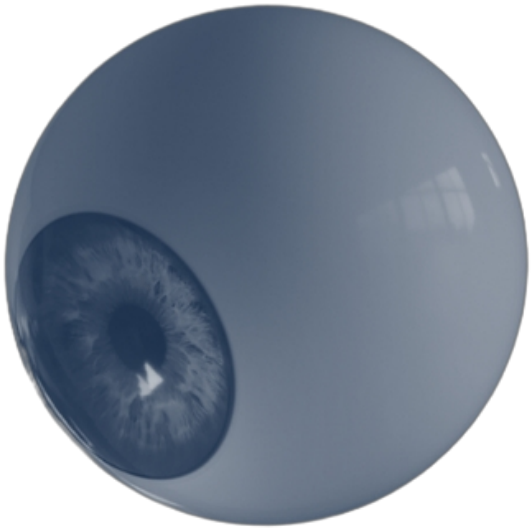
From Underdog to Contender: The Rise of Călin Georgescu in the Polls

Politics on Romanian TikTok

Monitored interval: January-November 2024

Policy Brief no.190

Politics on Romanian TikTok

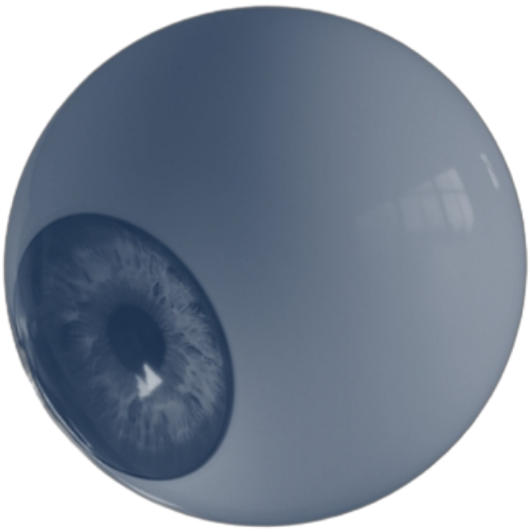


From September 2024 until now political hashtags have been constantly TOP trending on Romania. Following our online monitoring it was clear to us that the invasion of political content is coming from a wave of accounts that mostly support posts about presidential candidates.

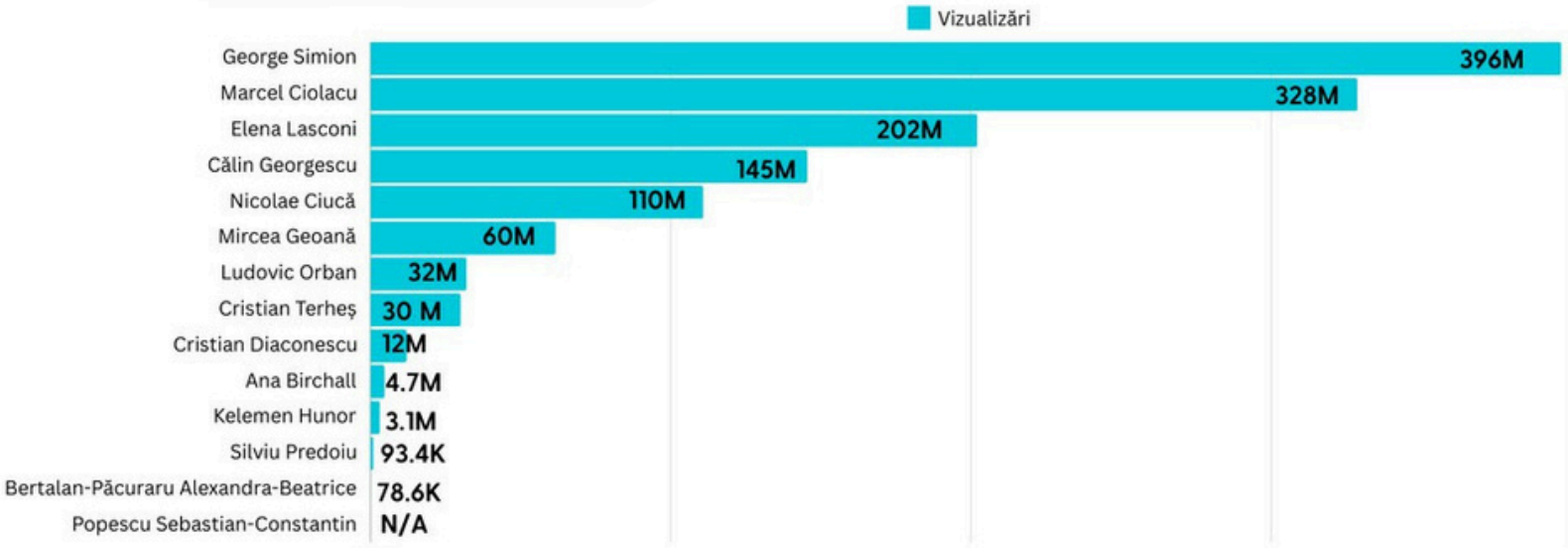
TikTok's official stance is that the platform does not accept paid political advertisements, but this PR exercise of theirs is contradicted by the reality that the overwhelming majority of content remains unmarked. What's more, the accounts are superficially vetted: they claim to be entertainment but are doing political propaganda in plain sight. This remains the **main problem for all the political content accounts analyzed: they have no traceability in real life** but creates content with hundreds of millions of views. **It would actually be quite absurd to declare your own post as political, since TikTok doesn't allow political ads so the content would be taken down**. This ban inoperative has in no way led to the depoliticization of the online space, but only to an absolution of the platform's guilt in terms of moderation and transparency of political content.

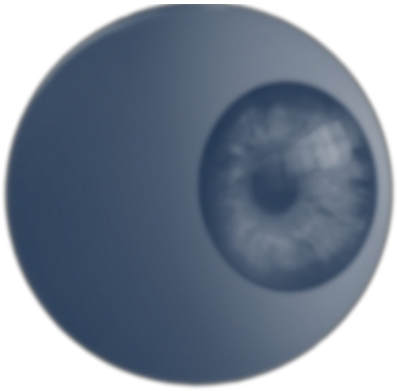
An example of this is the whole scandal last month **with Alexandr Stoianoglo, a presidential candidate in the Republic of Moldova, for the promotion of which Romanian influencers were paid and the content was not flagged in any way.** On TikTok, the legal theory remains completely parallel to the reality of the content circulating on the platform: **there are countless pages explicitly advertising a political party but claiming to be informative or educational accounts.** In the Romanian space, here below is the top of political content gone viral from September 2024 to date, directly correlated with the hashtags of the presidential candidates.

Who dominates the feeds?



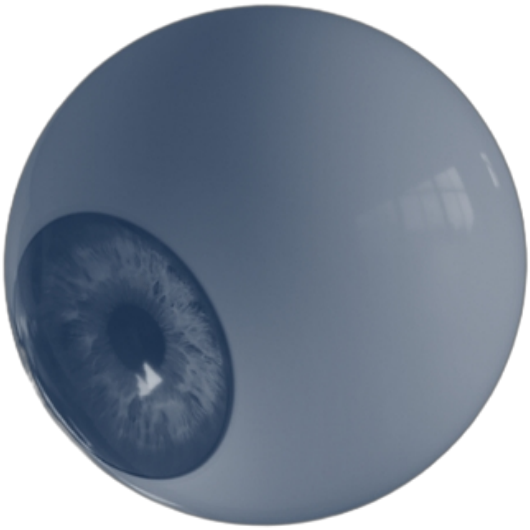
Aggregation of the main hashtags related to presidential candidates on the TikTok platform
January-November 2024





Romanian TikTok has 8.9 million users

Facebook has 13.03 million users



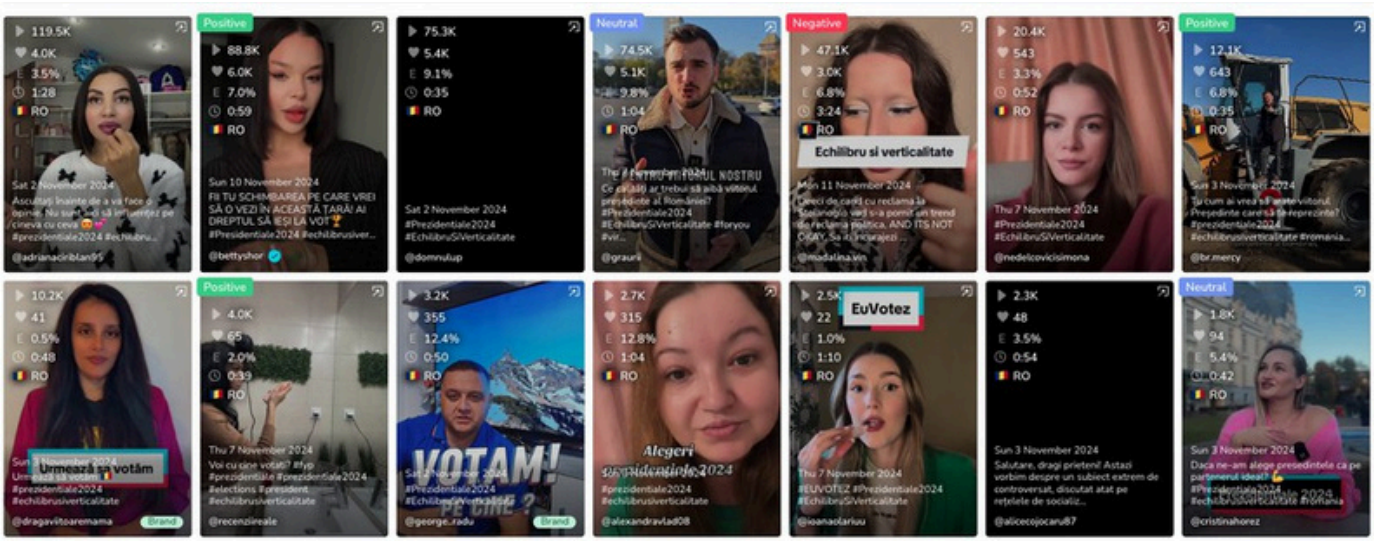
The constant viral political figures on Tiktok are **George Simion with 589,800 followers and 240.6 million content views on the main hashtags; Marcel Ciolacu with 208.9 million views, mostly from content created by other accounts, his official account with only 38,900 views followers. Elena Lasconi has had a steady, organic growth from August to now, reaching 123 million content views with her associated hashtags.** It's mainly USR Youth accounts and similar promotional ones, again, the official account has only 73,400 followers.

In addition to the above, the surprise Călin Georgescu appeared, who has achieved in the last two months the virality built by the first three candidates in 11 months. How did Călin Georgescu manage to obsessively invade voters' feeds? We discuss this at length in the section dedicated to him below, but in brief it's (i) a coordinated network of direct promotion accounts, plus (ii) a group of influencers who indirectly promotes the politician, without in any way marking the paid publicity.

An example is the #balanceandverticality campaign with 2.4 million views, where influencers describe Călin Georgescu according to a copy-paste script, without naming him, but using his own characterizations.

Influencer campaign 2.4 million views - #balanceandverticality

Exquisite Stoianoglo recipe?



Source Exolyt - We mention that the video of the influencer @madalina.vin is the only viral video from the analyzed top, a satire video that ironizes this trend and asks influencers to mark the trend political advertising.

#echilibrusiverticalitate

Total Views	Videos	Avg. Views / Video
2.4M	148	15.9K

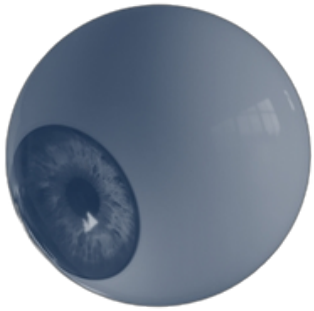
Influencer campaign 2.4 million views - #balanceandverticality

Exquisite Stoianoglo recipe?

Following the model of the Stoianoglo campaign, there are Romanian influencers with no affinity to politics, i.e. with exclusive content on fashion, makeup, entertainment, who have started to post under a single hashtag, without naming the recipient candidate. **The campaign is promoting Călin Georgescu under the hashtag #echilibrusiverticalitate and is based on the idea of a president who believes in neutrality,** verticality, basically recycling Georgescu's messages from the TikTok campaign.

The interesting part of this post is that it doesn't mention Georgescu's name explicitly, so it also overlaps with the expectations of the GOLD audience, which leads to a competition of the absurd between fans who contradict each other in the comments of the #balanceandverticality trend about the man who should actually be voted.

Whether this confusion is deliberate or random, we can only speculate.



Călin Georgescu

If we analyze his presence on TikTok we see that from September 2024 to date #calingeorgescu has gained 120 million followers.

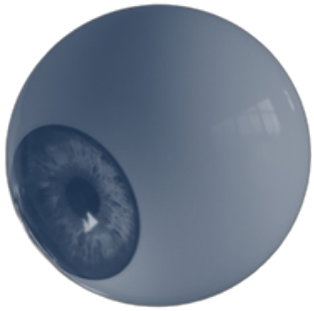
As of November 18, Călin Georgescu had 92.8 million views, most of which were in last 2 months. By November 22 it had increased by 52 million views. More precisely, it added more than all the visibility achieved by Mircea Geoană in 11 months. The burst of visibility seems suddenly and artificially created, just like the polls in which he suddenly exploded with a score between 8-10%.

Aspects that reinforce the idea of a coordinated promotion campaign are:

- **Exaggerated traffic without a relevant number of followers before the last 2 months.** Example: in September 2024, Călin Georgescu had 31 800 followers, in November their number surpassed Marcel Ciolacu's and is approaching Elena Lasconi's, increasing about fourfold to 154 900 followers in November
- **Its traffic of 150 million views is obsessively generated only around the hashtag #calingeorgescu and that's it.** In reality, organic traffic is much more unstructured when it is not exclusively paid. For example, even in the case of George Simion the traffic is split between several viral hashtags like #georgesimion #georgesimionpresedinte #georgesimionaur, etc.

The theme with the highest visibility pushed by Călin Georgescu on TikTok in the last two months is peace, more precisely the need for Romania to stop its support to Ukraine in order not to involve Romania in the war. This theme of the border conflict is present in the form of the need maintaining sovereignty and is combined with other classic narratives: Romania imports 90% of its food, we export Romanian quality to foreigners, we export our grain and buy poor quality processed products, etc.

Unverified viral information that has been shown on TV and later turned into videos on TikTok is the main promotional tactic; below are some of the viral claims.



Călin Georgescu

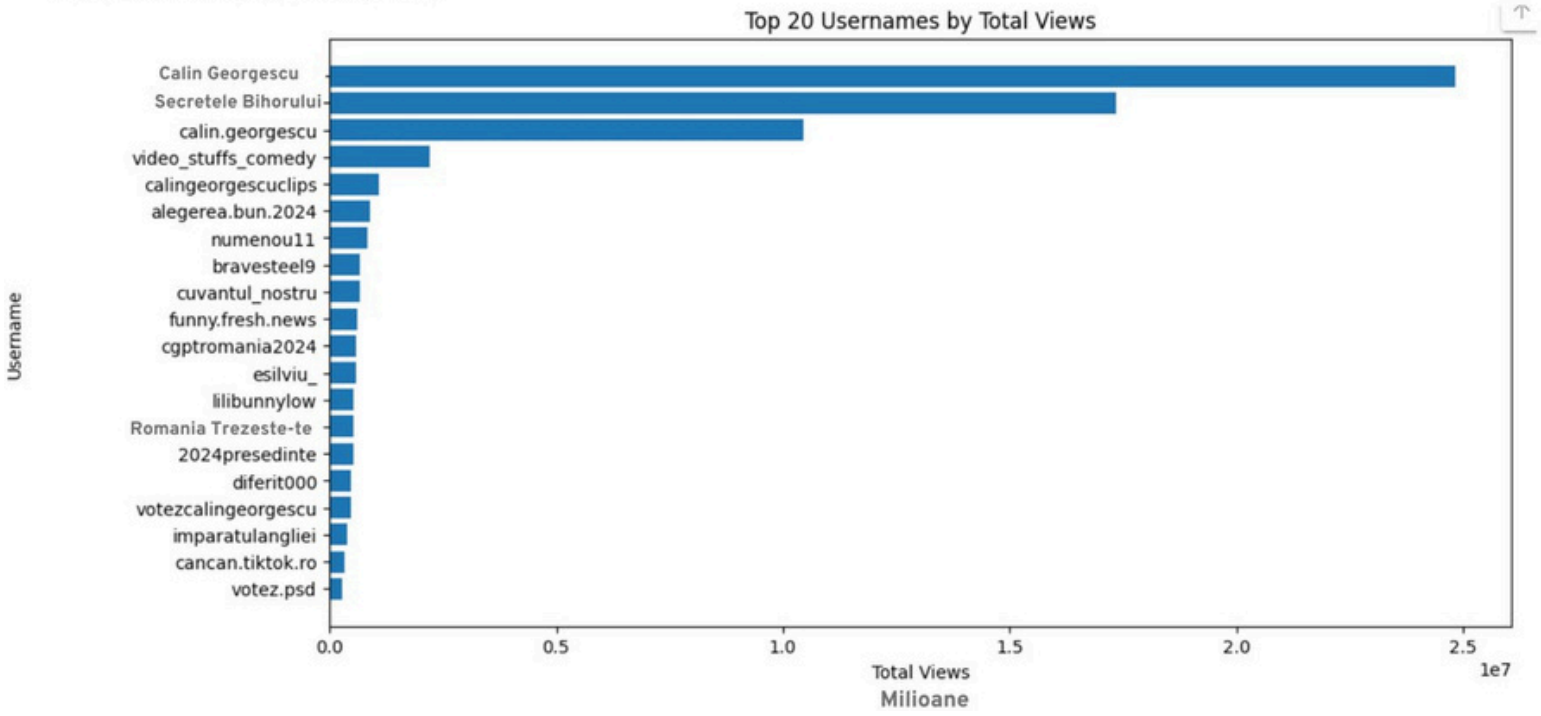
Where does its popularity come from?

Unverified viral information that has been shown on TV and later turned into videos on TikTok is the main promotional tactic; below are some of the viral claims.

"Today we export wheat for 30 bani kg and import frozen dough for 3.4 lei" (442 000 views, 29 000 likes)

"Support for Ukraine in the war with Russia. Refusal to continue economic and military support to Ukraine in the war started by Russia. Supporting the PEACE and considering that we are drawn into a conflict because of other interests behind it. Please leave in the comments your opinion, Romanians !" (1.3 million views, 95 800 likes)

Top Conturi care creează conținut despre Călin Georgescu pe TikTok
Ianuarie-Noiembrie 2024

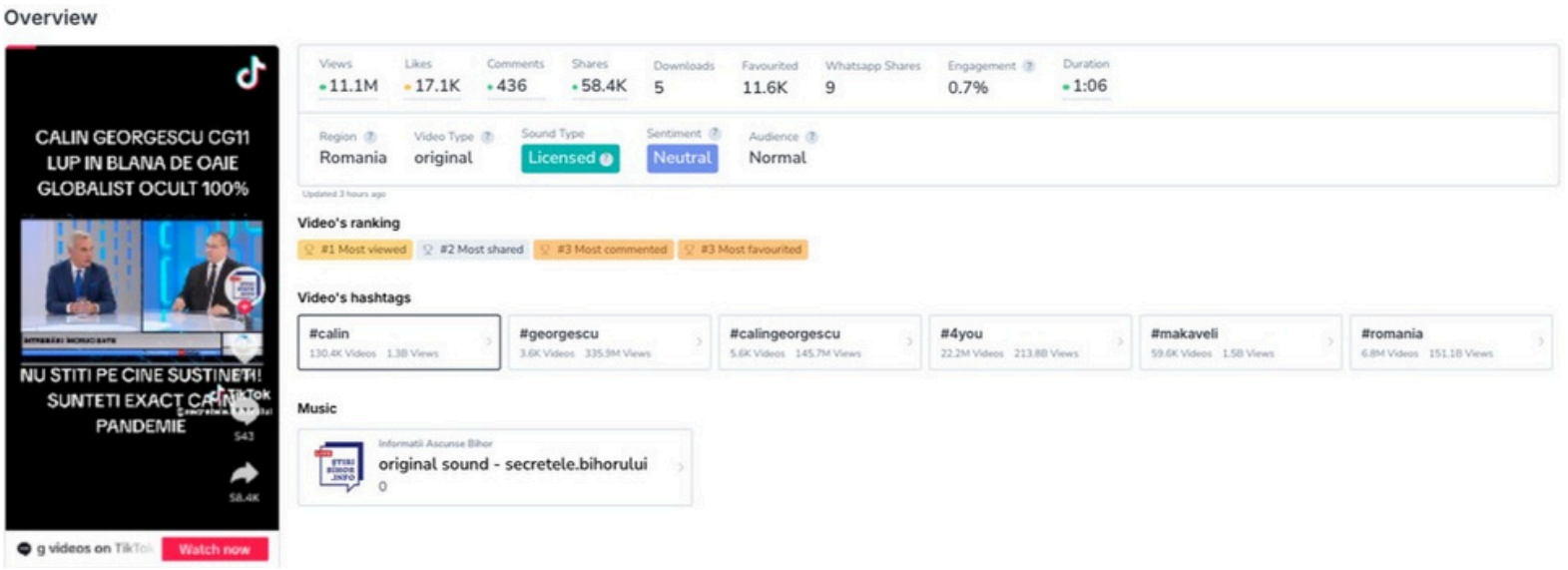


username	views	profile_link
Călin Georgescu Official	24828605	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-7151041929462957061
Secrets of Bihor	17354358	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-7425954215979549728
calin.georgescu	10442872	https://www.tiktok.com/@calin.georgescu
video_stuffs_comedy	2208515	https://www.tiktok.com/@video_stuffs_comedy
calingeorgescuclips	1102279	https://www.tiktok.com/@calingeorgescuclips
good.choice.2024	884431	https://www.tiktok.com/@alegerea.bun.2024
numenou11	847184	https://www.tiktok.com/@numenou11
bravesteel9	672918	https://www.tiktok.com/@bravesteel9
our_word	667905	https://www.tiktok.com/@our_word
funny.fresh.news	620700	https://www.tiktok.com/@funny.fresh.news
cgptptromania2024	595366	https://www.tiktok.com/@cgptromania2024
Your friends	584880	https://www.tiktok.com/@esilviu_
lilibunnylow	540346	https://www.tiktok.com/@lilibunnylow
Romania Wake up	536975	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-7398091704753095713
2024president	519759	https://www.tiktok.com/@2024presedinte
different000	480503	https://www.tiktok.com/@diferit000
votecalingeorgescu	479386	https://www.tiktok.com/@votezcalingeorgescu
emperorangels	396054	https://www.tiktok.com/@imparatulangliei
cancan.tiktok.ro	342519	https://www.tiktok.com/@cancan.tiktok.ro
vote.psd	288157	https://www.tiktok.com/@votez.psd

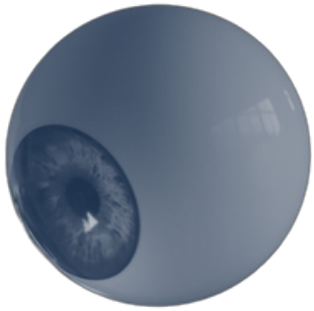
Călin Georgescu

Online reaction

The accounts promoting AUR, PSD and PNL have been trying in the last days a TikTok counter-campaign to reduce the popularity of Călin Georgescu, through a series of materials that have gathered about 20 million views saying that Georgescu is a covert globalist.



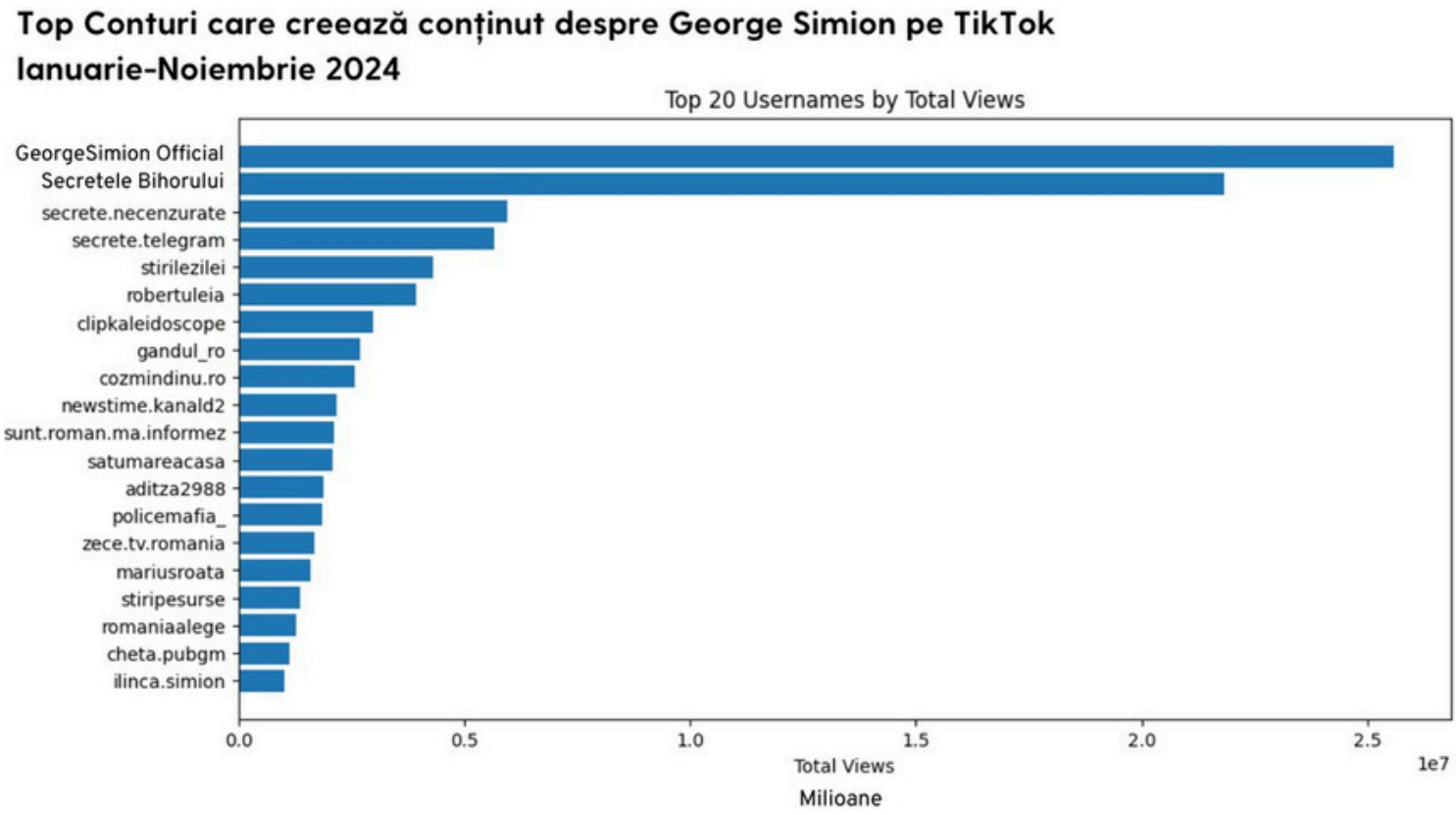
Source Exolyt



George Simion

A well developed promotion network

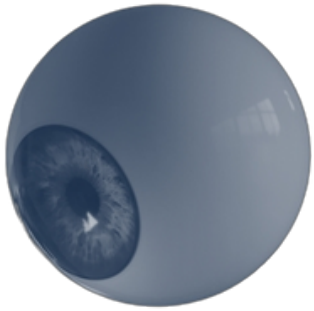
In George Simion's case, the recipe remains the same: a network of online accounts constantly promoting him, bringing him 500 million views this year alone. Sovereignist content, the portrayal of Simion as a Christian, anti-system family man and the apparent moderation of George Simion's discourse dominate the feed of Romanians on TikTok. With such virality, Simion dominates the top influencers on TikTok, being among the first politicians to use the platform to promote their electoral agenda.



George Simion

Tight promotion networks

The account secretele.bihorului, which also has the website stiribihor.info. On TikTok the account makes pro-AUR, anti Georgescu, but also about PSD. On the other hand, the website seems to put PNL and PSD press releases in the political section.

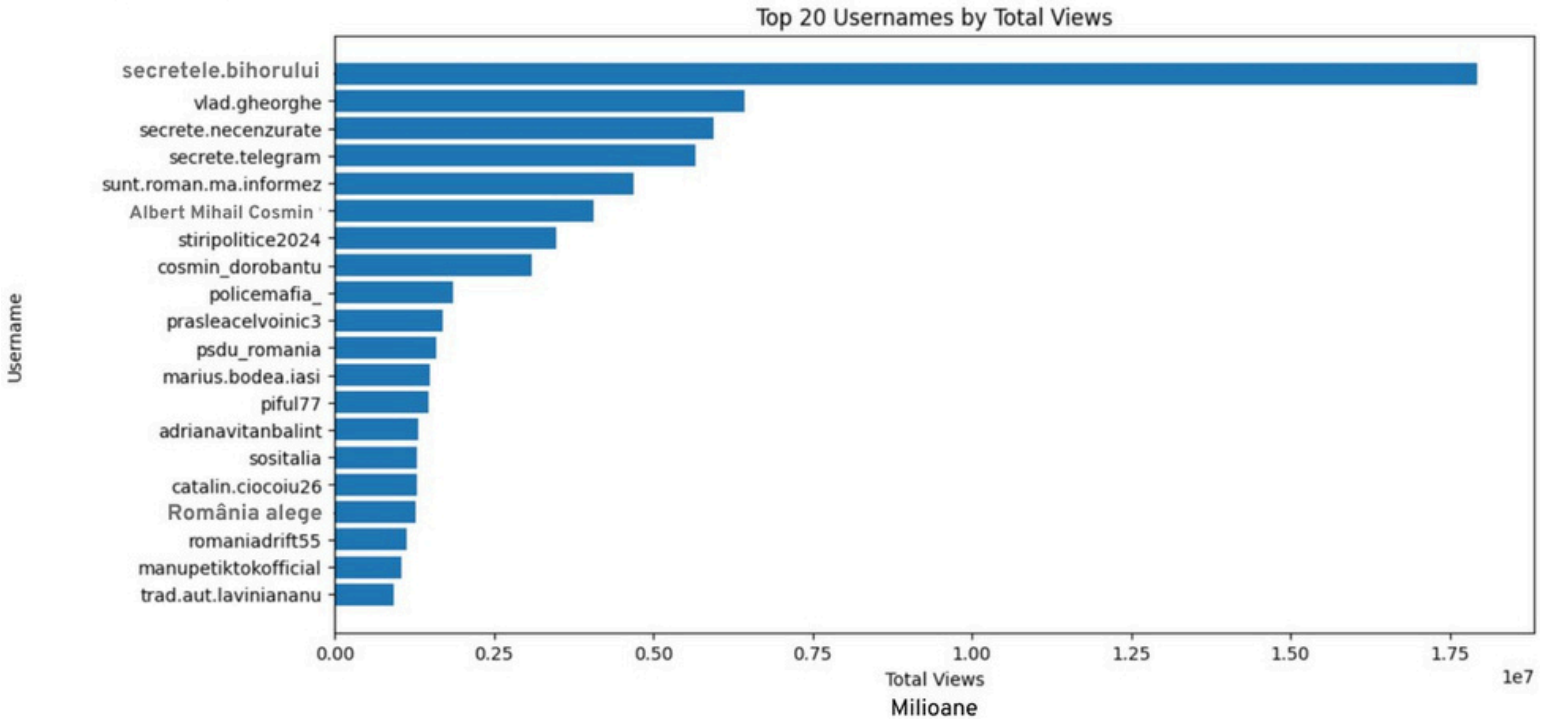


Marcel Ciolacu

Increased visibility, both negative and positive networks

Marcel Ciolacu has a visibility comparable to George Simion in the last 11 months, but the content alternates between positive and negative. Many satirical or USR, AUR and SOS-affiliated accounts are also appearing which counter the pro-Ciolacu ones. #Ciolacu has 300 million views in the last 11 months, 78% of the traffic coming from Romania, the rest from abroad (e.g. Germany 4%, UK 7%, Spain 4%).

Top Conturi care creează conținut despre Marcel Ciolacu pe TikTok
Ianuarie-Noiembrie 2024



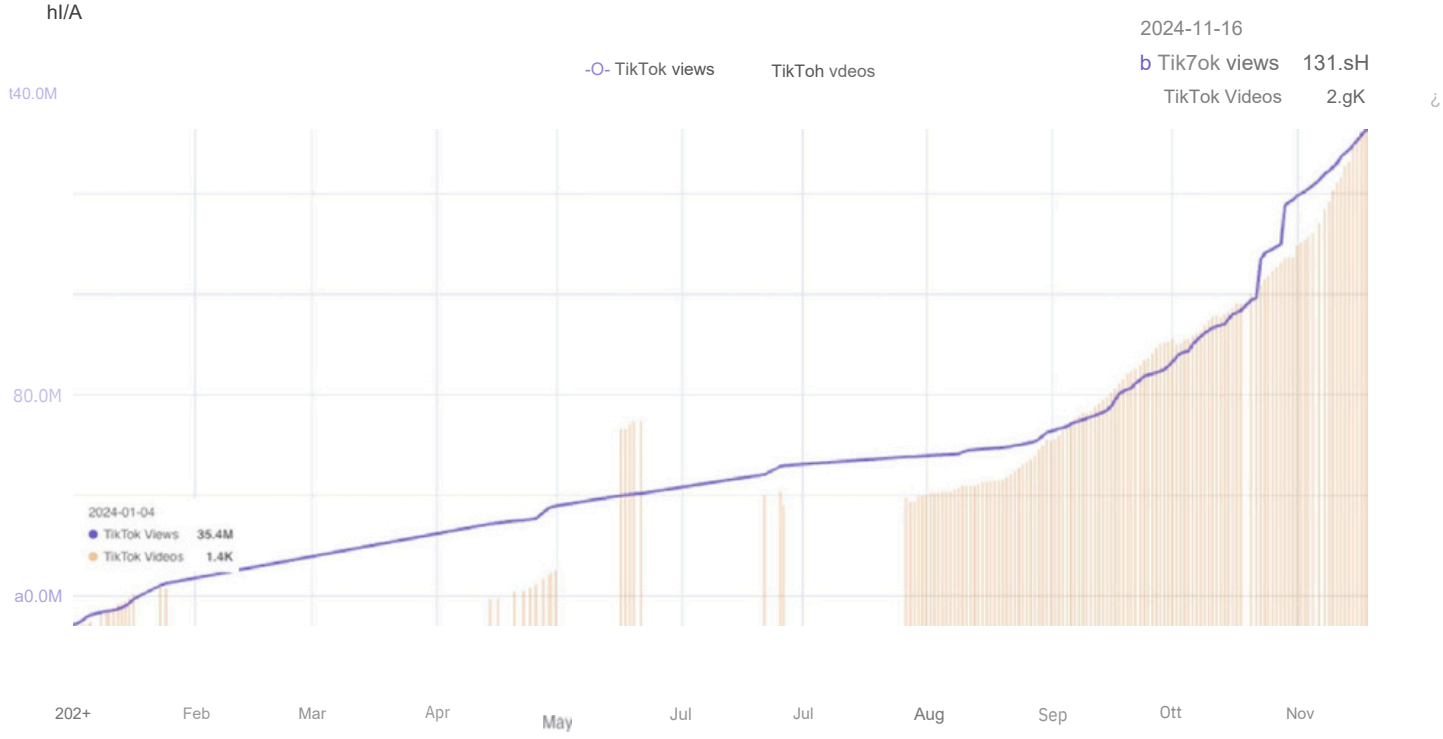
Marcel Ciolacu

username		profile_link
secretelebihorului	17930393	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-7425954215979549728
vlad.gheorghe	6432074	https://www.tiktok.com/@vlad.gheorghe
secrets.uncensored	5957213	https://www.tiktok.com/@secrete.necenzurate
secrets.telegram	5661114	https://www.tiktok.com/@secrete.telegram
sunt.roman.ma.informez	4698032	https://www.tiktok.com/@sunt.roman.ma.informez
Albert Mihail Cosmin	4058372	https://www.tiktok.com/@c0smey
stiripolitics2024	3486040	https://www.tiktok.com/@stiripolitice2024
cosmin_dorobantu	3089063	https://www.tiktok.com/@cosmin_dorobantu
polyceemafia_	1855850	https://www.tiktok.com/@policemafia_
prasleacelvoinic3	1702441	https://www.tiktok.com/@prasleacelvoinic3
psdu_romania	1586672	https://www.tiktok.com/@psdu_romania
marius.bodea.iasi	1488464	https://www.tiktok.com/@marius.bodea.iasi
Mr.Piful	1469404	https://www.tiktok.com/@piful77
adrianavitanbalint	1321300	https://www.tiktok.com/@adrianavitanbalint
sositalia	1298872	https://www.tiktok.com/@sositalia
catalin.ciocoiu26	1296142	https://www.tiktok.com/@catalin.ciocoiu26
Romania chooses	1276509	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-7274861409254818848
romaniadrift55	1136218	https://www.tiktok.com/@romaniadrift55
manupetiktokofficial	1056552	https://www.tiktok.com/@manupetiktokofficial
transl.aut.laviniananu	919673	https://www.tiktok.com/@trad.aut.laviniananu

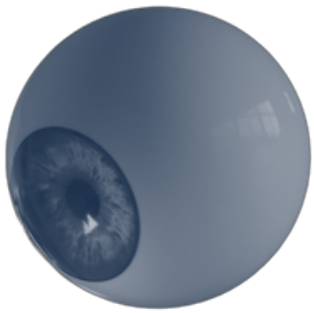
Total Views
132.7M 2.9K 45.6K

#marcelciolacu

Media hI/A



	Your selection	7 days	a morlth	2 months
T'kTok Views	73.1M	5.SM 16Z	34.ZM - i :.'.	49.9kI
T'kTok Videos	1.2K		504	714 - '

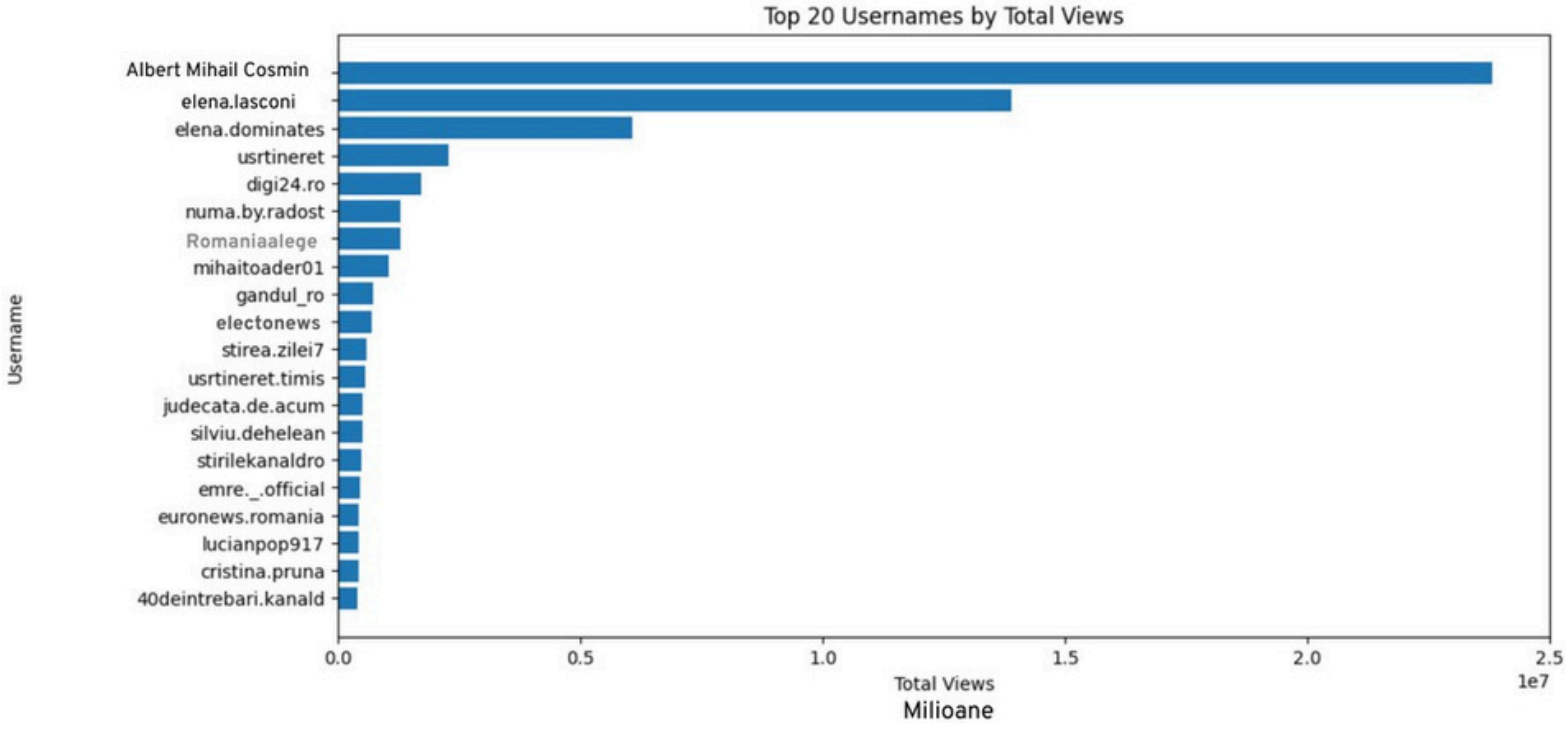


Elena Lasconi

USR influencers and youth accounts

Elena Lasconi ranks third in popularity on TikTok, with a majority of real accounts promoting her and predominantly positive content in the top 20 sources. Here we can find Albert Mihail Cosmin, pro-USR influencer, USR Tineret, USR Tineret Timiș, Cristina Prună, accounts that create content positive.

Top Conturi care creează conținut despre Elena Lasconi pe TikTok
Ianuarie-Noiembrie 2024

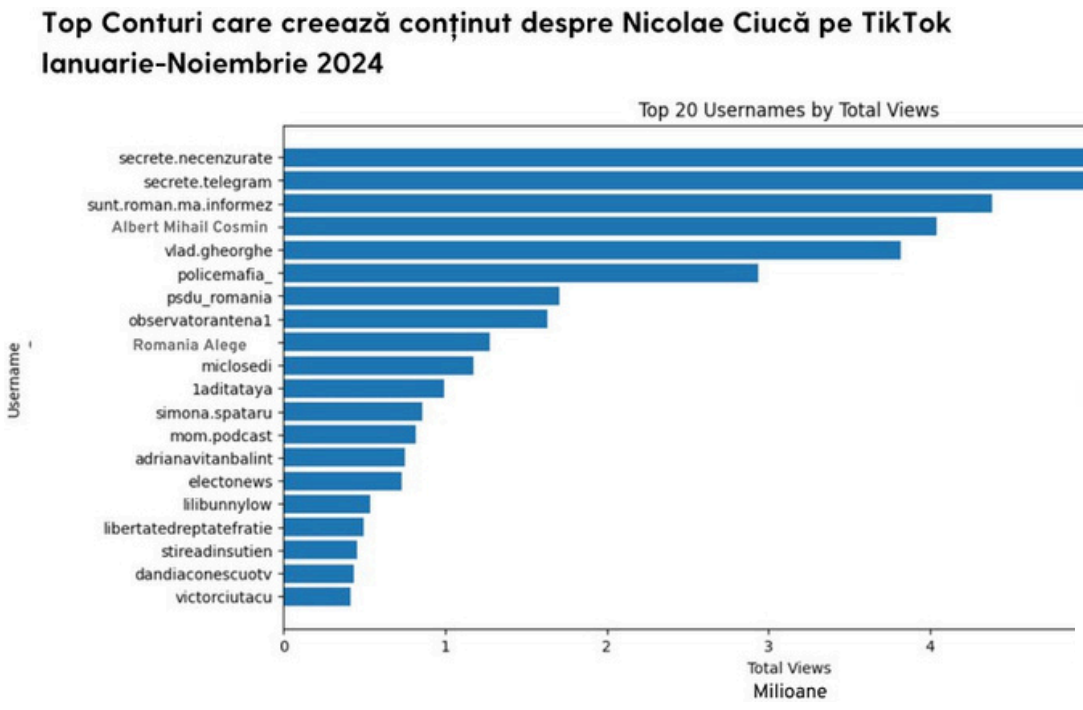


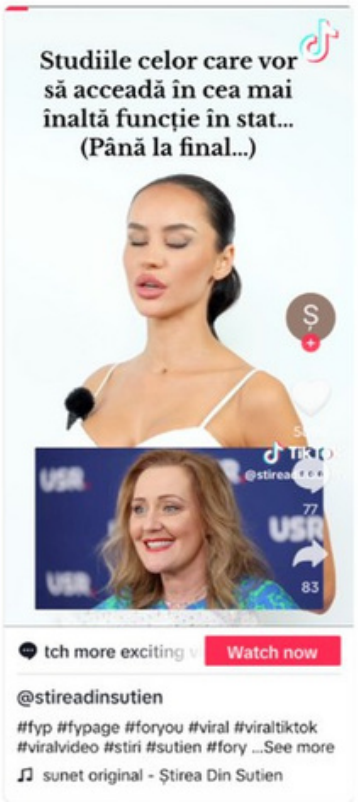
username	views	profile_link
Albert Mihail Cosmin	23809540	https://www.tiktok.com/@c0smey
elena.lasconi	13901349	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-7298623445133378592
elena.dominates	6079497	https://www.tiktok.com/@elena.dominates
usrtineret	2269330	https://www.tiktok.com/@usrtineret
digi24.ro	1723760	https://www.tiktok.com/@digi24.ro
numa.by.radost	1295894	https://www.tiktok.com/@numa.by.radost
Romaniaalege	1276509	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-7274861409254818848
mihaitoader01	1034093	https://www.tiktok.com/@mihaitoader01
gandul_ro	718092	https://www.tiktok.com/@gandul_ro
electonews	706761	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-6793633202164810758
stirea.zilei7	576619	https://www.tiktok.com/@stirea.zilei7
usrtineret.timis	567075	https://www.tiktok.com/@usrtineret.timis
judecata.de.acum	500334	https://www.tiktok.com/@judecata.de.acum
silviu.dehelean	499946	https://www.tiktok.com/@silviu.dehelean
stirilekanaldro	467783	https://www.tiktok.com/@stirilekanaldro
emre._.official	449510	https://www.tiktok.com/@emre._.official
euronews.romania	424488	https://www.tiktok.com/@euronews.romania
lucianpop917	419179	https://www.tiktok.com/@lucianpop917
cristina.pruna	415364	https://www.tiktok.com/@cristina.pruna
40deintrebari.kanald	408916	https://www.tiktok.com/@40deintrebari.kanald

Nicolae Ciucă

Like Marcel Ciolacu's campaign, PNL's transition to promoting on TikTok is still clumsy. On the one hand, it does not control the flow of information as well as Simion does, as the networks are accounts such as @stiridinsutien, a source profiled very well in the title, in which case it's a big question how much effect the obvious pro-Ciucă propaganda can have.

On the other hand, videos promoting #ciucca have reached 110 million views in the last 11 months, so the candidate's visibility on TikTok is being pushed up, both positively and negatively. But mobilization messages remain confusing, without an effective strategy to get out the vote.





Source - Bra News

Nicolae Ciucă

username	views	profile_link
secrets.uncensored	5957213	https://www.tiktok.com/@secrete.necenzurate
secrets.telegram	5661114	https://www.tiktok.com/@secrete.telegram
sunt.roman.ma.informez	4381336	https://www.tiktok.com/@sunt.roman.ma.informez
Albert Mihail Cosmin	4038282	https://www.tiktok.com/@c0smey
vlad.gheorghe	3822363	https://www.tiktok.com/@vlad.gheorghe
polyceemafia_	2940728	https://www.tiktok.com/@policemafia_
psdu_romania	1704457	https://www.tiktok.com/@psdu_romania
observerantena1	1630568	https://www.tiktok.com/@observatorantena1
Romania Choose	1276509	https://www.tiktok.com/@deleted-7274861409254818848
miclosedi	1173461	https://www.tiktok.com/@miclosedi
1aditataya	994987	https://www.tiktok.com/@1aditataya
simona.spataru	857761	https://www.tiktok.com/@simona.spataru
mom.podcast	819801	https://www.tiktok.com/@mom.podcast
adrianavitanbalint	754474	https://www.tiktok.com/@adrianavitanbalint
electonews	735266	https://www.tiktok.com/@electonews
lilibunnylow	540346	https://www.tiktok.com/@lilibunnylow
libertatedreptatefraty	498826	https://www.tiktok.com/@libertatedreptatefratie
stireadinsutien	456344	https://www.tiktok.com/@stireadinsutien
dandiaconescuotv	435975	https://www.tiktok.com/@dandiaconescuotv
victorciutacu	413728	https://www.tiktok.com/@victorciutacu

Conclusions

As far as we can see at the moment the TikTok election campaign is being conducted in a regulatory Wild West, due to the platform's lack of standards for verifying the authenticity or identity of accounts. On the other hand, the winners in exploiting the viralization algorithm seem to be clearly the far-right candidates. If Diana Shoshosa had not been knocked out of the race she would have had a dominant position on TikTok among the candidates, with 500 million views in 2024, the bulk of which had positive.

This impact and the lack of verification of accounts claiming to be news generate inauthentic, manipulative bubbles that are incomparably easier to viralize and much more effective. Elena Lasconi seems to have benefited from a positive presentation thanks to the accounts of USR Youth and USR politicians who have mobilized to create content on TikTok, as well as a network to distribute memes that counter negative content on the sovereignist networks.

Methodology

The TikTok Monitoring Report was produced using Exolyt, a social intelligence and analytics platform designed specifically for TikTok. This report used Exolyt as the main monitoring tool and was focused on highlighting a holistic approach to data collection, analysis and presentation, with a particular emphasis on the use of hashtags as a linking element between narratives and as a distribution strategy for the data content for accounts associated with disinformation. Initially, Exolyt served as the main tool for data collection.

Once a hashtag or account was followed, the platform began to extract up to a year's worth of historical data. The research included monitoring and analyzing a varied number of TikTok accounts, capturing content, engagement metrics and follower demographics. This process provided a picture of overview of the social presence and performance of each account, which formed the basis of the subsequent analysis.

Another important aspect of our methodology was to analyze correlations and networks. By examining the relationships between hashtags, accounts and mentions, we were able to identify significant connections. From For example, analyzing the frequency with which certain hashtags appeared together helped us to identify clusters of related content and trends. We also tracked interactions between TikTok accounts, focusing on who mentions or recommends most often. This analysis revealed key influencers and content creators who played a significant role in shaping conversations.

office@expertforum.
ro (+40) 21 211 7400
str. Semilunei 7, apt 1, București, Sector 2
Postal code 020797

Authors: Voinea Mădălina-Elena Voinea, Expert Forum
analyst Sorin Ionita, Expert Forum