COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

How WatchDog.MD researches influence and prepares the public for it

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WE WATCH THE GOVERNMENT FOR YOU

An independent Moldovan think tank covering public policy and democratic governance.

01

RESEARCH

Elections, public spending, security, reforms and disinformation.

02

PREBUNKING

Anticipate misleading claims and explain the underlying facts.

03

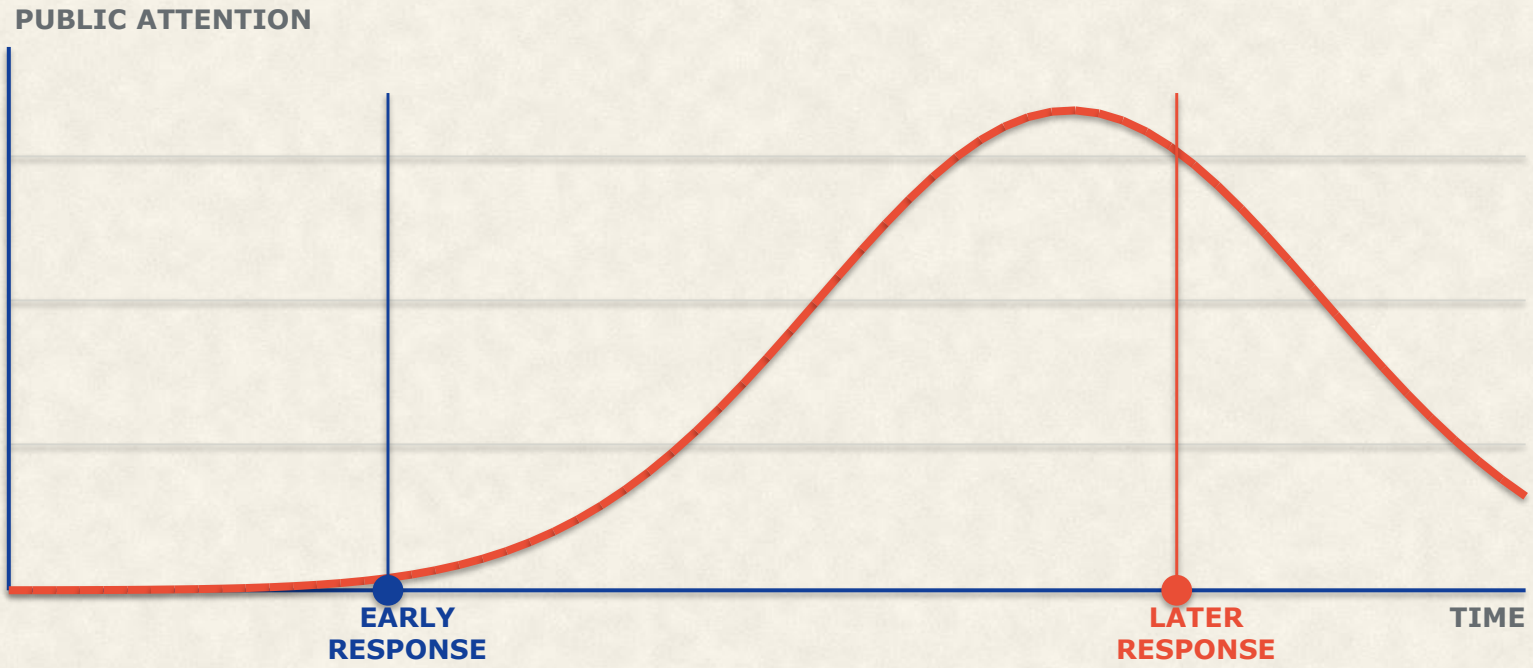
ACCOUNTABILITY

Publish investigations and bring documented findings to the public and institutions.

Based in Chișinău. Research on disinformation since 2020.

WHY WE PREBUNK

Before a misleading claim circulates widely, explain the facts and how the manipulation works.



BEFORE IT SPREADS

For example, explain how an unrelated military image can be passed off as evidence of a new threat.

Illustration of timing; the curve does not measure the effect of prebunking.

HOW WE PREPARE A PREBUNK

Our researchers follow public claims and work with colleagues who explain them to the public.

01

MONITOR

Follow recurring claims in news and social media.

02

CHECK

Read the documents and establish what actually happened.

03

EXPLAIN

Prepare a timely explanation in Romanian or Russian.

04

REVISIT

Follow later versions and correct our explanation if needed.

The subject determines the format: a report, a video or a media appearance.

BEFORE THE 2024 EU REFERENDUM

An October 2024 election-monitoring bulletin drew on WatchDog research into recurring claims.

01

WAR AND NEUTRALITY

Explain the security implications of EU membership and Moldova's neutrality.

02

HOUSEHOLD COSTS

Check claims about energy, exports and EU market rules.

03

IDENTITY AND RIGHTS

Check what the law actually says about cultural and individual rights.

Knowing which claims keep returning helps us prepare for the next campaign.

MONITORING THE 2025 ELECTION

The European Endowment for Democracy documented WatchDog's role in election early warning.

10,000

Telegram posts recorded per day before the election

UP TO 80%

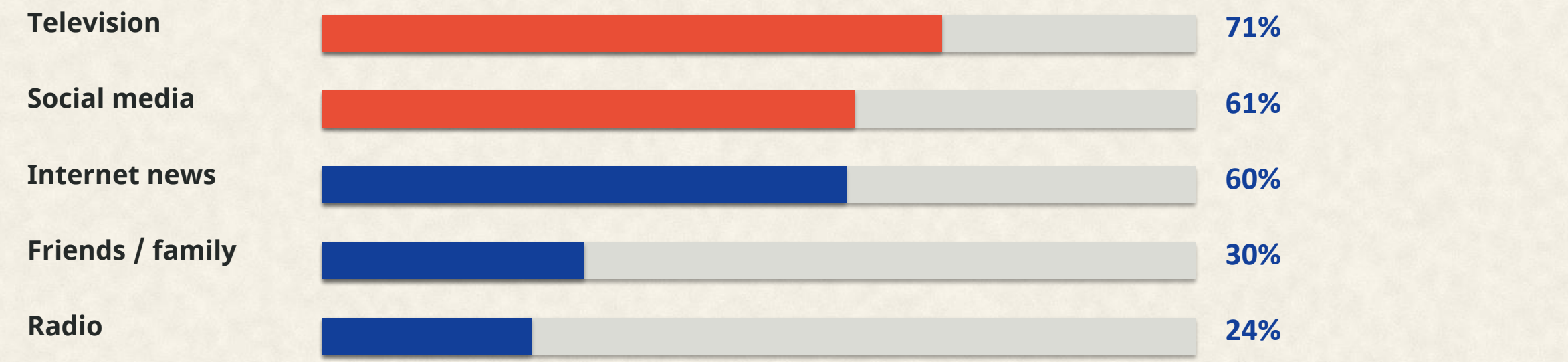


of monitored posts contained disinformation, the assessment reported.

Figures describe the monitored material, not all Telegram activity.

WHERE MOLDOVANS GET POLITICAL NEWS

Respondents to a 2024 IRI survey reported using several sources of political information.



We publish research, explain it on television and make Romanian- and Russian-language videos.

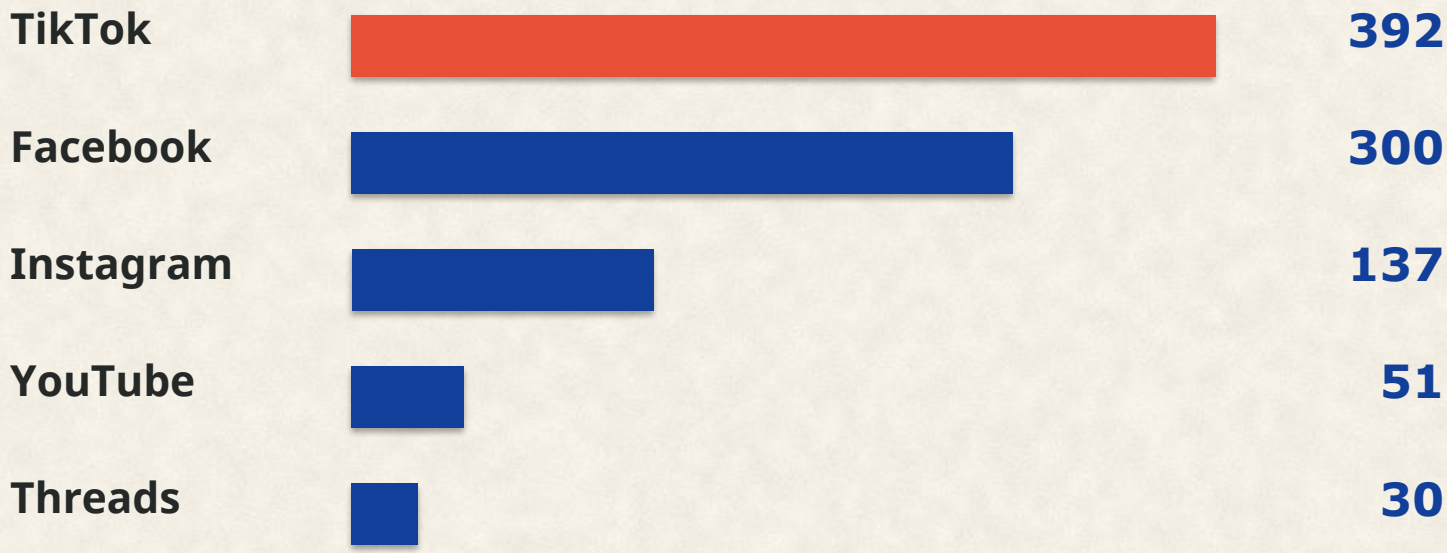
910 ACCOUNTS. FIVE PLATFORMS.

In August 2025, we mapped a Russian disinformation network across five social platforms.

910

accounts and pages found

Count within the published investigation.



TikTok and Facebook together accounted for 692 of the 910 records.

INVESTIGATING A FACEBOOK NETWORK

In June 2025, we examined anonymous pages associated with Ilan Shor and a wider network.

146

Anonymous pages linked to Shor

315

Additional pages on standby

2,167+

Pages in the wider network

EVIDENCE WE EXAMINED

Page names, reused images and advertising records

Similar names alone cannot establish who controls a page.

WHERE I USE AI IN RESEARCH

I use coding assistants and language models alongside conventional research tools.

01

CODE

Write and debug scripts for collecting public posts.

02

SORT

Group similar messages and translate extracts.

03

COMPARE

Look for shared sources and unusual changes in activity.

04

CHECK

Open the original posts and verify the results.

The software counts the records. I assess the evidence.

VIBE CODING: MY OWN MONITOR

I describe the task in plain English and develop the software with a coding assistant.

EXAMPLE OF A RESEARCH REQUEST

“Collect public Telegram posts and their dates. Keep links to the originals, count keyword mentions by day and export the results.”

THE RESULT

A monitoring application
A searchable archive
Charts of daily activity
Links back to the posts

I compare the output with original posts and fix errors in the code.

MY TELEGRAM MONITOR

I built a tool to collect and search public posts rather than read every channel by hand.

WHAT THE APPLICATION DOES

SEARCH	public sources and keywords
SAVE	post link / date / views
DISPLAY	daily chart and data export
CHECK	original posts and timestamps

WHAT CHANGED FOR ME

I can examine several hundred sources and go straight to the posts relevant to my research.

The chart counts posts. It does not tell us what people believe.

39.3 MILLION DISPLAYED VIEWS

A public allegation prompted me to study four months of Telegram activity.

165
Channels monitored

6,202
Relevant messages

39.3m
Total displayed views

HOW THE MESSAGES TRAVELLED

I compared forwards, similar wording and links shared by multiple channels.

The study traced amplification; it did not establish who financed it.

MY TIKTOK RESEARCH TOOL

I built a crawler to find relevant public videos and make their text searchable.

01

FIND

Search public videos by topic or hashtag.

02

SAVE

Keep the video link, caption, date and view count.

03

TRANSCRIBE

Search captions or machine-generated transcripts.

04

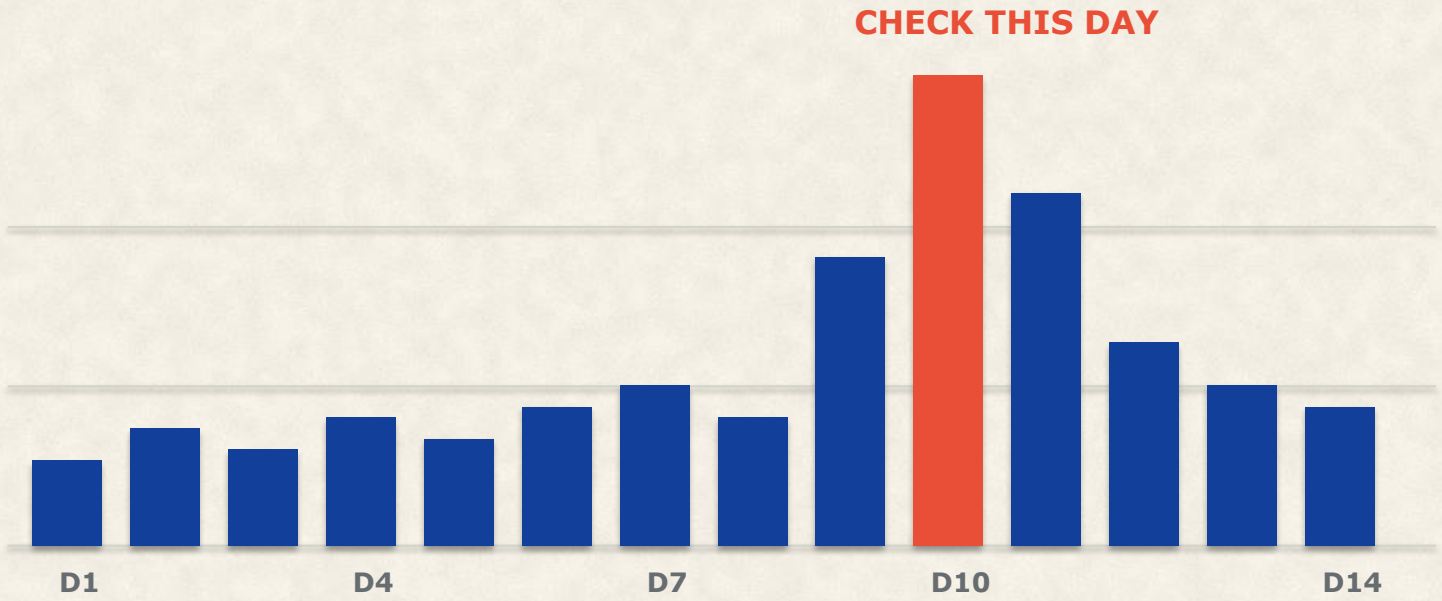
WATCH

Check the original clip before coding a claim.

A transcript can miss sarcasm, spoken context or words on the screen.

WHAT CAUSED THE SPIKE?

A chart of daily mentions tells me when to look more closely at the underlying posts.



I OPEN THE POSTS

- Which claim appeared?
- Who shared it?
- Was there a news event?
- Are the posts actually related?

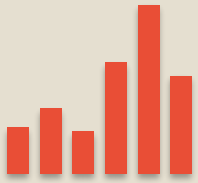
Simulated counts for demonstration; not data from a real investigation.

WHAT I LOOK FOR IN THE DATA

Four examples of patterns that can be checked against original public posts.

DAILY COUNTS

When did mentions increase?



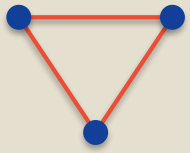
SIMILAR TEXT

Which posts reuse the same words?



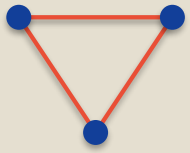
SHARED LINKS

Are several accounts citing the same source?



FORWARDS

Which channels repost each other?



News outlets also reuse texts and links. Similarity by itself proves little.

DRONE INCIDENTS AND RUMOURS

Our 2025 analysis examined how speculation and humour spread after a drone incident.

01

SEARCH

Compare Romanian- and Russian-language accounts.

02

DATE

Put posts and official statements in chronological order.

03

INSPECT

Find the original images and check independent reports.

04

EXPLAIN

Say what has been confirmed and what remains unclear.

Publish confirmed facts as they become available.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE CAN TELL US

Three statements about the same posts can require very different levels of proof.

01

OBSERVATION

“These accounts posted the same link.”
Check the original posts.

02

HYPOTHESIS

“The posts may have been prepared together.”
Check timing and wording.

03

ATTRIBUTION

“Someone paid these accounts.”
Requires separate evidence.

Our public Telegram investigation stopped short of identifying a financier.

WE STUDY HOW CLAIMS SPREAD.

THEN WE EXPLAIN THE FACTS EARLY.

ANDREI CURĂRARU / WATCHDOG.MD

FURTHER READING

Four of our published investigations.

AUG 2025	The Russian disinformation network in Moldova
JUN 2025	Russia and Ilan Shor: the architects of a Facebook disinformation network
MAY 2026	39 million views: who amplifies pro-Ceban messages on Telegram
NOV 2025	The drone on the roof: how Russian propaganda used humor