia and pride were used strategically in pro-Russian narratives to evoke emotional links to historical and cultural traditions, targeting older people (Disinformation monitor on social media. Using AI power tools to assess the scale and impact of disinformation).

Emotional analysis of disinformation narratives

EMOTION	FREQUENCY	KEY NARRATIVES
Fear	45%	NATO threat, energy crisis, immigration
Distrust	35%	Government corruption, EU policies, election fraud
Anger	10%	Fraudulent elections, anti-government messages
Nostalgia	5%	Russian cultural alignment
Pride	5%	Russia as a cultural and moral guardian

Source: *Disinformation monitor on social media. Assessed during period 1 November – 31 December 2924*, https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Disinformation-monitor-on-social-media_DECEMBER_2024-1-1.pdf

The Russian Federation has remained the dominant actor, with state-sponsored campaigns shaping narratives on various platforms. Local pro-Russian groups and troll farms worked in sync to amplify these narratives, creating the impression of organic support. The Republic of Belarus played a supportive role, acting as a regional hub for disseminating the narratives.

Disinformation related to the energy crisis blamed the EU and the Moldovan leadership for the gas price hikes, promoting the Russian Federation as the only reliable supplier. Promoted mainly on Telegram and Facebook, these messages amplified economic anxieties and increased public pressure on the government to re-establish ties with the Russian Federation and thus ensure the country's energy security.

Conclusions

Disinformation is a global problem that affects the Republic of Moldova with a direct impact on national and human security. Artificial intelligence has amplified and will continue to amplify these effects with consequences that are difficult to fully estimate. Disinformation is also being propagated intensively with the help of social networks that favor content with a strong emotional impact, which polarizes and affects people's ability to discern between truth and falsehood.

Artificial intelligence has a dual character, highlighted by various researchers, which on the one hand is a way of streamlining many processes, but with major risks such as the dissemination of misinformation and manipulation of public opinion. These characteristics have prompted organizations to develop various AI regulations to limit abuses of artificial intelligence.

The Republic of Moldova, like other countries, is affected by disinformation, especially anti-Western narratives and manipulation of information coming from external actors, especially from the Russian Federation. The process is catalyzed by artificial intelligence which is used both to create false narratives and for dissemination on platforms such as Facebook, Telegram or Tik Tok that polarize the public using their fear and anger.

The analysis of disinformation in Moldova's information space leads us to emphasize the need for specific strategies to counter the coordinated influence of state and non-state actors, especially in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections. The difficulty of this process is determined by the imperative of maintaining a balance between combating disinformation and freedom of expression. At the same time, collaboration between Teh platforms and the state is necessary to counter disinformation amplified by artificial intelligence, but difficult in the context of the new vision of the Meta that will not restrict freedom of experimentation. The advantages of artificial intelligence should be used by state institutions to counter misinformation through various software that could be acquired through collaboration with the private sector and technological innovation organizations.

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