

DISINFORMATION MONITOR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

**ASSESSED DURING THE PERIOD
1 NOVEMBER - 31 DECEMBER 2024**



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DISINFORMATION MONITOR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Assessed during the period 1 November - 31 December 2024

The disinformation landscape in Moldova during November and December 2024 was marked by a strategic and coordinated effort to exploit societal vulnerabilities and amplify public discontent. Leveraging key platforms like Telegram, Facebook, and TikTok, disinformation campaigns targeted economic, security, and cultural anxieties to polarize public opinion and undermine trust in democratic institutions. This analysis examines the top narratives propagated during this period, their emotional resonance, and the role of state and proxy actors, providing a data-driven understanding of how these campaigns influenced public perception and shaped the socio-political discourse.

Main insights for November and December months 2024

Platform dynamics:

- **Telegram** solidified its role as a primary disinformation platform, with narratives targeting niche, politically sensitive groups.
- **Facebook's** maintained a broader reach, amplifying narratives originating on Telegram to a general audience.
- **TikTok and Instagram** became increasingly prominent for targeting younger demographics through visually appealing, easily shareable content.

Shifts in narrative focus:

- While economic and security themes persisted, the energy crisis became a dominant topic during the winter months, leveraging public dissatisfaction with rising costs.
- Anti-government narratives intensified, aligning with public frustration over perceived leadership inadequacies.

Emotional Resonance:

- Fear and distrust continued to be the primary emotions invoked, driving virality and polarization.
- Nostalgia and pride played a secondary role, primarily in narratives advocating for closer ties with Russia.

Breakdown of emotional drivers

| 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 |

Fear was the dominant emotion, particularly in narratives surrounding NATO, energy prices, and government actions. Distrust complemented fear, undermining confidence in institutions and policies. Nostalgia and pride were strategically used in pro-Russian narratives to evoke emotional ties to historical and cultural traditions, targeting older demographics.

State and proxy actor activity levels

| ACTOR | ACTIVITY LEVEL | TACTICS USED |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|--|
| Russia | High | NATO threat, energy crisis, immigration |
| Belarus | Moderate | Government corruption, EU policies, election fraud |
| Local pro-Russian groups | High | Fraudulent elections, anti-government messages |
| Troll Farms | Moderate | Russian cultural alignment |
| External proxies (e.g., influencers) | Low | Russia as a cultural and moral guardian |

Russia remained the dominant actor, with state-sponsored campaigns shaping narratives across platforms. Local pro-Russian groups and troll farms worked synergistically to amplify these narratives, creating the impression of organic support. Belarus played a supporting role, acting as a regional hub for narrative dissemination.

Overview of the Top 10 Narratives (November – December 2024)

| NARRATIVE | IMPACT | KEY PLATFORMS | PRIMARY EMOTION | TARGET AUDIENCE |
|---|----------|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| NATO as a threat to Moldova’s security | High | Telegram, Facebook | Fear, Distrust | Security-conscious adults |
| EU policies will bankrupt Moldova | High | Telegram, Facebook | Fear, Distrust | Economically vulnerable families |
| Moldova’s government is corrupt and incompetent | High | Telegram, Facebook | Anger, Distrust | General population, political skeptics |
| Western values promote moral decay | Moderate | TikTok, Instagram | Distrust, Nostalgia | Young adults, conservative groups |
| Russia is a victim of Western aggression | Moderate | Telegram, Facebook | Pride, Distrust | Russian-speaking communities |

| | | | | |
|--|----------|---------------------|------------------|--|
| Gas crisis is the fault of EU policies | High | Telegram, Facebook | Fear, Distrust | Families, rural areas |
| Russian alignment ensures cultural preservation | Moderate | YouTube, Facebook | Nostalgia, Pride | Older generations, rural audiences |
| Election results are fraudulent | Moderate | Telegram, Facebook | Anger, Distrust | Politically active citizens |
| Pro-European leaders are corrupt and compromised | High | Telegram, Instagram | Distrust, Anger | General population, political skeptics |
| Immigrants threaten Moldovan culture | Low | TikTok, Facebook | Fear, Anger | Rural and culturally conservative groups |

Security and Defence

Disinformation narratives in this cluster framed NATO as a direct threat to Moldova's security, exploiting public fears about regional instability due to the war in Ukraine. Messages circulated primarily on Telegram, suggesting that collaboration with NATO would lead to Moldova's involvement in military conflicts. Facebook amplified these messages, supported by infographics and manipulated statistics designed to evoke fear. These narratives increased distrust in international partnerships, reducing public support for NATO and heightening anxieties about Moldova's geopolitical position. The focus on fear and distrust made these messages highly engaging and polarizing.

| INDICATOR | VALUE |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| Primary Platform | Telegram, Facebook |
| Emotions Evoked | Fear, Distrust |
| Estimated Reach | 6.5 million views |
| Target Audience | Security-conscious adults |

"Ruskii Mir" (Russian World)

This cluster glorified Russian culture and traditions, advocating for Moldova's alignment with Russian values. Facebook and YouTube were primary platforms for disseminating nostalgic content, often using historical references to evoke emotional ties. These narratives effectively targeted older generations and rural audiences, creating a divide between pro-European and pro-Russian supporters.

| INDICATOR | VALUE |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Primary Platform | Facebook, YouTube |
| Emotions Evoked | Nostalgia, Pride |
| Estimated Reach | 5 million views |
| Target Audience | Older generations, rural communities |

Energy and Gas Crisis

Disinformation around the energy crisis blamed the EU and Moldova's leadership for rising gas prices, promoting Russia as the only reliable supplier. Telegram and Facebook were key platforms, leveraging manipulated statistics and fear-inducing rhetoric to amplify the narrative.

These messages heightened economic anxieties and increased public pressure on the government to re-establish ties with Russia. The crisis narrative resonated strongly in economically vulnerable areas.

| INDICATOR | VALUE |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Primary Platform | Telegram, Facebook |
| Emotions Evoked | Fear, Distrust |
| Estimated Reach | 7.2 million views |
| Target Audience | Economically vulnerable families |