

INFORMATIONAL WARFARE, DIGITAL INFLUENCE NETWORKS, AND ELECTORAL PROCESS VULNERABILITY: THE CASE OF THE 2024 ROMANIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract: This article analyzes how digital influence networks can affect electoral competition in the context of geopolitical polarization and informational vulnerability. The study proposes an integrated approach, at the intersection of literature on disinformation, coordinated inauthentic behavior, computational propaganda, and network analysis, applied to the case of the 2024 Romanian presidential elections. Empirically, the research uses a methodological framework based on automated data collection from over 10,000 Romanian-language web sources, integration with social platforms via technical interfaces (APIs), sentiment analysis using Transformer models, and relational mapping of accounts. The analyzed material indicates the existence of a digital infrastructure centered on hub accounts, the most relevant being Daily Romania, connected to external nodes such as BRICS News, Zlati71, and Olga Bazova, in a transnational amplification architecture. Furthermore, the dataset suggests a geographical concentration of negative messages against pro-European actors, with a 68% share associated with IPs from the Russian Federation. The article argues that the analysis of influence networks must be integrated into the study of democratic resilience and informational security.

Keywords: *electoral disinformation; coordinated inauthentic behavior; informational warfare; network analysis; presidential elections; Romania.*

Introduction

The transformations brought by digital platforms to the sphere of political competition have profoundly altered the mechanisms of public opinion formation, electoral mobilization, and narrative distribution. In this ecosystem, political actors, networks of influencers, and algorithmic amplification infrastructures can reshape message visibility and produce disproportionate effects on the public agenda.

The case of the 2024 Romanian presidential elections is relevant because it combined internal polarization, identity themes, anti-establishment messages, and strong network activity on the X platform (formerly Twitter). The rise of independent candidate Călin Georgescu was achieved through an influence network visible in interaction data, characterized by a high intensity of positive sentiment and an unusual posting frequency.

The present paper aims to analyze the parallel information ecosystems developed during the electoral campaign. The main objective of the research is to investigate the technical and narrative mechanisms through which the candidate's media success was propelled by coordinated support akin to informational warfare.

Theoretical Framework

An essential direction of research concerns the spread of disinformation and the role of platform architecture in accelerating the circulation of manipulative content (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018). In this context, the concept of computational propaganda describes the semi-automated use of platforms and coordinated accounts to manipulate political perceptions (Woolley & Howard, 2016). Influence is produced not only by the text itself but by its distribution infrastructure.

The concept of Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB) has become central to the analysis of digital interventions. Research shows that the coordinated sharing of links by networks of accounts can create the appearance of organic support, algorithmically manipulating the visibility of topics (Giglietto et al., 2020). Modern operational workflows allow for the longitudinal detection and monitoring of these coordinated accounts (Pierri, Luceri & Ferrara, 2023).

Geopolitically, security literature argues that Eastern Europe represents a space vulnerable to external narrative interference. Influence operations increasingly use cross-platform networks, combining multiple digital ecosystems to disseminate coordinated campaigns (Hui, Yang & Menczer, 2024). From this perspective, the article proposes treating electoral influence networks as hybrid infrastructures formed by narrative production, coordinated amplification, and geopolitical anchoring.

Research Methodology

To capture the complex flow of digital communication, the research utilized a mixed methodological design, supported by the analysis technology developed by the FlashData system.

Data Collection and Sentiment Analysis

The collection architecture was based on dedicated web crawling, applied to over 10,000 Romanian-language websites (from Romania, the Republic of Moldova, and the diaspora), and on integration with social media APIs (X, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn). For the X platform, data was extracted in near real-time. Sentiment analysis was conducted through a model based on the Transformer architecture, specifically trained for the nuances of the Romanian language, with raw results being validated by expert analysts.

FlashData Methodology

Dedicated Web Crawling

Advanced web crawling technologies collect data from over **10,000 websites** in the Romanian language across Romania, the Republic of Moldova, and the Diaspora. The system continuously monitors information sources to capture the complex flow of digital communication.

APIs for Social Networks

Integration with popular social media platforms and the use of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to access and extract data from **TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn**, and other platforms relevant to the analysis of political communication.

Sentiment Analysis

FlashData uses an artificial intelligence-based sentiment analysis tool continuously trained on the subtleties of the Romanian language, enabling identification of **emotional nuances and political polarisation** of messages.

Real-Time Updates

For social media platforms that offer streaming capabilities, data is updated in real time via dedicated APIs, providing a **dynamic perspective** on the evolution of public conversation as it unfolds.

Figure 1. FlashData methodological workflow for data collection and processing.

Unit of Analysis and Indicators

The analysis monitored hub accounts, amplification accounts, influencers connected to the network, and the geographical distribution of IP addresses. Key indicators included the engagement rate, temporal synchronization, posting frequency, and content flow traceability.

Results and Data Analysis

Extracted data demonstrate that support for the targeted candidate was orchestrated through a centralized and stratified network.

The Central Hub and Impact Metrics

The main node of this network was the Daily Romania account, created in October 2023, which rapidly accumulated 61,300 followers and generated over 7,400 posts. Its metrics exceeded industry averages, with a monthly reach of 2.4 million, an engagement rate of 12%, and over 340,000 shares. This architecture operated on three levels: direct messages to supporters, amplification through extended networks, and seeding to top influencers.

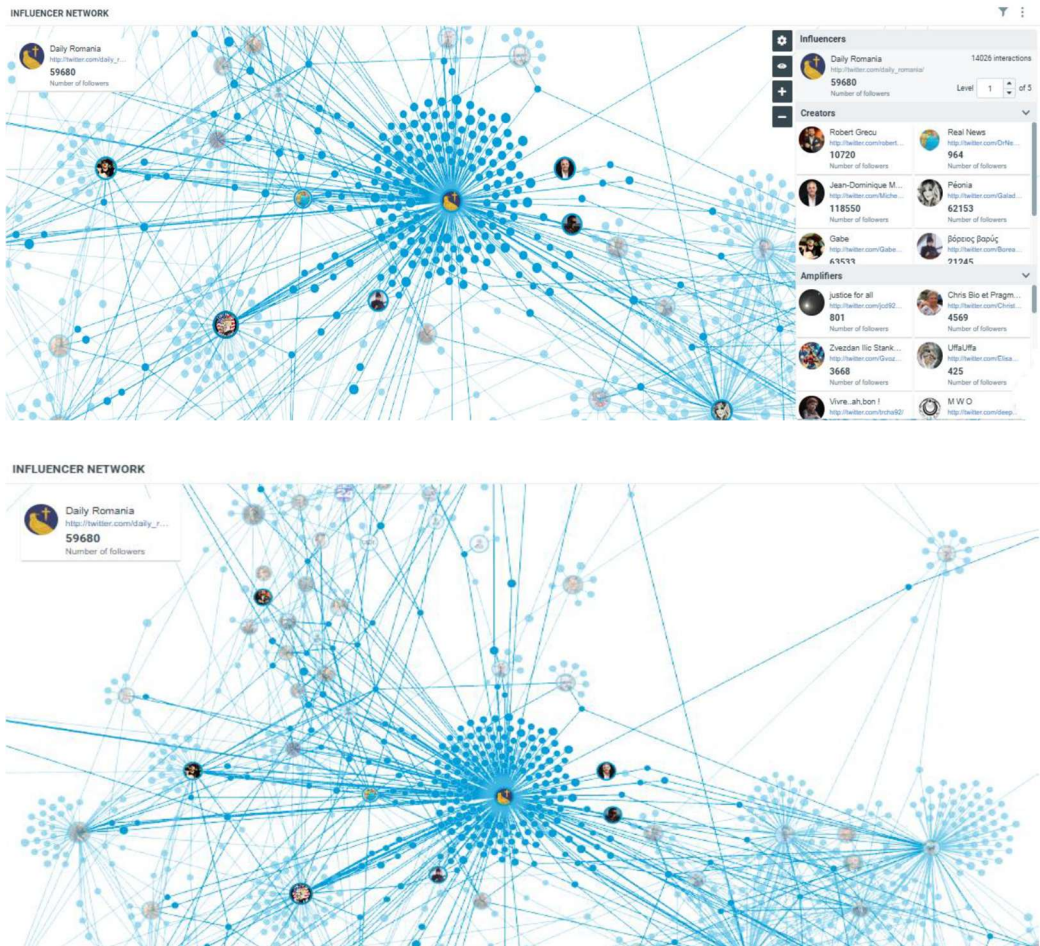
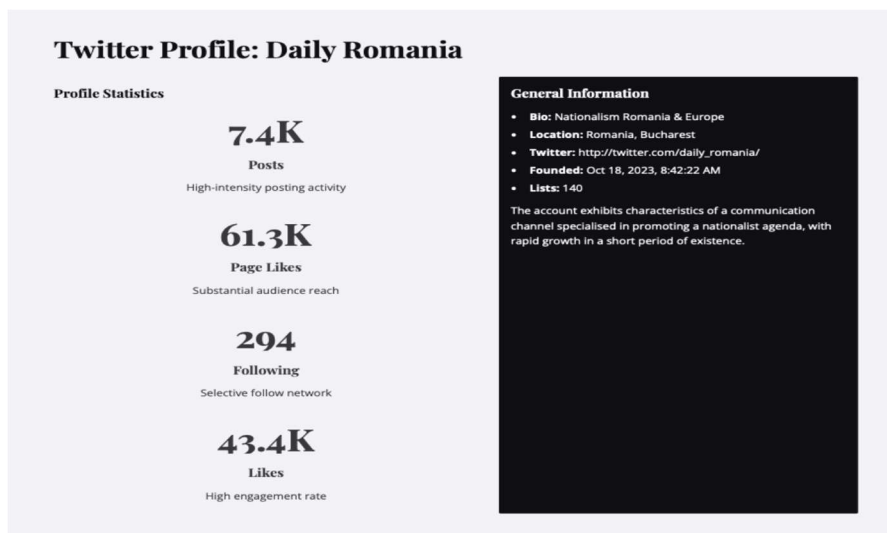


Figure 2. Network Nodes -- Daily Romania Profile.



Daily Romania Impact Metrics

2.4M

Monthly Reach

Total content impressions

12%

Engagement Rate

Interactions relative to views

340K

Shares

Redistributions in the analysed period

89%

Positive Sentiment

Analysis of comments and reactions

Daily Romania's exceptional content performance significantly surpasses industry benchmarks for political accounts, suggesting either an extremely engaged audience or the use of artificial amplification techniques.

Daily Romania 
daily_romania



Bio Nationalism | Romania & Europe
Location Romania, Bucharest
Twitter https://twitter.com/daily_romania/
Joined Oct 18, 2023, 8:42:22 AM

POSTS 7.4K
PAGE LIKES 61.3K
FOLLOWING 294
LIKES 43.4K
LISTS 140

MOST ENGAGING POSTS

SORT BY Engagement (Most engaging) -

-  The leading presidential candidate in Romania, Călin Georgescu, calls out the c...
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 26/11/24 at 17:09 |  18.1K  60.8K  2/10
-  Presidential candidate Călin Georgescu went to a frozen lake in the Carpathian M...
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 25/11/24 at 20:24 |  8.6K  60.3K  0/10
-  We are so back Romania's future president, Călin Georgescu pic.x.com/50480Hq...
QT @daily_romania: We are fucked
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 25/11/24 at 18:36 |  8.2K  60.4K  1/10
-  Călin Georgescu when a journalist asked him about feminism "Feminism is an abso...
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 26/11/24 at 00:17 |  7K  60.6K  2/10
-  Several news agencies are reporting that Robert F. Kennedy Jr. will travel to Ro...
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 26/11/24 at 19:22 |  4.8K  60.3K  0/10

MOST RECENT POSTS

SORT BY Found (Found last) -

-  Vlad the Impaler would vote Călin Georgescu as new president of Romania pic.x.com/50480Hq...
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 28/11/24 at 22:24 |  1.9K  61.2K  2/10
-  We, Romanians, exist on this earth to live in peace with both those from the West ...
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 28/11/24 at 20:18 |  3.1K  60.9K  3/10
-  Vote against insanity, vote for Călin Georgescu pic.x.com/7Z8IN1uq
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 28/11/24 at 19:28 |  3.2K  61.3K  3/10
-  Călin Georgescu literally beat all the lies and propaganda of the Romanian mainstrea...
QT @elonmusk: You are so much more than the media now
Daily Romania  @daily_romania | published on 28/11/24 at 18:08 |  113  60.8K  1/10

Figure 3. Centralized communication structure of the main hub.

Transnational Connectivity

A major finding is the connectivity of the local network with hubs affiliated with the non-Western bloc. Content generated by the BRICS News network was systematically redistributed within the Romanian ecosystem to promote a multipolar vision. Individual amplification nodes, such as Zlatti71 (specializing in pacifist/anti-war messages aimed at youth) and Olga Bazova, created an external validation bridge for the sovereigntist political discourse.

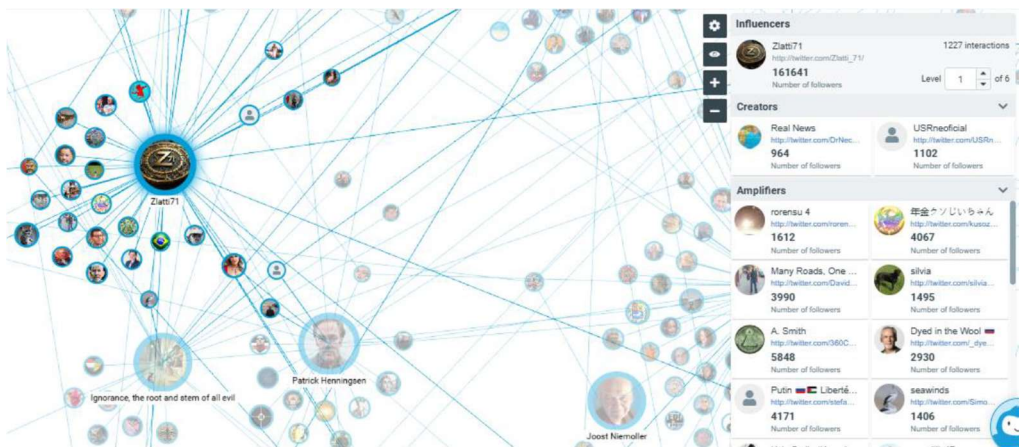


Figure 4. International geopolitical connection (BRICS News and amplifiers).

Network Nodes – BRICS News

International Geopolitical Connection

Analysis reveals substantial links to international media networks, particularly news sources related to BRICS and the non-Western geopolitical axis. This points to a positioning strategy for Romania in the Euro-Asian sphere of influence.



Geopolitical Perspectives

Promoting a multipolar world vision with an emphasis on alternatives to "Western hegemony".



Economic Narratives

Supporting non-Western economic models and critiquing Romania's dependence on traditional financial institutions.



Alternative Alliances

Exploring possibilities for cooperation with the BRICS bloc as an alternative to Euro-Atlantic integration.

The Influence of BRICS News in Campaign

Content generated and amplified by the BRICS News network has been adapted and redistributed within the Romanian media ecosystem, building a bridge between international geopolitical narratives and domestic political discourse.

1

Content Generation

BRICS News produces analyses and commentaries on the global geopolitical situation, framing international events through a specific editorial lens.

2

Local Adaptation

Daily Romania and other local accounts adapt the messages for the Romanian context, tailoring the narrative to resonate with domestic audiences.

3

National Amplification

The domestic network distributes the content towards the Romanian audience through coordinated sharing and re-publishing across platforms.

4

Feedback Loop

Local reactions influence the international communication strategy, creating a continuous cycle of narrative refinement and cross-border amplification.



INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY & NARRATIVE TRANSFER

International Connectivity & Narrative Transfer

The communication network includes connections with international news sources, particularly those linked to BRICS politics and international policy. This integration enables the synchronisation of messages at a transnational level.

Analysis of information flows reveals that narratives developed within a broader geopolitical context are rapidly adapted and integrated into Romanian political discourse, creating a strategic coherence between the local and global levels.

The impact of this connectivity manifests through:

- Legitimising political positions by referencing global trends
- Creating a narrative alternative to mainstream media
- Consolidating credibility through "independent" international sources

Network Nodes — Zlatti71

Individual Influencer Profile

Zlatti71 represents the type of individual influencer who operates as an amplification node within the broader network, specialising in anti-war and pro-peace messaging. This type of account serves as a contact point for specific segments of the target audience, connecting key narratives to engaged communities.

Niche Identification

Specialisation in specific topics (peace, anti-war) tailored to the target audience

Message Development

Creation of authentic content that resonates with the values and beliefs of the audience

Network Integration

Coordination with key network nodes to amplify messages and extend reach across platforms

Geographical Distribution of Negative Messages

Empirical evidence of external coordination is provided by the analysis of IPs behind the negative messages targeting pro-European candidates (such as Nicușor Dan and Maia Sandu). The analysis reveals an abnormal concentration: 68% of hostile messages originated from IPs in the Russian Federation, 18% from regional hubs in Belarus and Kazakhstan, and only 14% from other sources.

Geographic Distribution of Negative Messages About Nicușor Dan

From outside Romania



Figure 5. Geographical distribution of coordinated negative messages.

Discussions

The analyzed media rise was not exclusively an organic, grassroots phenomenon, but benefited from an asymmetric informational warfare. The exceptional engagement rate and perfect posting synchronization indicate the use of algorithmic gaming techniques. Furthermore, the connectivity with the pro-Russian media ecosystem highlights a paradigm shift in electoral interference. The geographical traceability of Russian IPs validates theories according to which internal polarization in Eastern Europe is frequently instrumentalized through external hybrid operations (Starbird, DiResta & DeBusschere, 2023).

Research Ethics and Study Limitations

Analyzed data were extracted from public and open sources (open-source intelligence). No personally identifiable information (PII) of private users was collected or exposed, the analysis focusing exclusively on public accounts, amplification hubs, and aggregated traffic metrics. An

inherent limitation of the study resides in the possibility of geographical masking through virtual private networks (VPNs), although the massive volume of analyzed data diminishes the probability of major statistical errors. Additionally, future analysis should include an in-depth examination of video dynamics on the TikTok platform.

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that the 2024 presidential elections were influenced by an organized digital infrastructure, which adopted non-Western geopolitical narratives to artificially consolidate the profile of a sovereigntist candidate. The existence of the two parallel ecosystems—one organic pro-European and one inauthentic supported by foreign IPs—shows the urgent need to develop cyber resilience mechanisms and analytical monitoring of coordinated inauthentic behavior.

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