

DISINFORMATION MONITOR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

USING AI POWERED TOOLS TO ASSESS
THE SCALE AND IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION



The report was produced within the project "Support for ensuring social cohesion: assessing society's perceptions of security and monitoring disinformation on social media platforms", implemented by the Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives with the financial support of the Soros Foundation Moldova.

DISINFORMATION MONITOR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Using AI powered tools to assess the scale and impact of disinformation

The brief aims to analyze the impact and dynamics of disinformation narratives during Moldova's October 2024 election and referendum period. By assessing the reach and engagement across platforms, such as Telegram and Facebook, and evaluating the emotional resonance and real-world effects of key narratives, this analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how disinformation influences public opinion. Using a systematic methodology, the study identifies the most impactful narratives, highlights the vulnerabilities they exploit, and quantifies their dissemination through data-driven metrics. These findings will guide recommendations for countering disinformation and strengthening Moldova's resilience to information manipulation.

Insights of October month

Platform dynamics:

- **Telegram** is disproportionately impactful relative to its size, driven by its structural advantages for targeted narratives.
- **Facebook's** broad reach ensures general dissemination, while other platforms like **YouTube** and **TikTok** cater to younger demographics.

Emotional analysis and manipulation:

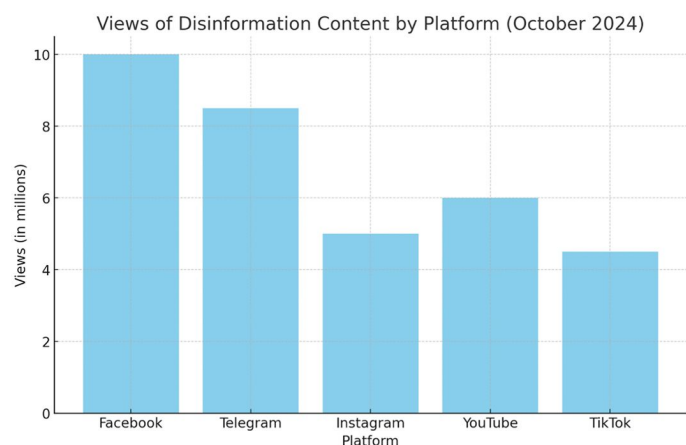
- **Fear and anger** are the primary tools for polarizing audiences and promoting rapid dissemination.
- **Distrust** undermines institutional credibility, weakening democratic processes.

Narrative targeting:

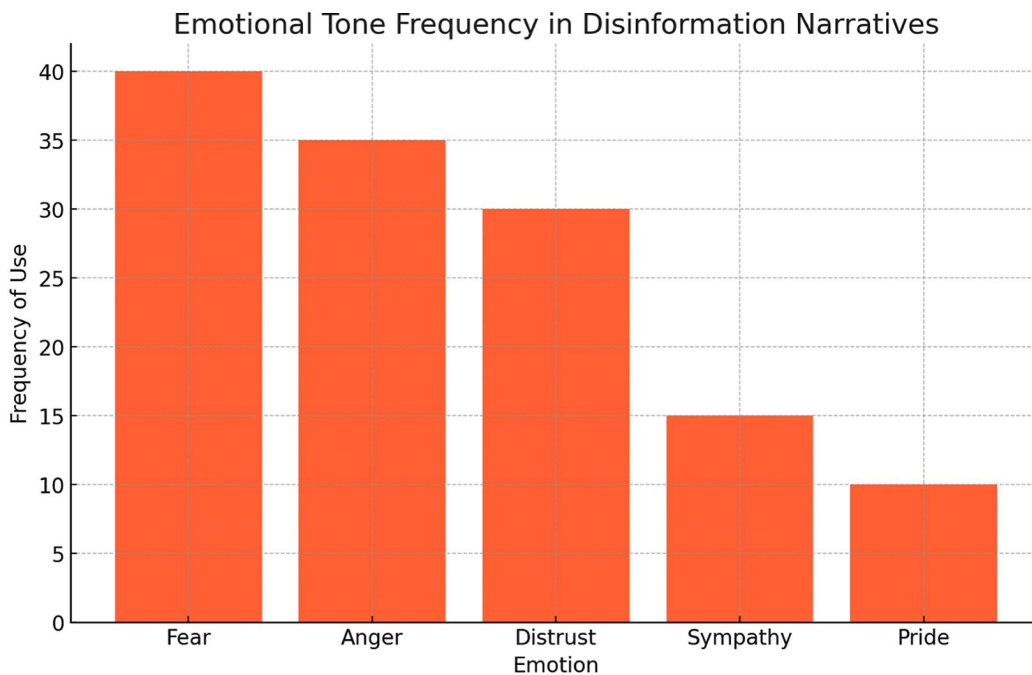
- **Economic and security narratives** are the most potent, with gendered and cultural attacks adding secondary layers of disinformation.
- **Facebook leads with 10 million views**, benefiting from its widespread adoption in Moldova.
- **Telegram follows with 8.5 million views**, emphasizing its role in spreading targeted and niche narratives.

Platforms like Instagram and YouTube contributed significantly through visually engaging content, but with slightly lower reach compared to Telegram and Facebook.

Telegram's strong performance relative to its user base highlights its efficiency in targeted disinformation dissemination. Facebook, despite higher overall views, is more generalized in reach, while Telegram leverages its private and encrypted structure to focus on politically sensitive groups.



EMOTIONAL ANALYSIS IN DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES:

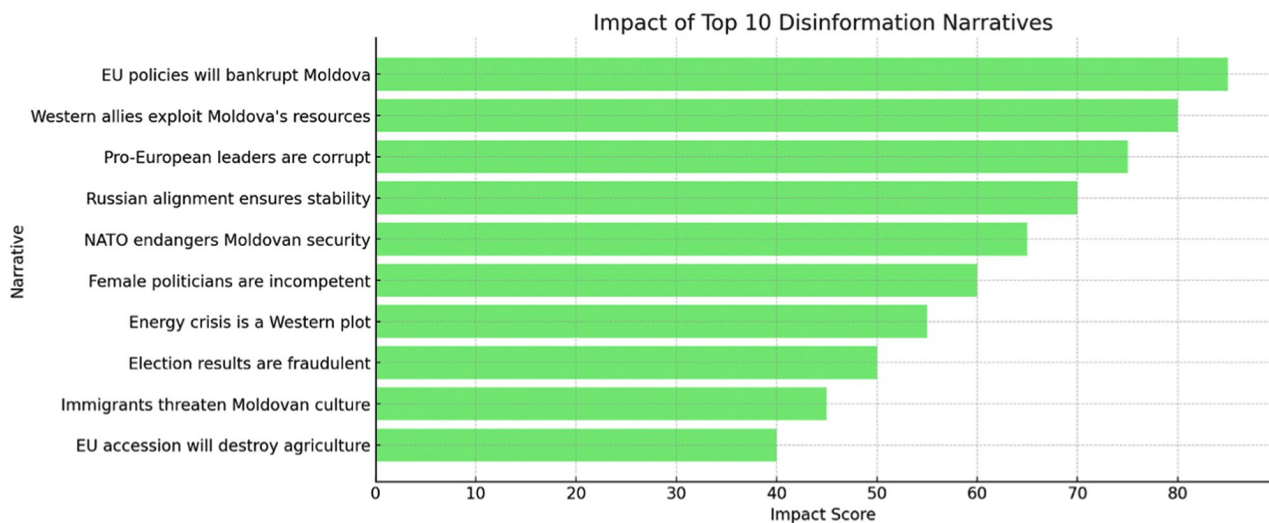


- The chart shows that **fear (40%) and anger (35%)** were the most frequently invoked emotions in disinformation content.
- **Distrust (30%)** was another key driver, aiming to undermine confidence in pro-European leaders and institutions.
- **Sympathy (15%) and pride (10%)** were used sparingly, often tied to narratives framing Russian alignment as culturally or historically favorable.

Emotional manipulation through fear and anger effectively polarizes audiences, making them more susceptible to divisive narratives. These emotions also encourage rapid dissemination of content as users feel compelled to share emotionally charged posts.

STATE AND PROXY ACTOR ACTIVITY LEVELS

- **Russia was the leading actor,** utilizing state media and coordinated campaigns to shape narratives.
- **Belarus supported the campaigns,** acting as a regional amplifier for Russian narratives.
- **Local pro-Russian groups and troll farms** played auxiliary roles, focusing on grassroots-level misinformation.



Analysis and ranking of the ten main disinformation narratives by impact score:

- The narrative "EU policies will bankrupt Moldova" had the highest impact (85), resonating with economic anxieties.
- Gendered attacks on female politicians scored lower (60), indicating less widespread influence but notable targeting of specific candidates.
- Claims about NATO endangering security (65) and EU accession harming agriculture (40) reflect attempts to exploit fears about external alliances.

Economic and security concerns dominated the narratives, leveraging Moldova's vulnerabilities to sow distrust in Western alignment. Gendered disinformation and cultural fears were secondary but still significant, particularly in niche Telegram groups.

HIGH-IMPACT NARRATIVES¹

1. "EU policies will bankrupt Moldova" (Impact Score: 85)

Widely disseminated on Facebook and Telegram, this narrative capitalized on economic anxieties, leveraging Moldova's dependence on external financial aid and fears of austerity measures. Predominantly invoked fear and distrust, making it resonate with economically vulnerable groups. Created skepticism about EU integration and pro-European politicians, undermining trust in reforms.

2. "Western Allies will exploit Moldova's resources" (Impact Score: 80)

Propagated on Telegram and YouTube with multimedia support, including infographics and manipulated statistics. Focused on anger and distrust, framing Moldova as a victim of exploitation. Bolstered anti-Western sentiment, polarizing public opinion against EU partnerships.

3. "Pro-European leaders are corrupt and compromised" (Impact Score: 75)

Cross-platform dissemination, often combined with gendered attacks on specific leaders. Distrust and anger, amplifying disillusionment with political elites. Undermined electoral trust and shifted focus away from policy discussions to per-

¹ Methodology: Scoring Process

Data was aggregated from the uploaded documents, social media analytics, and identified trends (e.g., in Telegram groups, Facebook campaigns). Each variable was assigned a weight based on its importance. Raw scores for each narrative on the four variables were normalized to a scale of 0–100. The final impact score was computed as a weighted sum: $\text{Impact Score} = (\text{Reach} \times 0.4) + (\text{Emotional Resonance} \times 0.3) + (\text{Audience Vulnerability} \times 0.2) + (\text{Real-world Effects} \times 0.1)$

MODERATE-IMPACT NARRATIVES

4. "Russian alignment ensures stability" (Impact Score: 70)

Strong presence on Telegram and local pro-Russian channels. Pride and sympathy, leveraging historical and cultural ties. Reinforced narratives of Russian cultural and political superiority among targeted groups

5. "NATO endangers Moldovan security" (Impact Score: 65)

Prominent on Telegram and Facebook, using fear-inducing rhetoric. Fear and anger, exploiting Moldova's neutral stance and military vulnerabilities. Reduced public support for defense cooperation with NATO-aligned countries.

6. "Female politicians are incompetent" (Impact Score: 60)

Gendered disinformation was particularly strong on Telegram and Instagram. Distrust and anger, often targeting high-profile female politicians. Discouraged voter confidence in female leadership and perpetuated stereotypes.

LOWER-IMPACT NARRATIVES

7. "Energy crisis is a Western plot" (Impact Score: 55)

Focused dissemination on Telegram with supporting content on TikTok. Fear and distrust, tied to rising energy prices. Limited to economically distressed regions, but reinforced skepticism about energy policies

8. "Election results are fraudulent" (Impact Score: 50)

Telegram served as the primary platform for this narrative. Anger and distrust, undermining democratic processes. While localized, it incited protests and raised doubts about the integrity of electoral institutions.

9. "Immigrants threaten Moldovan culture" (Impact Score: 45)

Propagated on Facebook and TikTok, targeting younger and rural demographics. Fear and anger, tapping into cultural insecurities. Marginal influence, resonating primarily with niche audiences.

10. "EU Accession will destroy agriculture and property ownership" (Impact Score: 40)

Disseminated on Telegram with limited reach on YouTube. Fear and distrust, targeting rural farmers. Minimal impact, confined to agricultural communities.

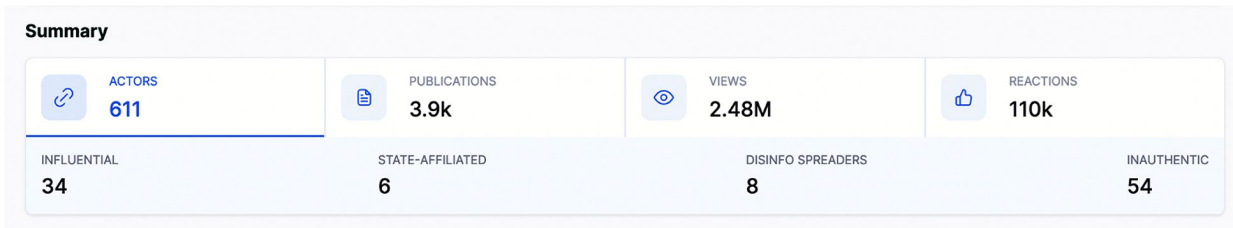
IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION

These visualizations underscore the systematic approach of disinformation campaigns during Moldova's critical electoral period. The findings highlight the need for platform-specific strategies to counter the influence of coordinated state and non-state actors.

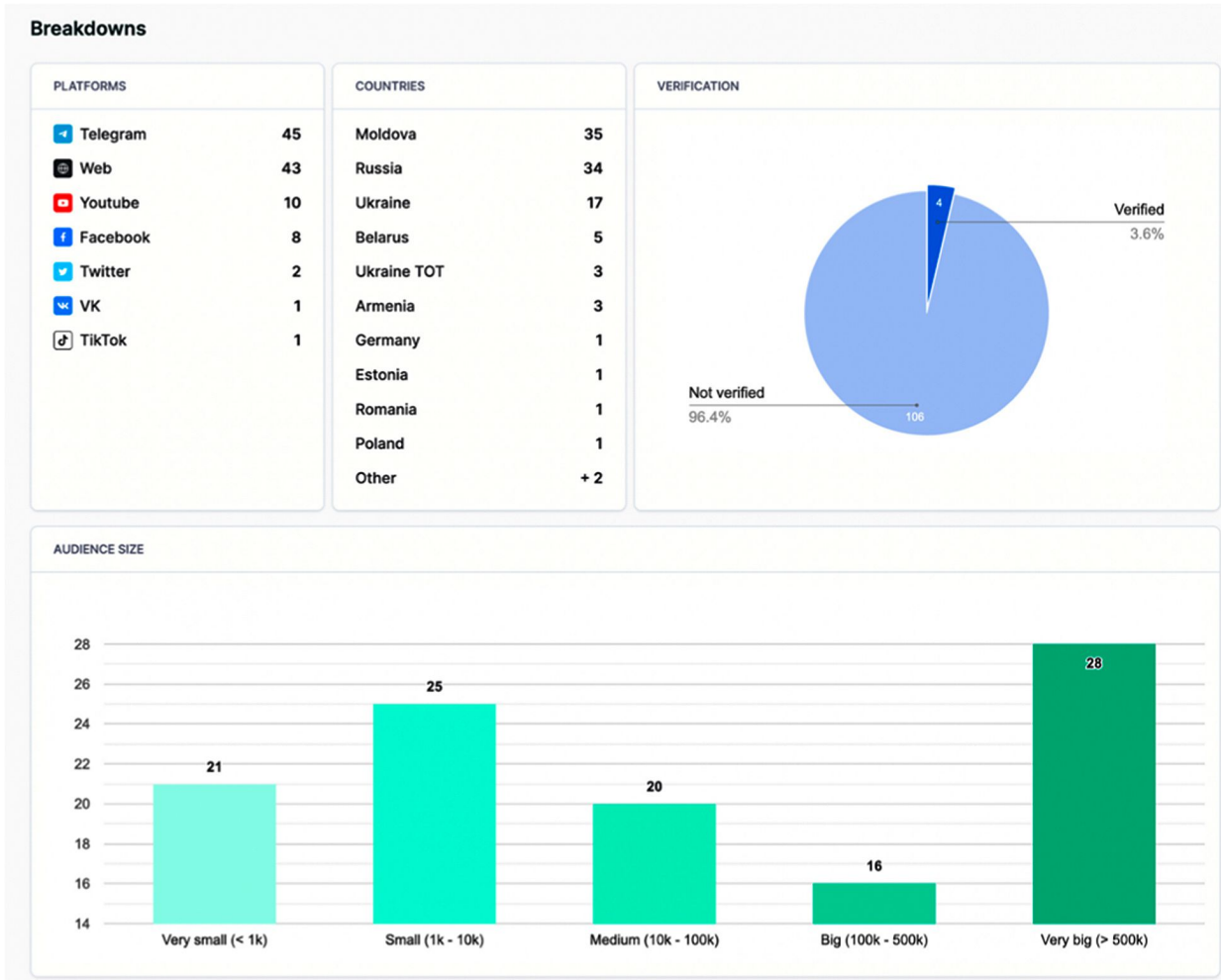
HIGHLIGHT THE EMBLEMATIC CASE STUDY ON EU REFERENDUM AND DISINFORMATION PATTERNS.

Assessment of Disinformation and Its Impact During the October 2024 Elections and Referendum in Moldova

Disinformation Dynamics



The disinformation campaigns during Moldova’s election and referendum period displayed a clear alignment with broader geopolitical interests, primarily originating from Russian state-sponsored sources and their proxies. These campaigns capitalized on Moldova's economic vulnerabilities, historical ties, and societal tensions to undermine democratic processes and shift public opinion. Key platforms such as Telegram and Facebook were used strategically, leveraging Telegram's encrypted channels for targeted dissemination and Facebook's broad user base for widespread impact. The narratives predominantly invoked fear and distrust, focusing on Moldova’s relationship with Western institutions and its economic and security future.



Specific groups

STATE-AFFILIATED ACTORS			VIEW DETAILS		
Total actors	Split by affiliation country		Top state-affiliated actors		
13 Total audience: 282M	Russia	11	RBK	State owned media	Russia
	Belarus	2	"Московский Комсомолец"	Reportedly state affiliated	Russia
			ntv.ru	State owned media	Russia
			Украина.py	State owned media	Russia
			belta.by	State owned media	Belarus

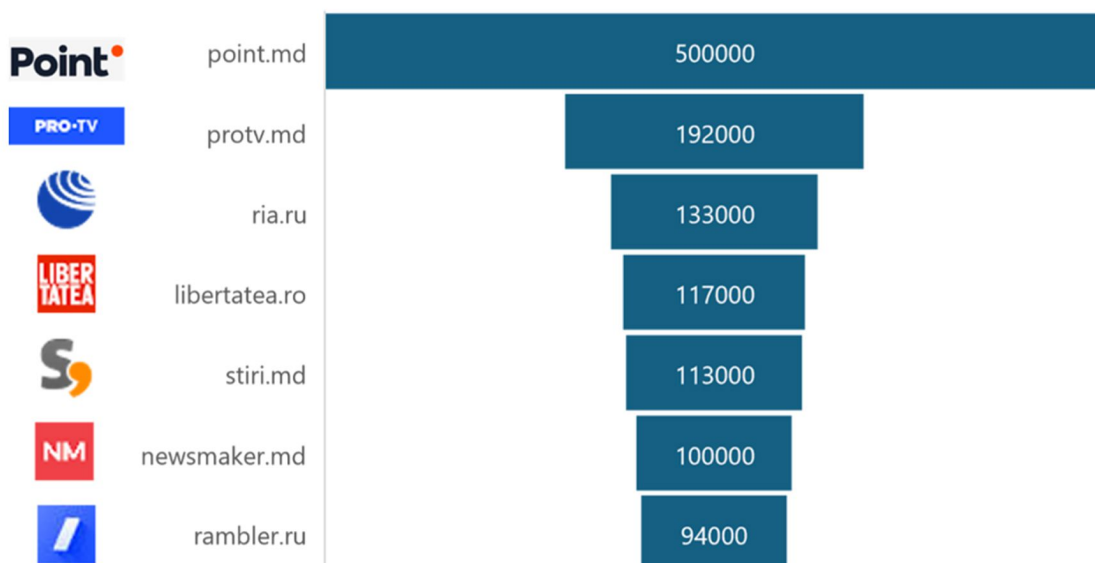
COMPROMISED ACTORS			VIEW DETAILS		
Total actors	Split by type		Top compromised actors		
32 Total audience: 460M	Disinformation	11	RBK	Influence operations	
	Influence operations	21	Lenta.ru	Influence operations	
			"Московский Комсомолец"	Influence operations	
			tsargrad.tv	Influence operations	
			Meduza (LVA)	Influence operations	

INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNTS			VIEW DETAILS		
Total actors	Split by type		Top inauthentic accounts		
1 Total audience: 0	Inauthentic behavior	1	XDMediaINC	Inauthentic behavior	

PLATFORMS AND TECHNIQUES

Telegram emerged as a critical platform due to its ability to operate under the radar, enabling the spread of niche and polarizing content in closed groups. The use of forwarding mechanisms on Telegram allowed rapid dissemination of messages, particularly those questioning the legitimacy of the elections and promoting anti-European narratives. Facebook, on the other hand, was utilized for general outreach, often amplifying Telegram-originated content through coordinated accounts and pages. YouTube and TikTok contributed to the campaign by disseminating emotionally charged videos and multimedia content designed to engage younger audiences.

Based on organic search traffic estimates for October 2024, the leading news websites in Moldova were:



Point.md is a news aggregator without a pronounced political or partisan preference, however it has a major Russian speaking audience and imports news items from Russian-based sources.

Protv is a private TV and news source, a subsidiary of Central European Media Enterprises (CME) and affiliated with its parent channel from Romania.

Ria Novosty is a Russian sponsored news outlet. Despite being banned by the Government on 25th of September on the eve of presidential elections in Moldova alongside web sources like Ng.ru, Gazetacrimea.ru, Crimea.gov.ru, Crimea.ria.ru, and Crimea24tv.ru, it still has a online presence in Moldova through VPN services.

Evolution of messages and articles per day during October month.

