INNOVATIVE PLATFORM FOR TRACKING AND ANALYZING
KEY FACEBOOK GROUPS IN ROMANIAN SOCIETY

Authors: **Dan Sultănescu[1] | Dana C. Sultănescu[1] | Andrei Dăneasă[1] | Edward Tsien[2]**

Advisor: Vlad Achimescu

Affiliations | [1]Center for Civic Participation and Democracy, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (Romania)
[2]University of South Carolina (US)

01 INTRODUCTION

The public communication space, which shapes political opinions and behaviors, is heavily influenced by the online transformation (Castells, 2004; 2005) and especially by the emergence of social media, as a deliberative space (Del Vicario et al., 2016) with the potential to stimulate both democratic deliberation and erosion (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022; Bennett & Livingston, 2018; González-Bailón & Lelkes, 2023). In Romania, Facebook is the dominant social media platform people use for news (Newman et al., 2022), hence analyzing the communities that emerge there is crucial for understanding the content and trends that shape public discourse.

02 OBJECTIVE

Understanding the main interests and values that guide and shape the formation of Romanian online communities, by using both paid* and open-source** tools and data to identify and map high-engagement Facebook groups. Creating a database, a dashboard, and an analytical process.

*ZeList Monitor,
**CrowdTangle Chrome extension

03 METHODOLOGY

TOPIC EXTRACTION

Creating search queries for the most relevant daily issues;

Using them to extract links from an online monitoring software, with attached metadata about the source size, the viewership of the link, time of posting etc

DATA COLLECTED SO FAR

- over 170.000 URLs with engagement data
- more than 16700 groups
- more than 15000 pages
- data from 4400 unique web sources

COLLECTING ENGAGEMENT DATA

Using CrowdTangle extension to collect metrics about each link's performance on Facebook, plus posting time and size of Facebook page/group;

Aggregating data to generate insights about groups.

WHAT IT CONTAINS

1. Information about the most relevant, active or popular:
   - Facebook groups
   - Facebook pages
   - media sources that produce content shared on Facebook
2. More than 40 highly relevant monitored topics (2020 – 2024)
3. Cluster analysis dashboard

CREATING THE DASHBOARD

Powered by database on:

- Facebook pages and groups
- links shared
- relevant topics

DATA ANALYSIS

Multidimensional Cluster Analysis

Filtering by:
- the most active and relevant sources and groups
- periods of time
- content (original topics)
- number of topics etc

04 FINDINGS

Using the extracted and aggregated data, we were able to identify the most active Facebook pages and groups in Romania (Fig. 2).

Using cluster analysis, based on commonly shared content, we were able to identify the types of ideological orientations and values that bring together Romanian Facebook groups (Fig. 1).

For each cluster, we can identify dominant Facebook groups, main content sources, viral content (highly-engaged links)

Data can be filtered to perform the mapping for different time intervals.

Examples in Fig. 1 and 2 are relevant for 2022; more than 1400 groups were included in the analysis, with content taken from over 200 different media sources.

FIG. 1 CLUSTER ANALYSIS.
we identified 8 clusters of Romanian Facebook groups, which we were able to characterize and label, then further group based on common behaviors
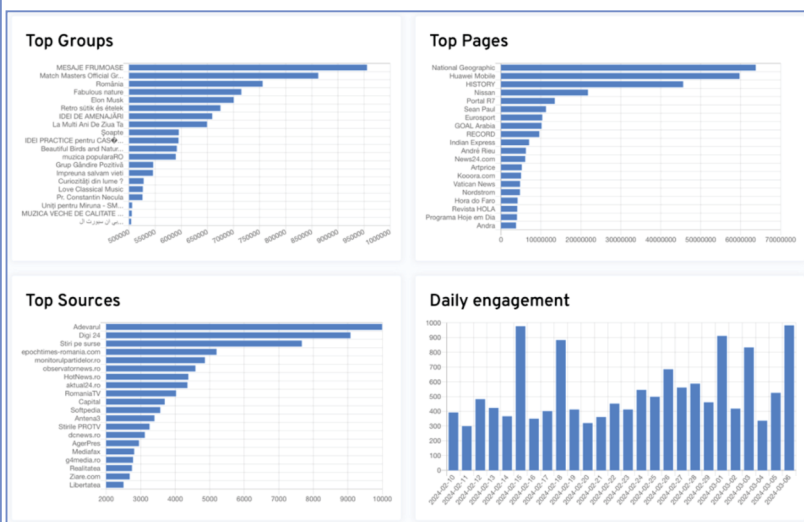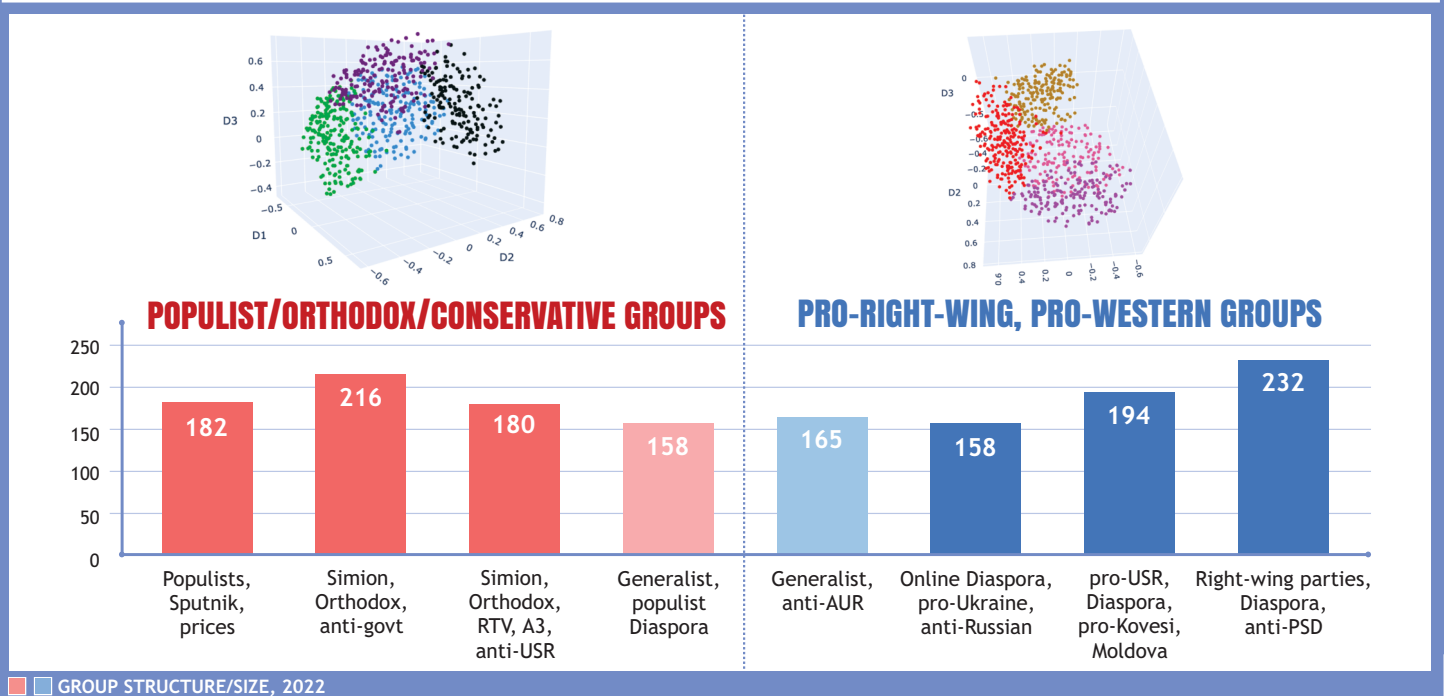

POPULIST/ORTHODOX/CONSERVATIVE GROUPS

182	216	180	158
Populists, Sputnik, prices	Simion, Orthodox, anti-govt	Simion, Orthodox, RTV, A3, anti-USR	Generalist, populist Diaspora

PRO-RIGHT-WING, PRO-WESTERN GROUPS

165	158	194	232
Generalist, anti-AUR	Online Diaspora, pro-Ukraine, anti-Russian	pro-USR, Diaspora, pro-Kovesi, Moldova	Right-wing parties, Diaspora, anti-PSD

■ ■ GROUP STRUCTURE/SIZE, 2022

FIG. 2 PAGE/GROUP INTELLIGENCE. information about top groups and pages, as well as top media sources providing content.

05 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Classifying topics (starting from the training sets)
- Topic modeling (for extracting more granular topics)
- NER (for identifying relevant keywords in the text of the posts)
- Network analysis (of pages and groups, based on the commonly shared links)
- The model is scalable, and can be replicated to analyze other types of content, based on various languages

socialmonitor

www.socialmonitor.ro