

Preliminary Report on Romanian Presidential Elections

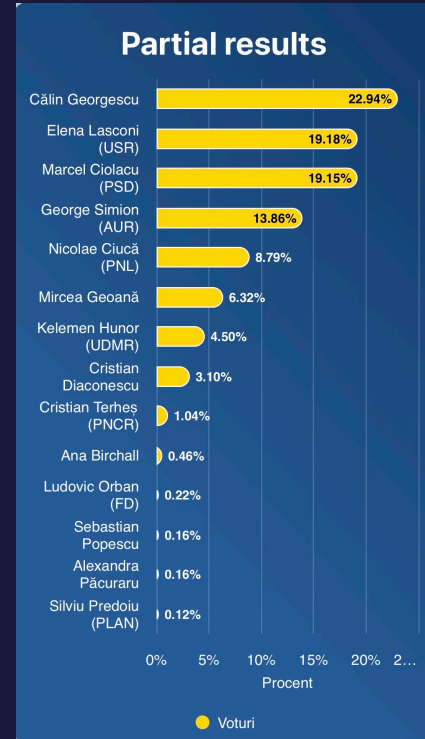
November 2024



Romanian Official Results for the First Round of the Presidential Elections



Source: Permanent Electoral Authority



Key Event – Călin Georgescu's Unexpected Rise

- **Winner of the first round of the presidential elections as an independent candidate.**
- **Received over 2 million votes, winning in 13 counties (G4Media).**
- **Known for a rhetoric aligned with Russia, highlighted by Kremlin's Ria Novosti (HotNews).**



Călin Georgescu's Background

- **First noticed in 2017 on pro-Russian disinformation sites (e.g., gandeste.org).**
- **Gained attention in 2020 as AUR's proposed Prime Minister (Misreport #43).**

Viral Controversies:

- **Promoted anti-vaccine and anti-science messages during the pandemic.**
- **Filmed a misleading video in Austria portraying himself as nationalist and anti-globalist.**



Călin Georgescu: Polarizing Narratives

Legionnaire and Antisemitic Rhetoric:

- **In 2022, attempted to rehabilitate controversial figures from Romanian history like Ion Antonescu.**
- **Criticized by historians for using history as propaganda (Europa Liberă).**

Prosecutorial Inaction:

- **Despite rising antisemitism and legionnaire propaganda, prosecutors failed to act in 2023-2024 (Parchetul General).**

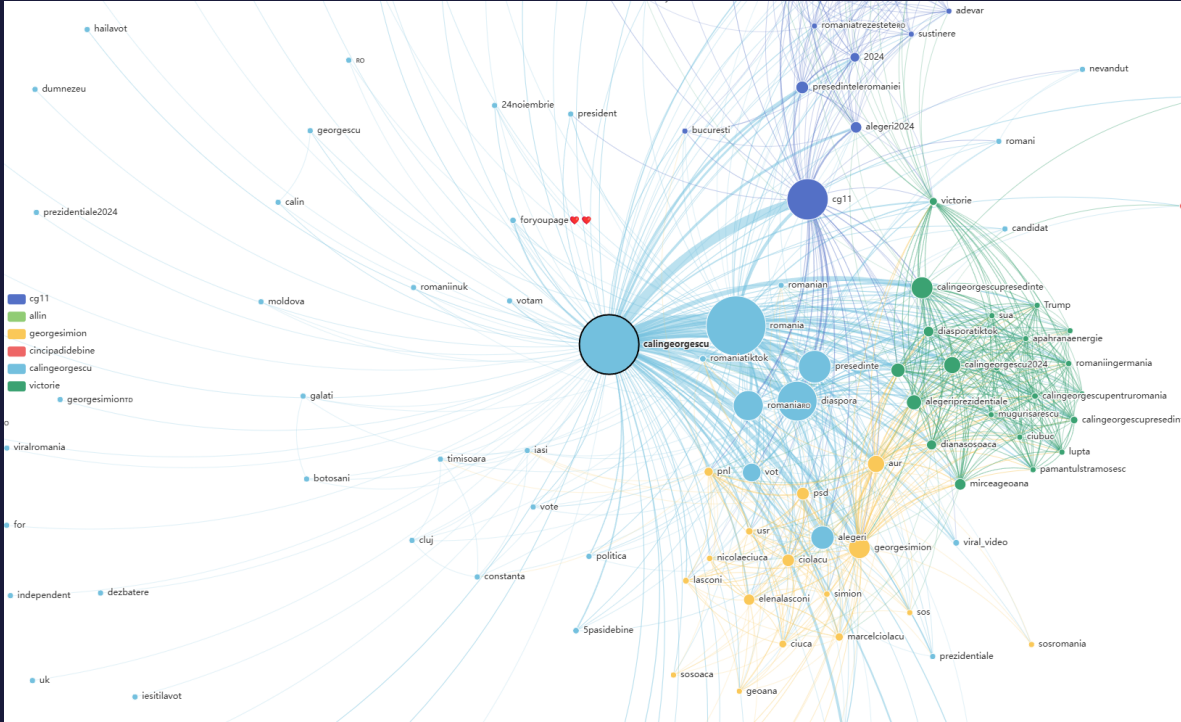


Călin Georgescu: Viralization on TikTok (quasi-absence from other VLOPs)

- **Călin Georgescu did not publicly disclose the budget for his presidential campaign, nor did he reveal the source of funding (no info on advertising budgets).**
- **Georgescu's TikTok views surged dramatically during the presidential campaign.**
- **Different mechanisms of viralization on TikTok vs. other platforms used to amplify his message.**
- **The rise of candidates like C. Georgescu highlights gaps in media monitoring and fact-checking.**



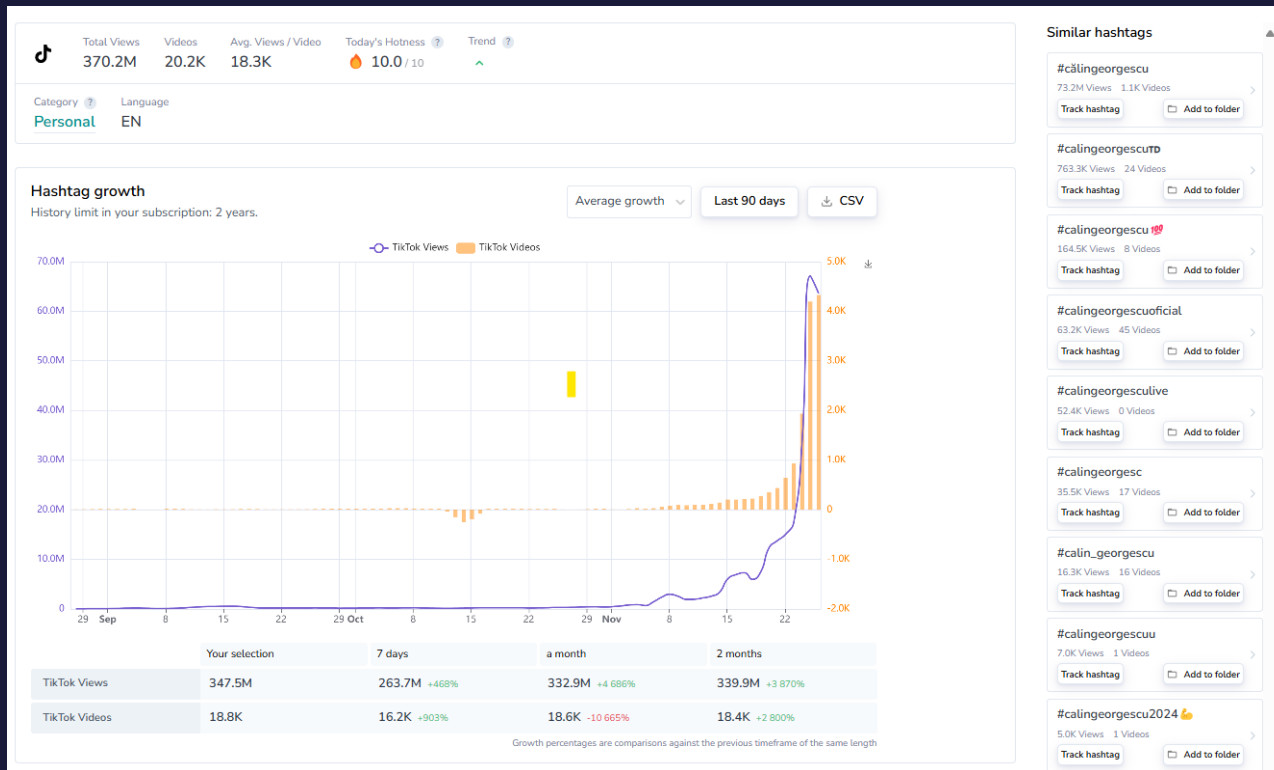
Călin Georgescu: Viralization on TikTok



Source: Exolyt



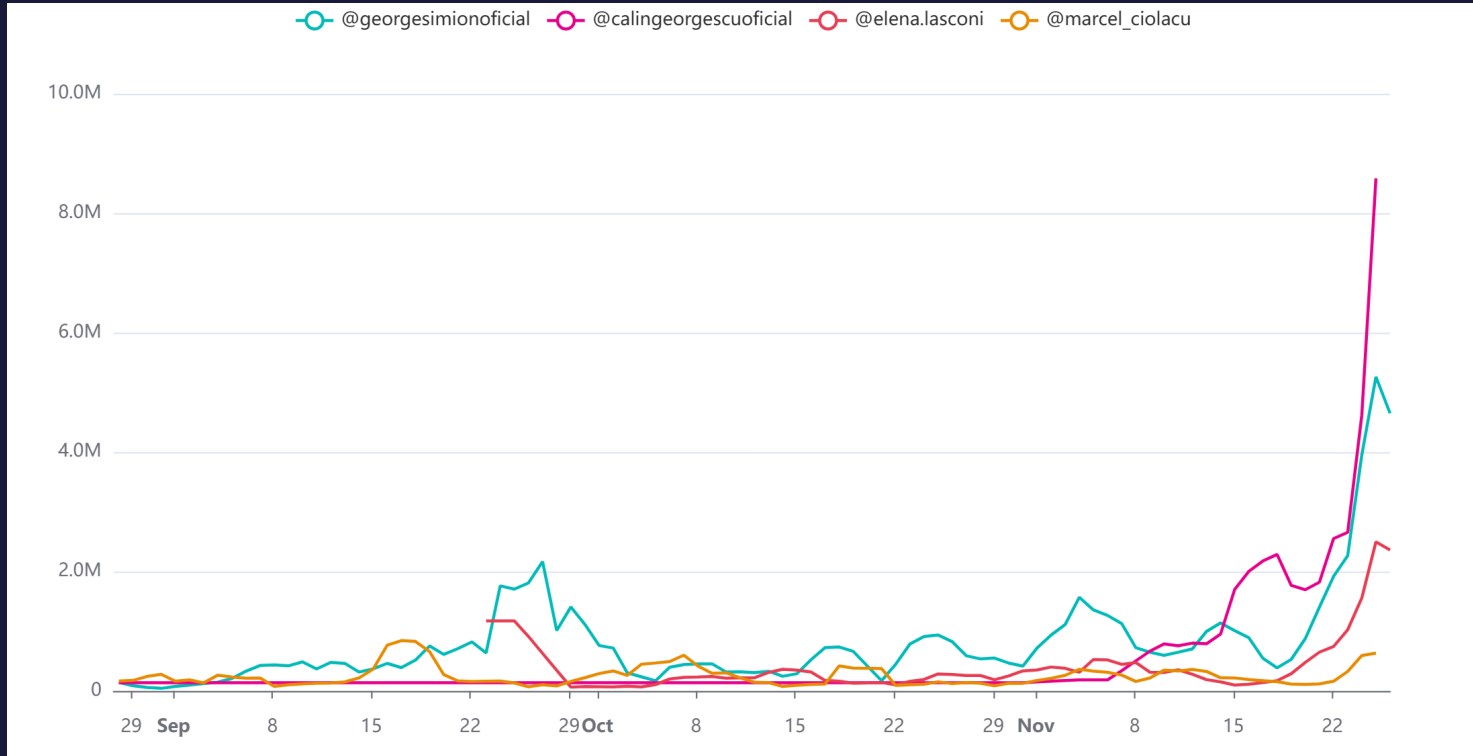
Hashtag Growth



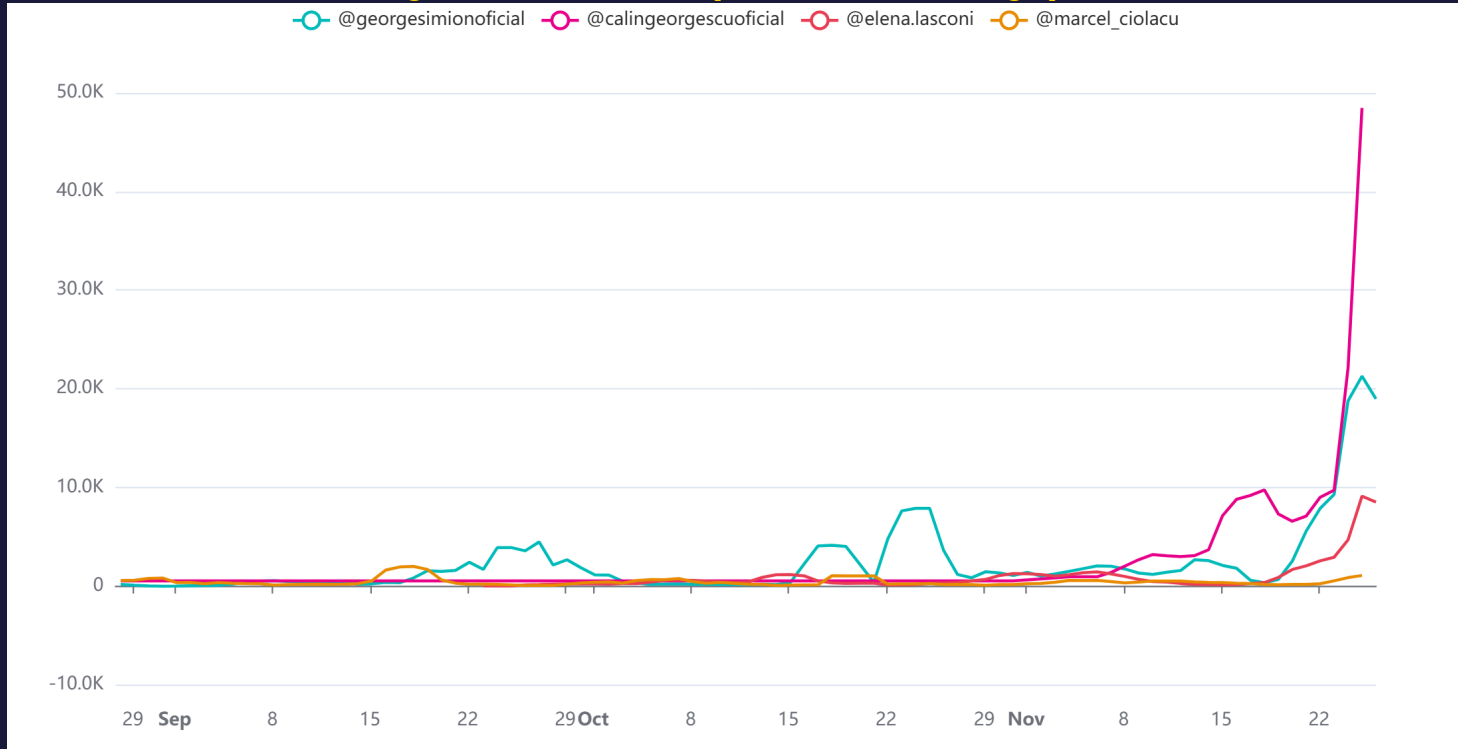
Source: Exolyt



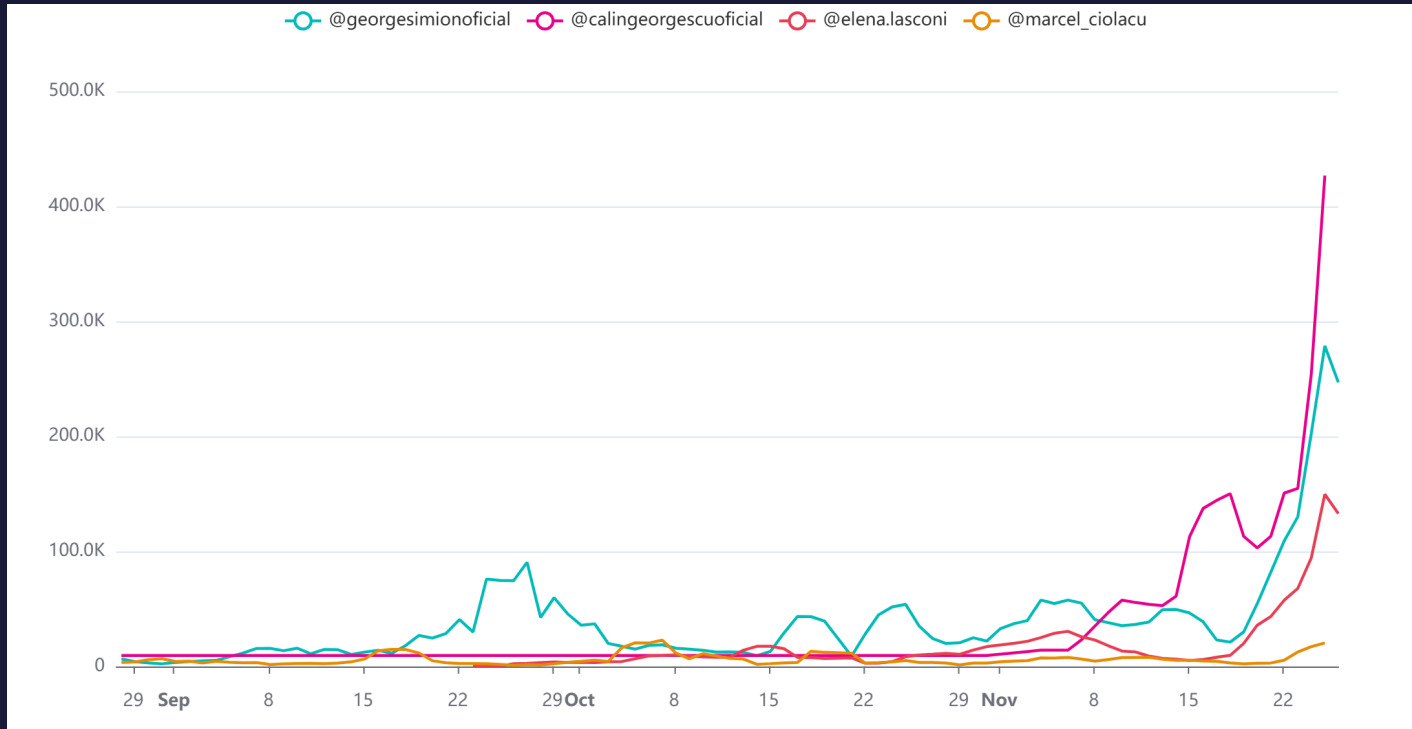
Growth last 90 days_views (Source: Exolyt)



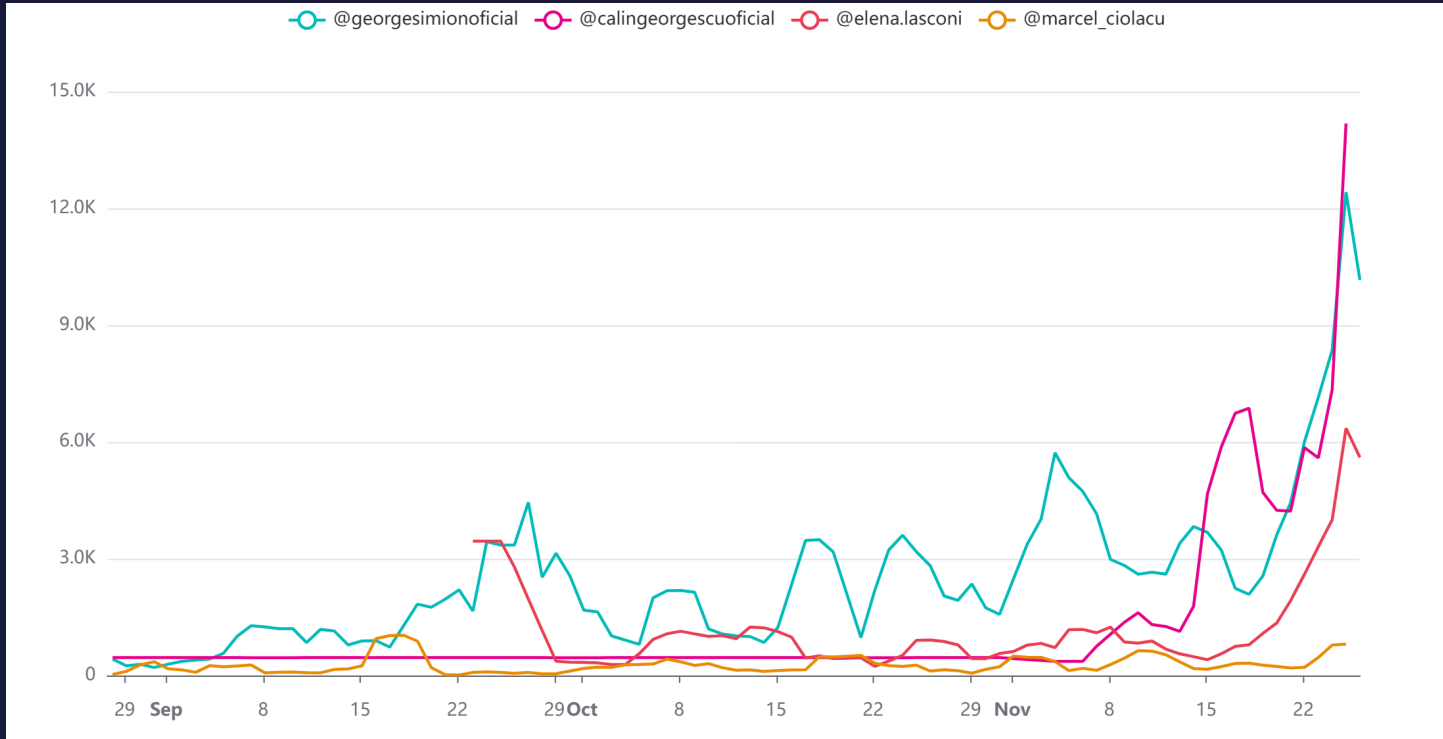
Growth last 90 days_followers (Source: Exolyt)



Growth last 90 days_likes (Source: Exolyt)



Growth last 90 days_comments(Source: Exolyt)





GEORGE SIMION

Luptăm până la capăt, vot suveranist pe 1 și 8 decembrie! Vrem PACE 🙌

Region RO Romania
Account type **Brand**
Exo Score **8.5** / 10

Totals

Followers **673.7K**
Views **263.3M**
Likes **11.1M**
Comments **652.0K**
Shares **488.5K**
Engagement **4.7%**

Average per video

Views **257.9K**
Likes **10.9K**
Comments **639**
Shares **478**



calingeorgescu

Calin Georgescu, poziția 11 pe buletinul de vot 24 noiembrie 2024

Region RO Romania
Account type **Brand**
Exo Score **6.8** / 10

Totals

Followers **348.2K**
Views **72.1M**
Likes **4.2M**
Comments **142.2K**
Shares **473.8K**
Engagement **6.7%**

Average per video

Views **95.8K**
Likes **5.4K**
Comments **189**
Shares **629**



Elena Lasconi

Înainte de toate, om și candidat pentru funcția de Președinte al României.

Region RO Romania
Account type **Normal**
Exo Score **8.3** / 10

Totals

Followers **109.6K**
Views **34.6M**
Likes **1.7M**
Comments **104.7K**
Shares **75.5K**
Engagement **5.5%**

Average per video

Views **160.7K**
Likes **8.0K**
Comments **487**
Shares **351**



marcel_ciolacu

Marcel Ciolacu Prim-ministru al României Președinte PSD

Region RO Romania
Account type **Normal**
Exo Score **8.0** / 10

Totals

Followers **43.0K**
Views **24.8M**
Likes **611.3K**
Comments **27.5K**
Shares **104.9K**
Engagement **3.0%**

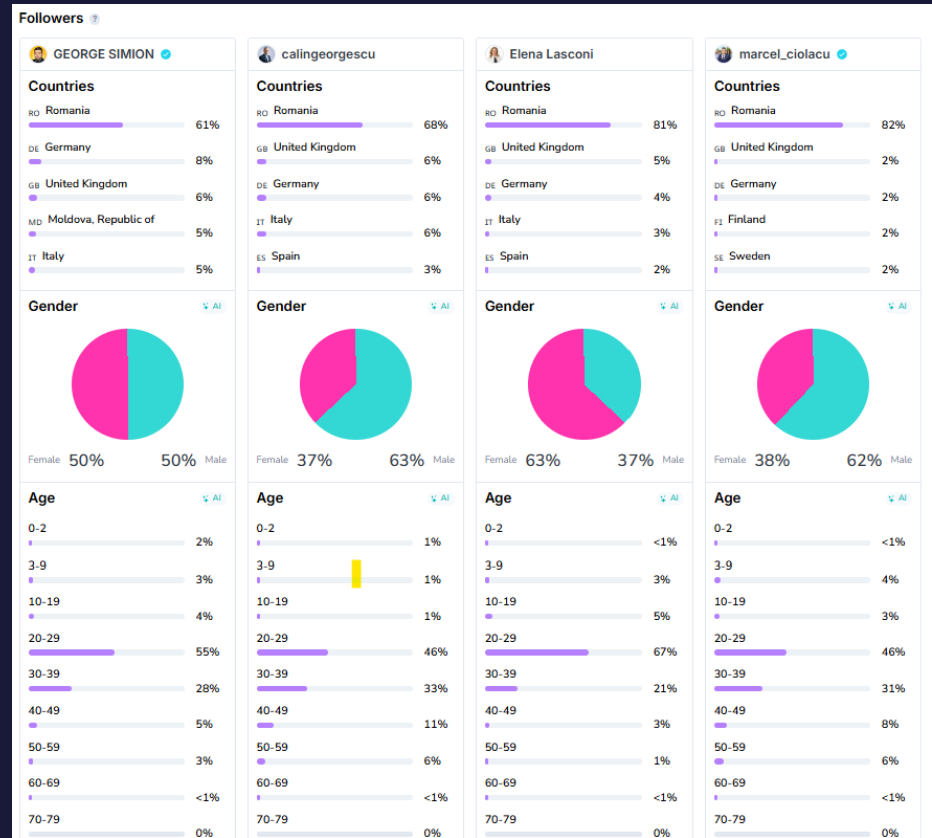
Average per video

Views **125.7K**
Likes **3.1K**
Comments **139**
Shares **532**

Source: Exolyt



Demographics on TikTok



Source: Exolyt



TikTok Specificities

- **Both anti-establishment candidates, despite their ideological differences, gained significant traction on TikTok.**
- **They reached a different audience than through mainstream media channels.**
- **Călin Georgescu and Elena Lasconi effectively capitalized on the TikTok's ability to engage persuadable audiences who avoid mainstream media (mainly for credibility reasons).**



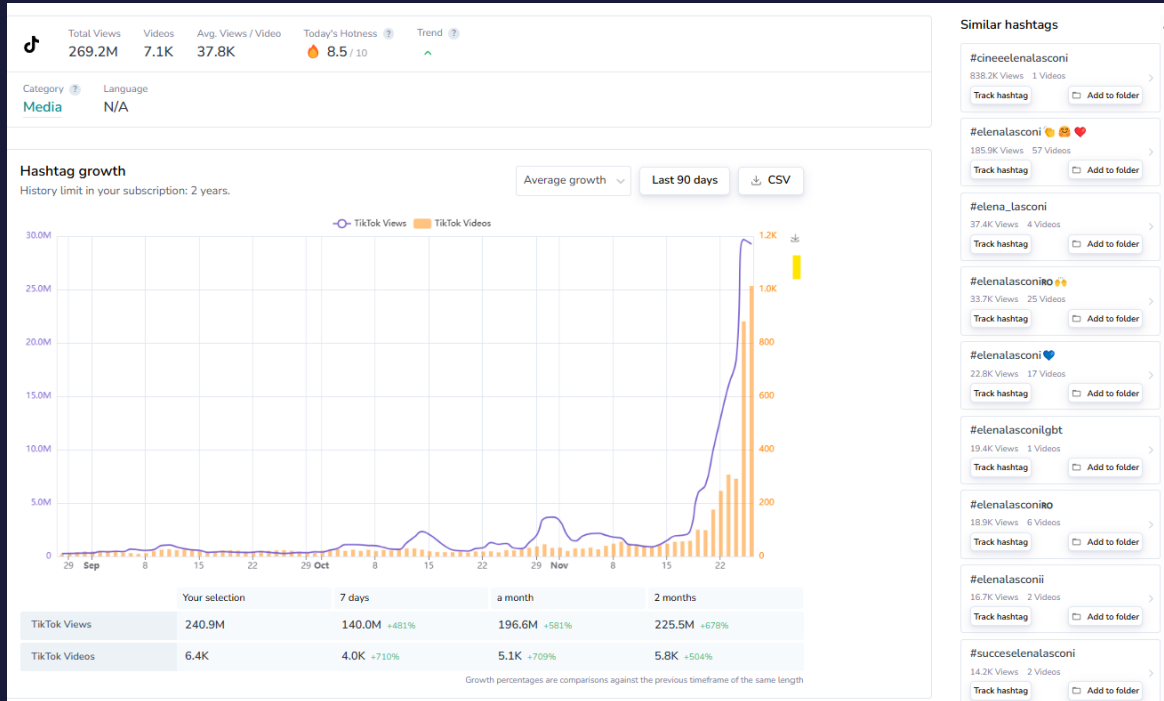
Elena Lasconi_Account Growth



Source: Exolyt



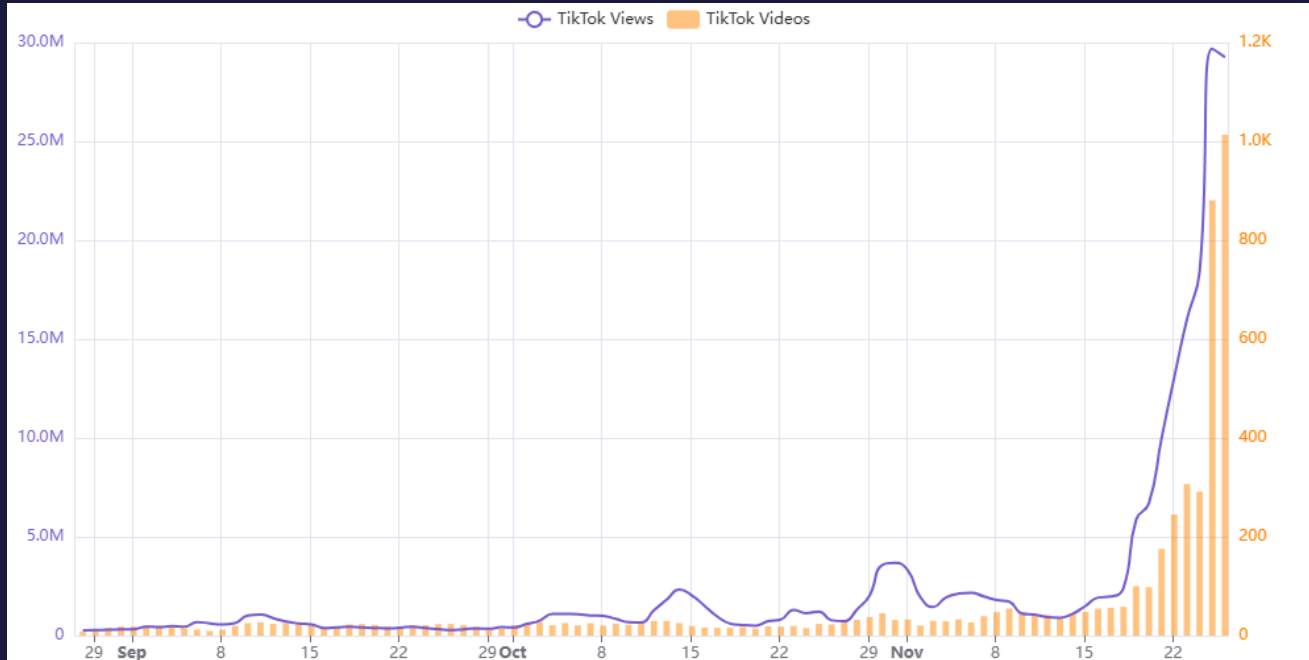
Elena Lasconi_Hashtag Growth



Source: Exolyt



Elena Lasconi_Last 90 days TikTok Growth



Source: Exolyt

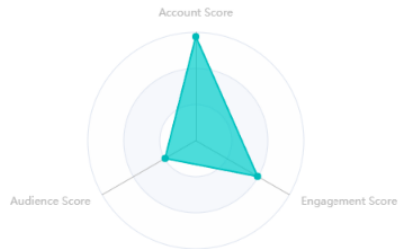


Scores for the two main candidates: Georgescu vs. Lasconi

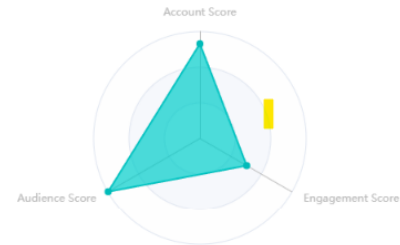
Calingeorgescuofficial Exo Score

ExoScore is a comparative metric that quickly summarises a given user's key characteristics relative to other users on the social media platform. It can be used to summarise account information quickly and compare different accounts at a glance.

ExoScore is composed of account, audience and engagement scores. Each score captures a different aspect of the user's account based on the last months data.



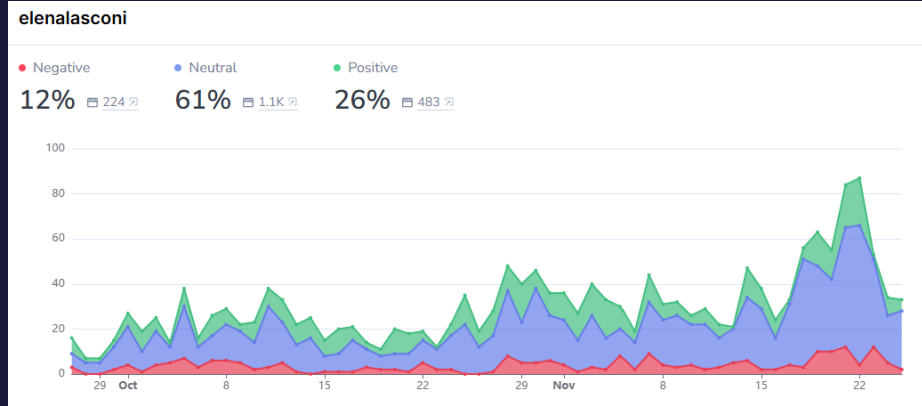
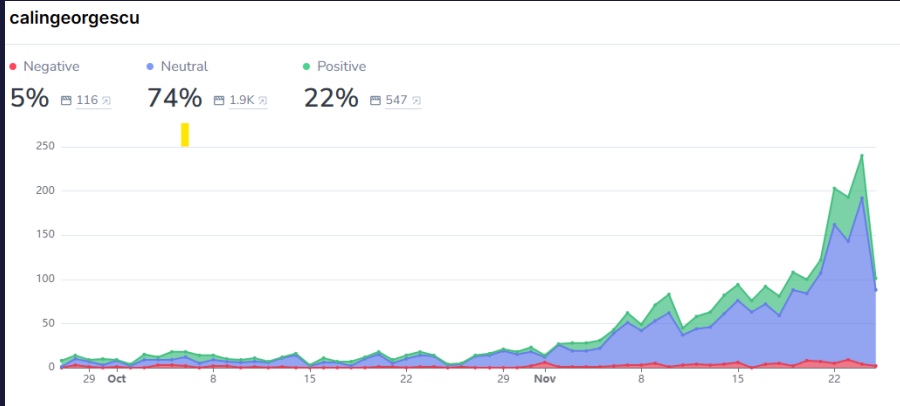
Account	9.6
Frequency	9.6
Consistency	10.0
Volume	9.2
Audience	3.3
Size	9.0
Growth	0.0
Future	0.0
Engagement	6.6
Comments	5.8
Likes	4.4
Shares	7.9



Account	8.9
Frequency	9.5
Consistency	10.0
Volume	7.1
Audience	10.0
Size	8.8
Growth	9.9
Future	8.7
Engagement	5.1
Comments	6.8
Likes	2.8
Shares	4.4

Source: Exolyt

Sentiment Analysis_TikTok: Georgescu vs. Lasconi

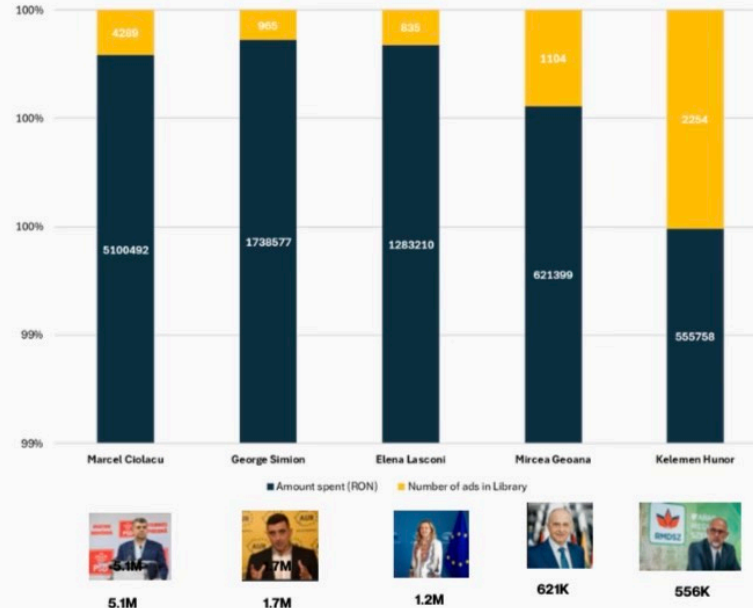


Source: Exolyt



Advertising budgets on Meta: Main candidates

Marcel Ciolacu (PSD), stands out with the highest expenditure, approximately **5.1M RON**, and 4,289 ads. This reflects a significant focus on visibility and engagement across digital platforms. **George Simion (AUR)**, spends considerably less at **1.7M RON** with 965 ads, suggesting a more focused or possibly niche targeting strategy compared to Ciolacu. **Elena Lasconi**, associated with USR, allocates **1.2M RON** and produces 835 ads, indicating a similar restrained strategy but with a slightly lower investment than Simion. **Mircea Geoană**, known for his diplomatic background, spends **621K RON** on 1,104 ads, prioritizing a modest financial investment with a balanced approach in terms of ad quantity. Finally, **Kelemen Hunor**, representing **UDMR** spends the least at **556K RON** but publishes 2,254 ads, showcasing a strategy that emphasizes quantity and cost-effectiveness rather than heavy spending. The comparison highlights stark differences in campaign strategies. Ciolacu's high spending and significant number of ads reflect his party's leading political role, whereas Hunor's low-budget, high-ad volume strategy likely targets a niche audience.



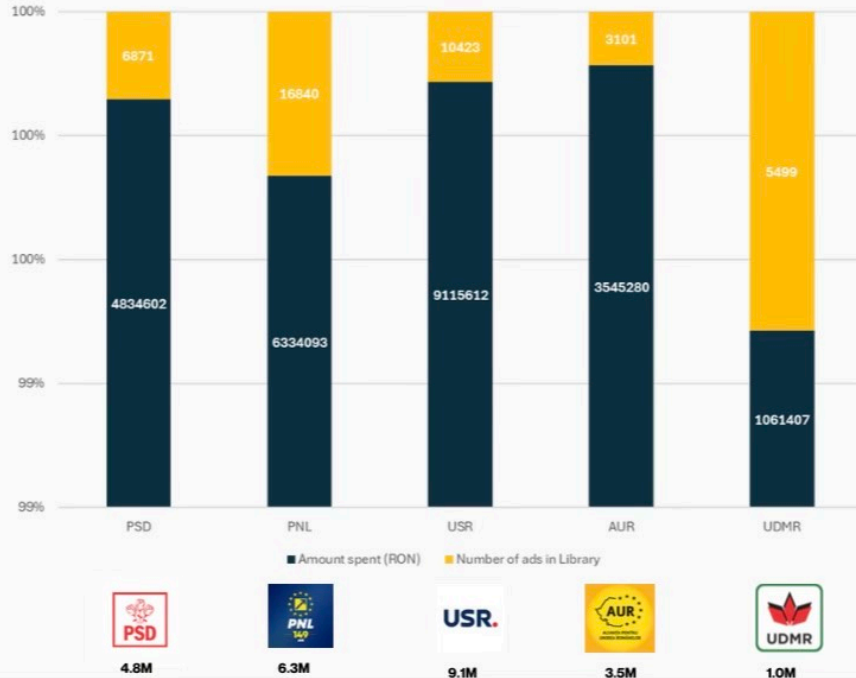
Source: Data aggregated from Meta Ads'Library

Advertising budgets on Meta: Main parties

USR (Save Romania Union) leads in terms of advertising expenditure, with approximately **9.1 million RON**, publishing 10,423 ads, indicating a significant investment in online campaigns. **PNL (National Liberal Party)** follows with **6.3 million RON** and 16,840 ads, showcasing a focus on quantity over cost per ad.

PSD (Social Democratic Party), with a spend of **4.8 million RON** and 6,871 ads, appears more reserved in both spending and the number of ads, indicating a potentially more targeted or cost-efficient approach. **AUR (Alliance for the Union of Romanians)** has a modest spend of **3.5 million RON** with only 3,101 ads, reflecting a likely niche or highly focused strategy.

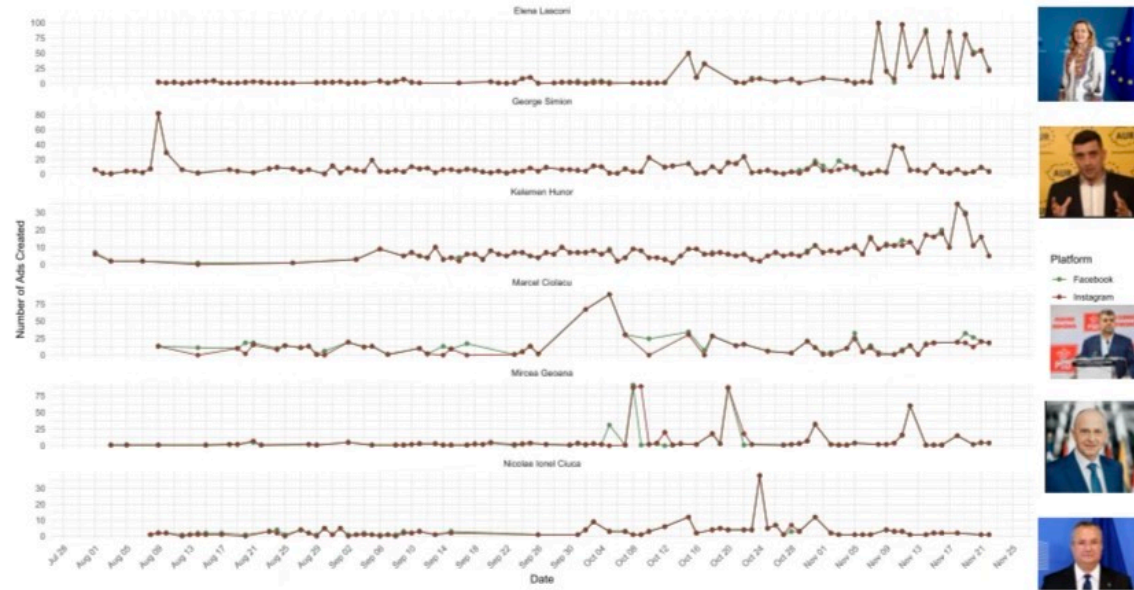
Finally, **UDMR (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania)** has the lowest expenditure of **1.0 million RON** with 5,499 ads, signaling a limited reach, possibly targeting a specific demographic.



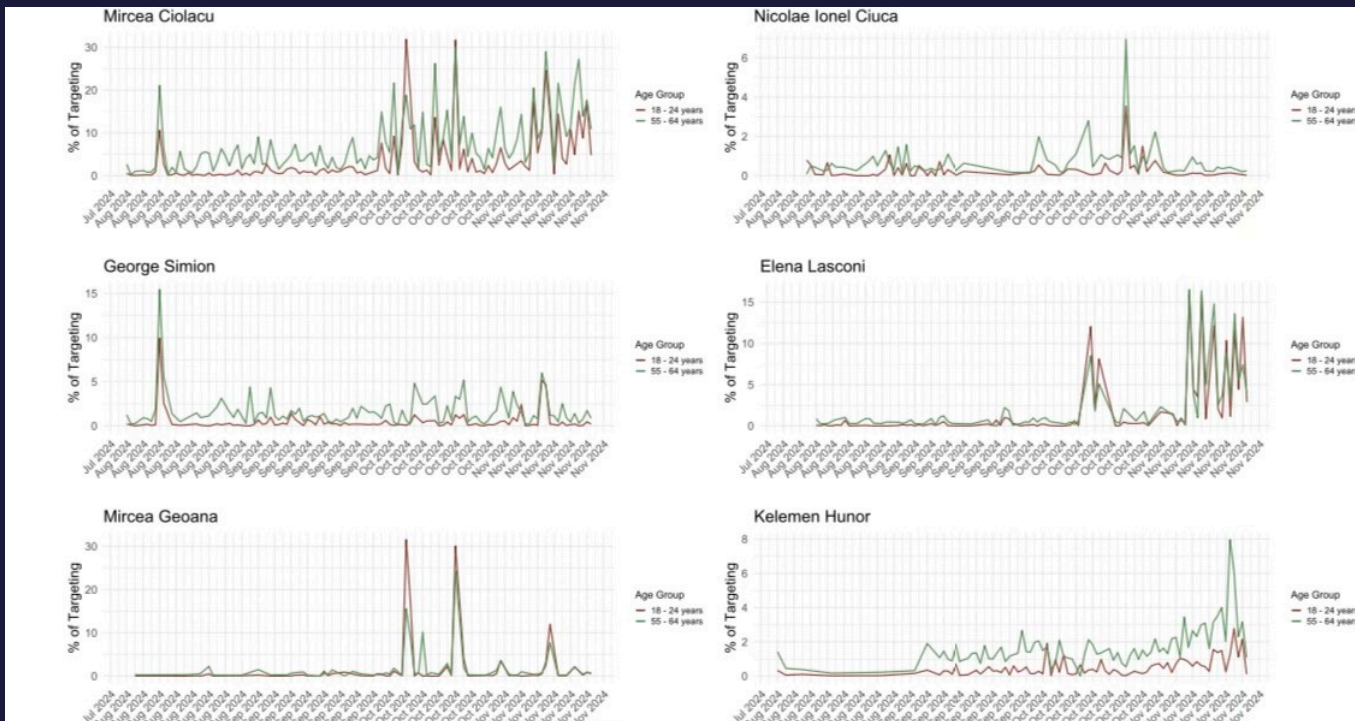
Source: Data aggregated from Meta Ads'Library

Advertising creation on Meta: Main candidates

- Elena Lasconi (USR) stands out with a significant increase in ad creation on both Facebook and Instagram in late October and early November. Her campaign heavily utilizes both platforms, reflecting a synchronized strategy to maximize outreach during critical campaign moments.
- George Simion (AUR) shows an early spike in August, likely marking a key campaign launch. His activity remains steady afterward, with balanced use of Facebook and Instagram to maintain engagement.
- Kelemen Hunor (UDMR) exhibits consistent low activity across both platforms. His campaign maintains modest engagement, focusing on targeted messaging rather than high-volume advertising.
- Marcel Ciolacu (PSD) adopts a balanced approach, with a gradual rise in activity leading to peaks in October and November. Both Facebook and Instagram are utilized, with slight variations in volume, indicating a diverse audience strategy.
- Mircea Geoană (Independent) displays irregular activity, with sporadic peaks and a more reactive strategy. His use of Instagram slightly outweighs Facebook, suggesting an emphasis on younger audiences.
- Nicolae Ionel Ciucă (PNL) shows minimal activity across both platforms, with occasional bursts in late October. This subdued strategy suggests reliance on other campaign methods or limited resources.



Advertising targeting on Meta by Age Groups: Main candidates



Wrap-up:

- **Social media has become the preferred source of political information for Romanians.**
- **Mainstream candidates have focused their investments on Meta ads, which were once considered the gold standard for effectively targeting voters.**
- **However, TikTok is emerging as a key platform for disenfranchised voters who feel unrepresented by both mainstream politicians and mainstream media.**



Wrap-up:

- **On TikTok, the viralization process operates with unique mechanics, and the amplification of echo chambers is significantly stronger than on other social media platforms.**
- **This demands special attention from media practitioners, researchers, national authorities, and regulators.**
- **TikTok remains largely an uncharted territory in terms of political ad transparency.**



Information on Political Ads in Romania (TikTok Transparency Report)

- **TikTok reported it has removed 88 advertisements in Romania for breaching its political content policies.**
- **The removed political ads accounted for 3,155,352 impressions on the platform.**
- **The estimated revenue loss due to these ad removals was €4,773.49 (which is modicum compared to advertising revenues).**
- **TikTok officially enforces a ban on all forms of political ads and branded content promoting political entities or causes, however, in reality, accounts linked to politicians and political parties are not restricted from using the platform's monetization features.**



Conclusions:

- **Greater attention to social media dynamics and misinformation is crucial to counter manipulation.**
- **Understanding viralization mechanisms is key to addressing disinformation effectively.**
- **TikTok campaigns shape Romanian political discourse, offering both opportunities for non-mainstream candidates and risks (for democratic processes).**
- **Right-wing and anti-establishment candidates are particularly successful in leveraging TikTok's algorithm.**



Lessons to be Learned:

- **A pivotal example of how misinformation, unchecked narratives, and social media can reshape political landscapes.**
- **Fake or untraceable accounts contribute to disinformation.**
- **Viral campaigns distort authentic public debates.**
- **TikTok's unregulated space favors candidates exploiting algorithmic visibility.**



Need for Transparency:

- **A call for enhanced vigilance and transparency in monitoring political discourse.**
- **Content promoting candidates often lacks clear sponsorship disclosure.**
- **Without stronger regulation, TikTok remains the vehicle of choice for extremist candidates.**
- **Enhanced transparency and content labeling on all VLOPs are essential to ensure fairness.**



Methodology and Data Collection:

- **Meta Ads' Library** was used to collect & aggregate data on advertising budgets, demographics and targeting in Romania.
- **Exolyt** was used to monitor hashtags, content trends, and influencer activities.
- **Metrics** included engagement, follower demographics, and video performance.

Network Analysis on Exolyt:

- **Identified connections** between hashtags, accounts, and shared narratives.

