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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Social Media And The Migrant Experience: Navigating Emotions, Identity, And Decision-Making In The Digital Age

Amin NAKHI

Abstract. Social media has become a powerful force shaping migration experiences, influencing individuals before, during, and after their journey. This paper explores how social media influences people's desire to migrate, affects migrants' mental health, and leads to unhealthy consumption habits. While social media provides migrants with emotional support, connectivity, and a sense of belonging, it also creates unrealistic expectations, increases stress, and can lead to compulsive engagement. By analyzing the double-edged nature of social media, this Literature Review aims to highlight both its benefits and drawbacks in the migration process. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing healthier digital habits and more realistic migration narratives.

Keywords: social media, migration, emotion, identity, decision-making, digitalisation

1. Introduction to Social Media and Migration

Social media is now a big part of life for billions of people. In 2021, there were 3.78 billion users, and by 2025, that number has grown to over 5.42 billion (Efe and Suliman) ("Social Media Statistics"). People now spend more than 2 hours a day on these platforms (Kahn). Social media plays a big role in migration decisions. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter help people learn about destinations, routes, and connect with others who have already migrated (Dekker et al.).

Before, migrants mostly asked family or friends for advice. Now, they can read stories from strangers and get support from wider networks, shaping their decisions in new ways (Dekker and Engbersen 401). During the journey, smartphones and apps help migrants navigate and stay safe (Dekker et al.). Even after arriving, social media helps them stay in touch with loved ones and feel involved back home (Komito 1075).

But social media also brings problems. It can cause anxiety, depression, and loneliness—especially for migrants already under stress (Meshi and Ellithorpe 106949). Comparing themselves to others online may make them feel disconnected or regretful (Kahn). So, while social media helps migrants in many ways, it also adds emotional challenges like homesickness and identity struggles (Komito).

2. General Roles of Social Media in Migration

Social media plays a massive role in shaping migrant's decisions about whether to leave their home country and where to go. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and messaging apps provide information that can strongly influence someone's thoughts about migration. Many

migrants use social media to learn about possible destinations, check updates on routes, and connect with others who have already made the journey (Dekker et al.). It is not just about finding information; it's about feeling connected and making decisions based on what they see and hear online.

One of the biggest ways social media affects migration is by expanding networks. Before, people mainly relied on family or close friends for information about moving to another country. Now, with social media, migrants can reach out to strangers, read personal stories, and get advice from people they've never met. This means they are exposed to a wider range of experiences and opinions, which can shape their decisions in unexpected ways (Dekker and Engbersen 401).

During the illegal migration journey, social media serves as a real-time guide. Migrants use smartphones to navigate routes, communicate with other travelers, and adjust their plans based on the latest information. Maps, GPS, and instant messaging apps become essential tools, allowing them to avoid danger and find the safest paths (Dekker et al.). These platforms are not just about planning; they become a lifeline for those traveling through unknown places.

Table 1. Websites and Applications Consulted Before and After Migration (Multiple Answers Possible).

	Before Migration, % (n=51)	**During Migration, % (n=47)**
Social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn)	80	38
Instant messaging (WhatsApp, Ping)	63	66
VOIP (Skype, Viber)	47	38
Maps (Google Maps)	20	64
Video Sharing (YouTube, Vine)	14	4
Government websites	2	0
Other (Websites found via Google)	41	13

Table 1 illustrates the most used tools among illegal migrants during their journey. Social networking sites, instant messaging apps, maps, GPS, and Voice over IP (VoIP) applications were the most popular. Notably, as migrants progressed toward Europe, there was a shift in usage patterns: the reliance on maps and GPS increased, while the use of social networking sites and VoIP applications decreased (Dekker et al.).

Beyond the journey itself, social media transforms how migrants stay connected to their home country. In the past, leaving meant losing touch with one's community, but now, migrants can remain actively involved in their home society. They participate in discussions, follow news, and even influence events from afar. Knowing that social media can keep them connected to their homeland and assist them throughout the journey gives migrants more confidence to take the leap. Unlike the past, when emigration often meant losing most of one's connections, today's

migrants can maintain relationships, stay informed, and even participate in their home society from afar. This sense of continuity can make the decision to migrate feel less daunting and more manageable (Komito).

Social media has changed how people migrate, making it easier to get information, connect with others, and feel supported. It helps migrants learn about destinations, feel less alone, and make more confident choices. But while it makes migration easier, it also brings emotional challenges, like feeling stuck between two worlds.

3. Mental Health and Social Media

Social media plays a major role in migrants' mental health, both positively and negatively. While it helps them stay connected with their homeland and find support, excessive or problematic social media use can harm their well-being. Some people's social media habits become maladaptive, causing distress and interfering with daily life (Kuss and Griffiths 3528). For migrants, this could mean obsessively checking updates from their home country, engaging in heated online debates, or feeling overwhelmed by the content they see.

Problematic social media use has been compared to substance addiction. Just like substance use disorders, excessive social media consumption can ruin executive functions and decision-making abilities (Delaney et al. 478). For migrants, this might affect their ability to adapt to a new environment, make sound life choices, or focus on their goals. Some might spend so much time online that they struggle to build in-person relationships in their new home. Rather than calling it an addiction, researchers prefer the term "problematic social media use." Studies have consistently shown that this kind of usage is linked to negative mental health effects, including increased levels of depression and anxiety (Marino et al. 274). Migrants who rely too much on social media may experience greater emotional distress, especially if they compare their lives to those of others online. Seeing friends and family back home enjoying events they can't attend can intensify feelings of loneliness and regret.

Spending too much time on social media, even when it's not classified as "problematic use," has also been linked to increased depressive symptoms (Primack et al. 179). It means that migrants who constantly scroll through their feeds could feel more isolated or homesick over time. Instead of helping them adjust, excessive online engagement might pull them further into nostalgia and sadness.

Interestingly, researchers have also theorized that worse mental health leads to problematic social media use (Brand et al. 1). Migrants who feel lonely, anxious, or depressed might turn to social media for comfort, but in doing so, they risk deepening their struggles. Instead of finding relief, they may end up feeling more disconnected from real-life interactions.

The relationship between social media use and mental health is complex and requires further study. One possible explanation is the lack of in-person social support. Spending more time online often means less time spent in face-to-face interactions, which are crucial for emotional well-being (Shensa et al. 150). For migrants, this is particularly important. If they don't actively seek friendships and community in their new country, they might find themselves trapped in an online world that does more harm than good.

While social media can be a lifeline for migrants, it can also become a burden if not used wisely. Migrants need to be aware of how social media affects their emotions and take steps to ensure it remains a helpful tool rather than a source of distress.

4. The Impact of Social Comparison on Behavior

Social comparison is a natural process where people evaluate their own opinions, abilities, and behaviors by comparing them to others (Kahn). This tendency exists both in real life and in online interactions, but social media has amplified it significantly. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp provide an endless stream of updates about people's lives, achievements, and emotions, making social comparison an almost unavoidable part of daily life.

With social media constantly updating, users are exposed to posts from friends, family, acquaintances, and even strangers, creating a nonstop cycle of comparison (Kahn). We see their vacations, jobs, relationships, and even their opinions, which inevitably leads to evaluating our own lives against theirs. This comparison can sometimes inspire us, but it can also lead to dissatisfaction, insecurity, or unrealistic expectations about what life should look like.

One of the key reasons social media enhances social comparison is its ability to bring together people who are like us. Studies have shown that we are naturally drawn to those who share our background, interests, and lifestyles, and social networking sites strengthen this tendency. While this can create a sense of belonging, it also increases the likelihood of comparing ourselves to those in our circles, often in ways that make us feel inadequate. Seeing others achieve milestones or live seemingly perfect lives can create pressure, making us question our own progress and worth (Kahn).

It is important to recognize that social media does not always reflect reality. People tend to share only the best parts of their lives, filtering out struggles, failures, and daily challenges. Yet, when we compare ourselves to these curated versions of life, we might feel like we are falling behind, even when we are not. This can affect self-esteem, mental health, and decision-making, especially for migrants who are trying to adjust to a new life and may already feel disconnected or uncertain about their future.

Understanding social comparison and its impact on behavior is essential for navigating social media in a healthier way. Instead of letting comparison create self-doubt, we should remind ourselves that everyone's journey is different, and social media only shows a small fraction of reality. Awareness and mindfulness can help reduce the negative effects of comparison and allow us to use social media in a way that supports, rather than harms, our well-being.

5. Social Comparison on Social Media and Migration

Social media plays a significant role in shaping young people's perceptions of life abroad, often influencing their decision to emigrate. By presenting an idealized version of other countries, and highlighting opportunities while minimizing challenges, it can create unrealistic expectations. This curated reality may lead young individuals to feel dissatisfied with their current life, making migration seem like the only path to a better life (Skrbis 235).

However, social media continues to shape identity even after migration. It provides a space for social comparison, where users constantly measure their abilities, achievements, and experiences against others (Yang et al. 95). For migrants, this can be even more complex, as they navigate between their home culture and a new one while dealing with personal and social expectations. The same platforms that once fueled their dreams of a better life can now amplify feelings of displacement, cultural disconnection, or even regret, making the process of identity formation both transformative and challenging.

There are two main types of social comparison: one based on ability and competition, and another based on opinions and perspectives. Ability-based comparisons often make people feel pressure to succeed, while opinion-based comparisons help shape viewpoints and beliefs (Yang et al. 95). Social media amplifies ability-based comparisons by constantly showcasing others' achievements, making individuals feel as though they are falling behind. For those facing obstacles in their own countries, this can create the perception that success is only attainable beyond their borders.

These comparisons make people think about themselves in different ways; both reflection and rumination influence major life decisions, including the choice to emigrate. For some, reflection leads to self-discovery and the pursuit of new opportunities, while for others, rumination fuels negative thoughts about their self-worth and future, making migration feel like the only escape. In both cases, social comparison plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive their possibilities and limitations (Trapnell and Campbell 290).

However, after moving, social comparison does not stop—it simply shifts focus. Migrants may begin comparing their current lives not only with their past but also with the lives of family and friends who remained behind. Seeing loved ones together, celebrating moments, and sharing the highlights of their lives on social media can create a filtered nostalgia, making migrants question their decision. Without considering the challenges they once faced or the difficulties their loved ones may still experience, this selective comparison, often driven by rumination, can lead to feelings of regret or isolation. In this way, social media with social comparison not only shapes migration aspirations but also continues to influence migrants' emotions, reinforcing both expectations and doubts about life in a new country (Suls et al. 225, Yang et al. 95).

6. Challenges of Social Media Use for Migrants

While social media is a powerful tool for migrants, it also comes with serious challenges. One major issue is how social media can create and spread negative attitudes toward migrants. In many Western countries, anti-immigrant sentiment has grown, and digital platforms have played a major role in shaping how people talk about migration. Since many people get their news online, the way migration is portrayed on social media influences public opinions and reactions (Walsh and Hill 700).

Platforms like Twitter have been used to create fear and moral panic around migration. During the 2019 Canadian election, for example, Twitter was used to spread exaggerated concerns about migrants. Many tweets focused on cultural and security-related fears rather than real economic effects. Posts that portrayed migrants as a threat gained the most attention, showing how social media can fuel discrimination and exclusion. Since these platforms encourage emotional and dramatic content, negative messages about migrants spread faster and reach more people.

Another challenge is that social media has changed how migration debates happen. Unlike traditional media, where news was controlled by journalists and experts, social media allows anyone to create and share content. This has made migration discussions more interactive, but also more chaotic. Misinformation spreads quickly, and non-professional users can shape public opinion in ways that are not always based on facts. This means that migrants are often judged by misleading or exaggerated narratives that can make their experiences harder (Walsh and Hill 700).

Besides public opinion, migrants themselves face risks when using social media. While platforms help them access valuable information, they also expose them to misinformation. Many migrants rely on social media to make "smart" decisions about where to go and how to travel, but not all the advice they find is reliable. False information can lead migrants into dangerous situations, making their journey riskier. In addition, access to social media is not always equal—some migrants struggle with internet access, language barriers, or difficulty finding accurate sources of information (Dekker and Engbersen 405).

Despite these challenges, social media remains a key part of migration today. It connects migrants, helps them plan their journeys, and keeps them in touch with their home countries. However, the risks of misinformation and negative portrayals should not be ignored. Understanding these challenges is essential for making social media a safer and more useful tool for migrants.

7. Social Media's Emotional Impact After Migration

Social media has changed the way migrants experience emotions related to their journey. In the past, migration often meant a complete disconnect from one's home country and family. Now, with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, migrants can maintain emotional bonds despite physical distance (Komito 1080). This ability to stay connected can provide comfort, but it also raises new emotional challenges.

One major emotional impact is the way migrants feel about their identity and belonging. Studies suggest that ethnic identification influences psychological well-being, but its effect depends on how migrants are accepted in their host country. If they feel rejected, their ethnic identity may not boost their self-esteem as expected, leading to emotional distress (Nesdale et al. 575). At the same time, social media allows migrants to share their emotions, find support, and maintain a sense of community, even when they are far from home. Social media also plays a key role in shaping emotions such as nostalgia and longing. Migrants often express feelings of homesickness through posts, stories, and messages. Digital interactions with family and friends make them feel connected but can also intensify their yearning for home (Boccagni and Baldassar 75). Constant updates from their home country—whether family gatherings, cultural events, or political discussions—can make them feel emotionally torn between two places.

Additionally, the concept of "Connected Migrants" has evolved into "Virtual Migrants," where social media allows people to remain socially and culturally active in their home community, even without physical presence (Komito 1080). This raises important questions: Does strong emotional support from social media prevent migrants from forming deep relationships in their new country? Does it make migration easier because they can "carry" their community with them wherever they go? These digital connections shape how migrants experience adaptation and belonging.

Based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), strong emotional support from social media can influence how migrants adapt to their new country. This theory suggests that people define themselves based on the social groups they belong to. When migrants stay closely connected to their original communities online, they reinforce their old identity, which can make them feel emotionally secure but also limit their willingness to integrate into new social groups.

Because they receive validation and support from their existing network, they may feel less pressure to build deep relationships in their new country. Instead of forming strong local

bonds, they might continue identifying primarily with their homeland and culture, slowing down their sense of belonging in their new environment. However, for some, social media can act as a bridge, helping them maintain old ties while gradually forming new ones.

8. Conclusions

The relationship between migration and social media is deeply complex, offering both empowerment and emotional strain. While digital platforms facilitate connectivity, provide critical information, and help migrants sustain relationships with their home countries, they also introduce new psychological and social challenges. The emotional weight of migration is often heightened online, where curated images of home can intensify nostalgia, and the lack of physical proximity can deepen feelings of isolation.

One of the key findings of this study is the paradoxical role of social media in the migration experience. On one hand, it serves as a tool for empowerment, allowing migrants to form virtual communities, navigate legal and logistical challenges, and gain emotional support. On the other hand, it can foster unrealistic expectations, increase exposure to misinformation, and create emotional dependencies that hinder full integration into new environments. The psychological impact of this digital engagement cannot be overlooked—migrants who rely heavily on social media for emotional reassurance may struggle with detachment from their surroundings, delaying their sense of belonging in their host countries.

Ultimately, the influence of social media on migration is shaped by both individual usage patterns and broader systemic factors, such as government policies on digital access, online censorship, and the presence of supportive diaspora communities. Future research should explore how migrants can leverage social media more effectively to balance emotional well-being with the practical realities of adaptation. Recognizing both the benefits and pitfalls of these platforms is crucial in understanding how digital connectivity continues to reshape the migrant experience in an increasingly online world.

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Shaping One's Identity: Evaluation Of Motivational Persistence Questionnaire (EMP); Results Of Preliminary Validation In English

Ana-Maria Teodora ANDRONIC

Abstract. The study aims to conduct a preliminary validation of the psychometric characteristics of the English version of a Romanian questionnaire, designed to assess motivational persistence. Motivational persistence is an essential element of an individual's identity, a relationship that brings a bi-directional perspective and is seminal for people's social identities. The analysis of the translated English version is performed on a sample of 152 UK residents, with data on the six factors of the questionnaire (ambition, determination, planning, implementation, recurrence, self-discipline), and comparative analyses on the relationships between EMP factors and the Grit scale (Duckworth et al., 2007). The alpha values for the EMP are similar to the ones obtained with the original version of the MPS. The EMP correlates with the two factors of the Grit scale. This tool is unique and complex, as it combines factors based on their temporal proximity to desired ends, focuses on the durability of goal strivings and on post-decisional volitional and motivational processes. Conclusions are drawn about the psychometric characteristics and its usefulness in assessing motivation / persistence for psychotherapy, counselling, any allied fields and for academics and researchers.

Keywords: motivation, identity, motivational persistence, scale validation, counselling tool, United Kingdom.

1. Definition of Terms – Theoretical Foundation

The existing literature on motivational persistence reveals a need for further empirical research and an improvement of instruments and measurement tools. The repeated empirical testing and successful validation of a Romanian questionnaire, designed to assess motivational persistence, prompted us to translate it and validate it on an English-speaking sample. The preliminary validation of the psychometric characteristics of this English version was done on a UK-based sample and exhibits strong psychometric characteristics.

1.1. Conceptual Definitions and Motivation Models

Motivation is a widely used variable that captures the interest of academics, psychologists and researchers alike. It can be defined as the process "which makes people put real effort and energy into what they do" (Srivastava & Barmola, 2011, p. 106). Other researchers regard it as a "psychological state of the individual as it relates to the authentic action, and the physical reality of undertaking it" (Pinner, 2017, p. 37). In fields such as organisational psychology, education, language acquisition, the importance of motivation is viewed as an essential ingredient.

Motivation is strongly connected to an individual's identity. The IBM identity-based motivation framework (Oyserman & Mesmin, 2010) notes that people are guided by their internal set of values and principles, and they will interpret setbacks, effort put into an action, difficulty of

tasks and other elements depending on how relevant an action is to them. If one reflects on their future selves, then identity can predict task persistence, by increasing motivation (Destin et al., 2022). Also, an individual's identity can make goals feel relevant by matching their view of themselves to the task, and labelling it 'identity-congruent'. As noted by authors Oyserman and Mesmin (2010, p. 1001), "identities are dynamically constructed in context", and when an action or goal feels congruent with one's identity, then motivation appears to sustain effort and persist into finalising actions related to that goal.

Waugh (2002) identified over ten models of motivation that were developed in the 20th century, integrating concepts such as goals, needs, self-efficacy, rewards, reinforcements and so on, that are still used today. Clark (1998) listed over 40 empirically-tested theories in his study about motivation performance. The wealth of so many different types of conceptual models that are tested empirically in domains associated to learning, child development, cognitive, behavioural and social sciences reflect the complexity of motivation studies, and can make it difficult to both define and analyse comparatively.

Motivation can be studied depending on the dimensions of motivation (process-focused or outcome-focused), on the type of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic and amotivation), in terms of observable cognitive (e.g., recall, perception), affective (e.g., subjective experience), behavioural (e.g., performance), and physiological responses (e.g., brain activation) (Toure-Tillery & Fishbach, 2014, p. 328). For example, intrinsic motivation determines the individual to be internally prompted to exhibit a certain behaviour, not out of fear of unwanted consequences but from real interest. Extrinsic motivation was described as a determinant of behaviours which cannot be internally motivated or is outside the person's conscious control, which "pertains to a wide variety of behaviours where the goals of action extend beyond those inherent in the activity itself" (Vallerand & Bisonnette, 1992, p. 600). Deci and Ryan (1985) recognised the existence of a third type of motivation, called amotivation, which refers to lacking intentionality, and described in more recent research as "a strong negative predictor of engagement, learning and wellness" (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 3).

1.2. Persistence and conceptual operationalisation; empirical results

Persistence, as a key variable in the history of psychological research, can be defined as "the tendency to remain engaged in specific goal-related activities, despite difficulties, obstacles, fatigue, prolonged frustration or low perceived feasibility" (Constantin et al., 2011, p. 99). An analysis of persistence definitions from the 20th century finds common patterns, such as resistance to frustration and an ability to bypass obstacles and maintain effort (Hojbota & Constantin, 2009). Persistence takes into account facets of goal pursuit, such as the extent to which a person continues to engage (rather than abandoning the goal), the length of time spent on achieving the goal and number of tasks completed (Touré-Tillery & Fishbach, 2014). Goal pursuit in empirical research attends to "the setting of appropriate goals and the effective striving for goal attainment" (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2009, p. 2). For this to happen, individuals should think about the type of goals they have, the type of expected results, the means of acquiring them, the timeframe involved and the type of anticipated rewards. We see again that personal identity guides us towards the goals that feel worth pursuing and, in the meantime, sustained effort and pursuit of goals and actions can shape and strengthen one's commitment to their social identity (Luyckx et al., 2016).

Historically, persistence was shown to occur once levels of motivation to successful goal completion or anticipation of success were high, or when motivation to avoid anticipation of failure was elevated (Feather, 1961). Clark (1999) emphasizes the importance of persistence when addressing distractions that people encounter. One study on the role of affective experience in work motivation (Seo et al., 2004) highlights the dimensions of behavioural outcomes, namely intensity, direction and persistence. These three facets derive from the theoretical model proposed by Kurt Lewin in the 20th century. Intensity refers to the amount of effort involved (task performance), direction is the behavioural choice (between possible actions), and persistence denotes maintaining the pattern of behaviour longitudinally (Kanfer, 1990). Persistence is seen to be a critical element of long-term work productivity (Seo et al., 2004), and is more important during situations where there is a lack of feedback, advice or appreciation (Buddhapriya & Bhatt, 2018).

One line of research concerns personality, affect and emotions. Persistence can be enhanced by positive feelings or positive affect, as individuals tend to pay less attention to progress feedback information and make fewer progress evaluations, enhancing thus task persistence (Seo et al., 2004). Strong goal commitment is the result of envisioning the future goals as desirable, having a positive outlook and high expectations (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2009). Another line of research states that motivational persistence can be studied within the context of goal-directed behaviours and Affect Regulation Dynamics (Bagozzi et al., 1998; Baumeister et al., 2007; Pekrun & Stephens, 2009). The majority of self-regulation models are vertical, looking at constructs hierarchically rather than horizontally, spanning over time in a sequential order (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

Another similar variable is grit, defined as a "mixture of toughness, persistence and resilience" (Jordan et al., 2018, p. 576). Duckworth et al. (2007, p. 1087) assess grit as being a noncognitive trait, defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" that correlates with the Big Five Conscientiousness and is a predictor of success. Across six studies, findings suggest that older individuals exhibit higher grit than younger people, a grittier person makes fewer career changes, grit correlates positively with level of education and is the result of both talent and sustained effort (Duckworth et al., 2007). According to the same authors, this individual-level attribute can be trained to be developed and maintained over time, which is useful in work environment and academic contexts.

Persistence is therefore, regarded as a vital component of self-regulation, and a key predictor of well-being and performance (Brandstätter & Bernecker, 2022). The concept can be measured either with targeted instruments for children (Lufi & Cohen, 1987) and adults (Mukherjee, 1974), as a component of larger inventories (Cloninger et al., 1991) or with ad-hoc items created to measure specific behaviours. But the variety of measurements can lead to a perpetuation of the concept's ambiguity (Constantin et al., 2011), thus the aim of the authors in this study was to obtain an instrument that can support the needs of academics, practitioners and researchers.

1.3. Motivational persistence and The Rubicon Model

Motivational persistence is regarded as being a relatively stable component of the conative system (the capability to set and follow through with personal goals), often compared to a character trait. Motivational persistence may be viewed as the cumulative effect of a spectrum

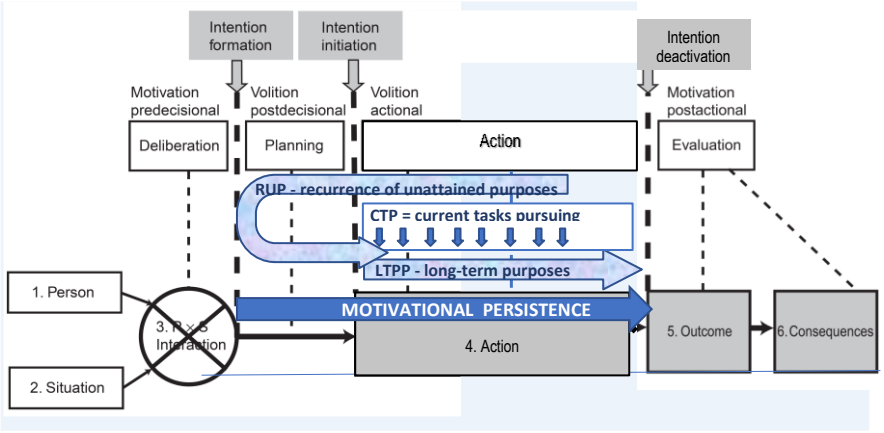
of predispositions, tendencies and conditions that can enable goal achievement (Hojbota & Constantin, 2009).

Recent motivational studies (Sherman and Kim, 2004; Belschak et al., 2006, Houser-Marko and Sheldon, 2006; Eniola and Adebiyi, 2007) confirm that motivational involvement (to be attracted to / to intend to attain personal motivating goals) and motivational persistence (persistence in motivational aims, tendency to persevere behaviourally and motivationally in the effort of achieving ambitious targets) represent two different stages of the motivational process, two distinct facets of motivation, between which a weak relationship of interdependence exists (Constantin & al., 2008).

Based on these observations and on the need to distinguish the concept under discussion (persistence in motivational aims) by the persistence in task (the time necessary for finish a limited task), Constantin et al. (2011) chose the syntagm "motivational persistence". They proposed a comprehensive model and a questionnaire (MPS - Motivational Persistence Scale) that allow the assessment of motivational persistence, defined as a person's predisposition to persevere with a task or action, in the effort of achieving ambitious goals, or the tendency to persist and invest time and effort (Constantin et al. 2011). This concept is quite similar to other concepts that overlap with the semantic content associated with persistence, such as: perseverance, toughness or ruggedness (hardiness) and grit (strength of character).

The motivational persistence model can explain what happens after a person has taken a decision in the post-decisional phase, as reflected by the Rubicon model (Gollwitzer, 2000, 2001, Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2008). This term was chosen as a metaphor for the point of no return, a reference for Caesar crossing the Rubicon River (Rauber, 2007). The point of no return signifies a step forward, when the individual moves from goal setting and planning to goal striving or implementation. Coming back to the current model, the two factors of the Motivational Persistence Scale (LTPP - long-term purposes pursuing and CTP - current tasks pursuing) are relevant only for the Action phase (volition actional) of the Rubicon model. LTPP is understood as the endeavour to pursue long-term aims that have been previously selected, and CTP signifies daily efforts made to achieve current tasks that are subsumed to long-term goals. The third factor of the Motivational Persistence Scale (RUP - recurrence of unattained purposes) could be relevant for the Planning phase (volition post-decisional) from the Rubicon model, and also for Action phase form this model (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The motivational persistence model (Constantin et al., 2011) in the Rubicon model phases (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2008)



From this perspective, motivational persistence as it is operationalized by the Motivational Persistence scale, is highly relevant to evaluate individual predispositions or capability to maintain long-term motivation in order to achieve important personal goals. The motivational persistence model (Constantin et al., 2011) allows an understanding of the processes between the initial deliberation and the consistent follow-up of long-term goals. For these reasons, we choose to analyze the motivation to adhere to treatment by using motivational persistence model and the MPS questionnaire.

1.4. Stages in the construction of the MPS and Implications for the current research

The original version of the Motivational Persistence Scale (MPS; Constantin et al., 2011) was developed out of necessity, in the absence of suitable scales that would incorporate various personality aspects and elements of the aforementioned Rubicon model. Preliminary data collection from 667 participants through a number of 64 items helped the researchers to identify three factors, following exploratory factor analysis (EFA). These results were reconfirmed in 2011 on a second sample of 296 participants via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The new MPS scale evaluated motivational persistence, focusing on three main factors: Long Term Purpose Pursuit (LTPP), Current Purpose Pursuit (CPP) and Recurrence of Unattained Pursuits (RUP). LTPP and CPP are set on a temporal range and are volition-based, whereas RUP refers to past and inactive responsibilities. Current purpose pursuits depend on volitional and motivational resources that stem from self-control. Long-term purpose pursuit refers to ideal and distant goal pursuits (Constantin et al., 2011). The recurrence of unattained pursuits refers to an actualization and revival process that appears post-intentional, as described by Heckhausen and Gollwitzer (1987) in their Rubicon model of action phases, detailed above.

In the 2011 study, the authors tested the construct and convergent validity of the scale, to see how the coefficients for the MPS would correlate to pre-validated, more established

instruments of measurement for a similar concept, such as the Grit Scale for Consistency of Interest and the Persistence of effort (Duckworth et al., 2007), the ACS-90 scales for Preoccupation, Hesitation and Volatility (Kuhl & Beckmann, 1994) and the Persistence Scale of the Temperament and Character Inventory (Cloninger et al., 1994). Data analysis revealed a statistically coherent model and confirmed both the factorial structure with the three facets of motivational persistence (CPP, LTPP, RUP), as well as its construct validity through the instrument's association with the aforementioned scales (Constantin et al., 2011).

From 2011 to 2017, work has been done to improve the internal consistency and predictive validity of the instrument, including the development of subsequent versions with 18 items, with 21 items and 15 items. In 2018, two more factors were added (SAG or Setting Ambitious Goals, SDA or Scheduling Daily Activities), to cement the relevancy of goal pursuit in achieving long-term projects, and the scale reached a version with 42 items and five factors. This new version was empirically tested on a convenience sample of 3471 participants in 2020, re-confirming the factorial structure and exhibiting high internal consistency.

A third stage in the development of the current Romanian version of the Motivational Persistence Scale was refining the instrument for wider application, for participants ranging from the academic sector, to the clinical settings and organizational contexts. A sixth factor was added, namely self-discipline, to reflect this concept's association with motivational persistence and importance to long-term goal setting. The six factors have also been re-named and given labels to reflect the psychological dimensions they strive to measure: ambition (setting ambitious goals), determination (pursuing long-term goals), implementation (realization of daily tasks), planning (scheduling daily activities), self-discipline (demonstrating willpower and self-restraint) and recurrence (re-actualization of unachieved past plans or abandoned goals).

There are several reasons why we want to validate the aforementioned version of the Romanian scale into English. First of all, when the Romanian version of the scale was created, there was a need to incorporate the three aspects mentioned above, namely CPP, LTPP and RUP. Having created and subsequently validated the scale in Romanian, it was necessary to pursue further analysis on a diverse group of participants who speak English. Secondly, the authors of the original version of the scale considered that there is a lack of adequate measures, and suggested that other researchers should continue improving and testing their findings. Thirdly, by adapting the scale in English, we could test its construct validity, producing a valid self-report measure for motivational persistence. Lastly, we wanted to test the scale against a construct which correlates with persistence, namely grit, variables which have been shown to correlate significantly in the past (Constantin et al., 2011).

2. The Present Research

The purpose of this paper is twofold: firstly, to expand current knowledge and understanding of motivational persistence and secondly, to validate the English version of the Motivational Persistence Scale. The factorial structure and psychometric properties of the scale were analysed.

2.1. Methods

Ethical clearance was obtained by submitting a detailed proposal to the University Ethics Committee, several months before data collection was started. The proposal contained a sample

of the Informed Consent, the complete description of the research project, the purpose of the study, details on procedure and methodology, information on the potential risks or benefits, information on participant recruitment, confidentiality agreement details. All respondents completed an online survey for this study. The Informed consent page at the beginning of the survey fully explained to the participants their rights and the complete details of their participation in this study in a clear, transparent manner. All adult participants who have agreed to move forward after reading the Consent were able to progress to the next stage and complete the survey items. Participants were not offered any financial or material incentives for their participation, and there were no risk of harm or any negative consequences associated with taking part in this online research. No information which could be used in any way to identify the participants has been collected, as all online data collection followed the BERA privacy and data storage regulations on anonymity, confidentiality and data safety.

Following institutional approval from the University Research Ethics Committee (no. 2187 from the 20th of April 2021), data collection commenced on the 30th April.

2.1.1. Participants

A total of 152 participants (90 female, 60 males, 2 other), ranging from 19 to 76 years, volunteered to complete the online survey. The research survey was advertised on various social media groups, on LinkedIn, different student groups from London-based Universities, and by sharing the form link with UK-based charities and third-sector organisations. The participants self-selected from the general population of the United Kingdom, mainly from London, therefore a convenience sample of 152 respondents was the final lot of participants included into the data analysis. 25% have only lived in the UK, 27.6% lived in the UK for more than 10 years, 14.5% over 5 years, 13.2% between one and five years, 3.3% under 1 year, with 16.4% currently living in a different country. Over 58% are working full-time, 24% working part-time, and 17% are not employed.

The participants were asked to self-assess their English proficiency, with 67% assessing their level as Native/ Proficient, 27% Full professional level/Advanced, and 6% Upper-Intermediate. Respondents whose native language was not English spoke 27 other languages, with larger percentages being the Romanian participants (13%), Arabic (8.5%), French, German, Portuguese, Czech, Polish, Turkish, Slovak (between 1 and 3%) etc. A percentage of 57.9% of participants held at least a University degree (20% of the respondents hold a Master's Degree or a PhD, 37.5% hold a Bachelor Degree), 23% have tertiary education (UK levels 4-5 qualifications), 11.1% Post-secondary education (UK level 3 qualifications/ A levels), 7.2% upper-secondary education (GCSE, NVQ 2) and 1% primary education.

2.1.2. Procedure

The MPS (30-item Romanian version) was translated into English, following the cross-cultural adaptation and validation procedure for psychological instruments (Borsa et al., 2012). The original instrument was translated, back-translated and evaluated by two English native speakers, two bilingual speakers, before the two authors reached consensus on the final version of the questionnaire, which was empirically tested on a sample of 152 UK residents. The data collection procedure ran from the 30th April to the 30th June 2021, following the University ethics committee approval, and the survey was administered online, due to the covid-related restrictions.

Participation was voluntary, and the survey was shared via email to London charities or on social media, with the aim of reaching an audience as diverse as possible.

All statistical analyses were conducted in SPSS 20.

2.1.3. Instruments

The main instrument used is the Evaluation of Motivational Persistence questionnaire, the English version of the MPS (Constantin et al., 2011), with 30 items and 6 factors (ambition, determination, planning, implementation, recurrence, self-discipline). Respondents selected their response on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Very Little Extent to Very Large Extent.

The scale is a self-report instrument designed to evaluate aspects of three main facets of persistence, namely current purpose pursuit, which refers to persistence for short-term behaviours; long-term purpose pursuit, meaning the sustainment of actions over long periods of time; and recurrence of unattained purposes, the mental reactivation of past goals or postponed actions.

Grit: We used the 12-item Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007) with a 5-point Likert response scale, ranging from Not Like Me at All to Very Much Like Me. The GRIT scale generally exhibits high internal consistency, ranging from 0.77 to 0.85 (Duckworth et al., 2007). This measure is comprised of two subscales, titled the Perseverance of Effort and Consistency of Interest.

3. Results

3.1. Psychometric properties of the EMP (English version)

The results for the descriptive statistics analysis show that our newly translated scale exhibits good internal consistency and construct validity.

In terms of the Alpha Cronbach analysis, the internal consistency for each of the six factors was assessed, with acceptable scores for Ambition (.715) and Implementation (.746), good scores for Determination (.831) and Recurrence (.816), and an excellent score for Planning (.909). Self-discipline scored .672, so the items for this factor will have to be corrected for further applications of the scale. Also, the alpha values for the EMP are similar to the ones obtained with the original Romanian version of the MPS.

Confirmatory factor analysis could not be completed, as the number of respondents is lower than required (N=152). As per statistical requirements, a critical sample size of 200 respondents should provide stable results and offer sufficient power to estimate a model's stability (Collier, 2020; Garver & Mentzer, 1999). Exploratory factor analysis EFA and confirmatory factor analysis CFA were conducted on the previous versions of the Romanian scale, and the results confirmed the current structure with six factors that has been used for translation in this case.

A high overall score on the EMP means that an individual has the ability to persevere in the effort over time, in order to reach ambitious goals, without abandoning the tasks that were set out for completion.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Skewness and Kurtosis for Factors of the EMP

EMP	M	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
EMP_total	98.02	15.40	-.394	-.309
EMP_ambition	17.47	3.25	-.289	.149
EMP_determination	17.84	4.27	-.597	-.317
EMP_planning	15.86	5.39	-.323	-.747
EMP_implementation	16.23	3.76	-.137	-.238
EMP_recurrence	13.00	4.35	.136	-.573
EMP_self-discipline	17.57	3.48	-.374	-.267

Note: N= 152. Std. Error of Skewness =.197. Std. Error of Kurtosis = .391.

3.2. A comparison between GRIT and the EMP

The Pearson correlation analyses employed to compare the 12-item Grit scale and the 30-item EMP scale reveal an expected pattern of correlations. The EMP correlates with the two factors of the Grit scale- Table 2 reveals the correlation coefficients.

Out of the six factors of the EMP scale, five correlate significantly with one another, namely ambition, determination, planning, implementation and self-discipline. The only factor of the instrument that showcases negative correlations is Recurrence, defined by the authors of the original scale as "serving the goal of signalling abandoned intentions" and referring to "motivating characteristics of important, still unattained goals" (Constantin et al., 2011, p. 114). There is one reason that might explain the unique role that recurrence plays, compared to the other factors, namely that recurrence is oriented towards the past, with the aim of retrieving and reviving lost or postponed plans and actions, which might be valuable in the long run for personal goal achievement. The other factors of the EMP scale are oriented towards the future, mainly for long-term goal achievement, planning and implementation of actions. This complex mechanism between newer, recently chosen and older, abandoned goals, has been frequently ignored by persistence frameworks, but it is important for humans and influencing their behaviours. People usually have various objectives and goals but it is unlikely they would invest time and effort into achieving all of them, so a sequential distribution of effort and resources is needed, in order for individuals to gradually come back and achieve delayed plans or projects.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients among the variables (N=152)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.MPE_total	-								
2.MPE_ambition	.64**	-							
3.MPE_determination	.77**	.46**	-						
4.MPE_planning	.78**	.39**	.48**	-					
5.MPE_implementation	.64**	.24**	.45**	.40**	-				
6.MPE_recurrence	.15	.11	-.05	-.03	-.29**	-			
7.MPE_self-discipline	.76**	.35**	.59**	.54**	.70**	-.22**	-		

8. GRIT- consistency of interests	.36**	.05	.40**	.31**	.54**	-.41**	.50**	-	
9. GRIT- perseverance of effort	.60**	.38**	.62**	.38**	.55**	-.22**	.62**	.48**	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

4. Limitations

Firstly, the present study used the adapted English version of the Motivational Persistence Scale, where the internal consistency value for Self-discipline is acceptable, yet lower than the other values for the remaining five factors of the scale. The items for self-discipline need to be adapted to improve the value of Alpha Cronbach.

Secondly, we used a self-report questionnaire with two scales to measure our variables, namely motivational persistence and grit. There are numerous limitations to self-report instruments (Lucas & Baird, 2006; Paulhus, 1991), such as a vulnerability to the social desirability bias.

A limitation noted by Duckworth et al. (2007) in their validation article on the GRIT scale refers to the use of items that "asks respondents to reflect on their characteristic approach to goals, setbacks, and challenges", "which necessitate retrospective reflection" (p. 1099). Both Grit and the EMP include items which that refer to past goals and recurrence of unattained purposes respectively, to determine how past behaviours affect or predict present and future decisions.

Lastly, the sample size of 152 respondents did not allow us to conduct confirmatory factor analysis, so further empirical utilizations of the scale should involve larger samples. The small number of participants might affect the external validity of our initial study, so further research is needed.

5. Conclusions and Future Directions of research

This measurement tool could prove useful for counselling practitioners, for psychotherapists and researchers in measuring and understanding motivational persistence. Another sector is education, as practitioners should use this tool especially with students who are at the beginning of their careers and wish to decide which path is most suitable for them, and how their social identity is linked to their future professional plans.

This tool is unique and complex, as it combines factors based on their temporal proximity to desired ends, focuses on the durability of strivings and on post-decisional volitional and motivational processes. As literature on the topic has shown repeatedly, goal achievement requires sustained effort, a focus on objectives and prolonged dedication over time, and there are several factors which aid it, such as ambition, determination, recurrence of unattained purposes and so on.

We recommend further applications of the present instrument in organisational contexts. 82 % of our respondents were in a form of employment (58% working full-time, 24% working part-time) at the time of the study, and this tool is fast, practical, empirically valid and theory-grounded. Any intervention programme that can be implemented in organisational, academic,

developmental, counselling or other sectors should focus on both the characteristics of the population, the subgroups involved and of the institution that employs changes.

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Annex 1

30-item EMP

1. I like to set up simple and easy-to-reach objectives for myself.
2. I prefer immediate achievements instead of long-term goals or projects.
3. I like to write down my daily/weekly to-do list in advance.
4. I sometimes don't fully go through with my planned activities.
5. I still think about the different ways I could have taken advantage of the opportunities I gave up on in the past.
6. I am a disciplined individual in anything I do.
7. I like to think about future accomplishments.
8. Long-term goals motivate me to overcome day-to-day hardships.
9. I check my planned activities every morning, before I get to work.
10. Some days, I deviate from my planned activities.
11. I still think about the goals I gave up on, even though they don't matter anymore.
12. I honour my commitments, even when I lose or am at a disadvantage.
13. I don't feel the need to prove myself or to achieve great things.
14. I continue to invest time and effort in projects that require months of patience and hard work.
15. I use an agenda and make lists to plan what I have to do every day.
16. When I plan to do something, I don't give up until I get it done.
17. I'm surprised when I think about older, abandoned initiatives again.
18. I still keep things well organised, even when it's not necessary.
19. I am an ambitious person.
20. I remain motivated even for activities lasting months.
21. I plan in detail what I have to do the next day.
22. At the end of each day, I usually find that I did not accomplish what I planned out to do.
23. It's difficult for me to forget an important project that I gave up on to focus on other priorities.
24. I usually break self-imposed limits (for example, with shopping, food, time, etc).
25. I always expect more from myself and from my future.
26. I don't like to pursue goals that require months or years of effort.
27. I regularly update my list of personal goals that I will achieve in the future.
28. I am efficient in achieving my day-to-day objectives.
29. I always think back at my unrealized projects.
30. Through discipline and perseverance, I have achieved my most important goals in life.

Likert Scale ranges from 1- Very Little Extent to 5- Very Large Extent

Inverted Items: 1, 2, 4, 10, 13, 22, 24, 26

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The Doctrine Of Double Effect In Contemporary Social Protest. Ethical Implications Of Social Media Activism In Romania

Ana-Ștefana COVACIU

Abstract. This paper[1] examines contemporary forms of Romanian pro-Palestine digital activism through the lens of the Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE), while also exploring the role of symbolic participation within social media environments. The research focuses on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, analyzing forms of online engagement such as hashtags, symbolic communication, protest mobilization and audience interaction. Using a qualitative and exploratory approach, the study investigates how digital activism may reflect both humanitarian intentions and unintended consequences within highly visible online spaces. The analysis integrates perspectives from digital activism studies, social protest theory and social media behavior, particularly concepts such as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Paolo Gerbaudo's choreography of assembly. The findings suggest that social media platforms contribute significantly to the visibility and coordination of protest movements, while simultaneously facilitating symbolic forms of participation shaped by visibility, emotional discourse and platform-specific dynamics. Moreover, the paper argues that online engagement may involve unintended consequences such as polarization, hostile interactions and performative behavior. By applying DDE to digital activism within the Romanian context, the study contributes to the growing literature on social media activism, symbolic participation and contemporary socio-political behavior in digital environments.

Keywords: Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE), digital activism, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social protest, Romanian activism.

1. Introduction

Contemporary social protest is no longer limited to physical action and traditional forms of mobilization, as social media platforms are increasingly influencing socio-political life and civic engagement. Consequently, digital activism has become a relevant field of study for understanding contemporary political communication, online participation and user behavior within digital environments. However, the growing visibility of online activism can raise ethical questions regarding the intentions and unintended consequences of digital participation. Therefore, the research questions of this paper are (1) *How can the Doctrine of Double Effect be applied to contemporary forms of Romanian pro-Palestine digital activism on social media?* and (2) *How do social media platforms influence symbolic participation within Romanian pro-Palestine digital activism?* The paper contributes to the growing literature on digital activism by combining ethical analysis with perspectives on digital participation and symbolic engagement. Moreover, it

[1] Acknowledgments: This research was conducted as part of The Special Scholarship for Scientific Activity awarded by Babeș-Bolyai University for the 2025-2026 academic year.

highlights the importance of examining social media environments in order to better understand contemporary socio-political behavior and patterns of digital participation.

The Romanian context was selected because, although Romania is not directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, growing online engagement within global humanitarian causes has been observed in recent years, particularly pro-Palestinian activism across social media platforms. The research does not aim to provide a political, military or international conflict analysis, nor does it seek to promote or invalidate either the pro-Palestine movement itself or the individuals involved in these forms of activism. Moreover, the paper does not evaluate the legitimacy of the broader political conflict or of the political cause itself. Instead, the analysis adopts an interpretative and analytical perspective focused on observing participation and engagement within social media platforms, as well as the ethical implications associated with these forms of digital activism.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE)

The Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE) has mostly been discussed in fields such as war ethics, political debates, medicine and humanitarian intervention. The doctrine argues that an action that produces both good and harmful consequences can be morally allowed under certain conditions.[2] For the Doctrine of Double Effect to work, it must be possible to clearly distinguish between actions that use harm as a direct means to achieve a goal and actions that produce harm only as a side effect.[3]

Michael Walzer explains DDE as a rule of law that says noncombatants must not be directly targeted at any time. First highlighted by Catholic casuists in the Middle Ages, the doctrine encompasses morality as a central characteristic. Walzer further highlights the morality within the concept, underlining certain conditions which might allow the performance of an act likely to have negative consequences. Moral evaluation of an action depends not only on its outcomes, but also on the nature of the act and the intention behind it. An action must be legitimate or morally neutral, and the actor must aim at a morally acceptable objective rather than at the harmful consequence. Any negative effect should occur as an unintended side effect rather than to achieve the desired result. At the same time, the expected good must be significant enough to justify allowing the harmful outcome.[4]

In moral theory, an action is considered voluntary when it is performed knowingly and intentionally. Lack of knowledge can change how an action is understood. If a person does not know certain details about what they are doing, but would have acted in the same way if they had known, the act can be described as non-voluntary. Non-voluntary acts are actions where external circumstances influence how a person carries out their intentions. In contrast, an action is involuntary when a person would not have acted in that way had they been aware of the real meaning or consequences. Therefore, this distinction shows that knowledge plays a key role in

[2] Lawrence Masek, "Intentions, Motives and The Doctrine of Double Effect", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60, no. 240 (2010): 567, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40660454.
[3] Richard Hull, "Deconstructing the Doctrine of Double Effect", *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3, no. 2 (2000): 196, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27504131.
[4] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars. A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 151-153.

moral responsibility. However, ignorance doesn't always remove responsibility. For instance, when a person avoids knowing relevant information or chooses not to reflect on the consequences of their action, that ignorance itself can be considered voluntary. Consequently, intention and awareness are key elements in evaluating moral responsibility, which is central to DDE.[5]

The doctrine is tied to the just war theory and, although it is one of the most used formulations in war ethics and international relations studies, it is not without fault. The main problem with it is that it can be too weak in protecting civilians. Harm may be considered acceptable if it is not directly intended, even if the person knows it will likely happen as a side effect of their action. However, critics argue that this is not enough. It is not sufficient for someone to simply not intend to harm civilians; they should also actively try to avoid harming them. The doctrine focuses too much on intention and not enough on the responsibility to reduce damage.[6] Within this debate, Warren S. Quinn explains the role of intention in DDE by introducing the concept of agency. On one hand, in cases of direct agency, the victim's suffering contributes to achieving the goal, making the person part of the strategy. On the other hand, in cases of indirect agency, harm may be anticipated, but it doesn't play a role in achieving the intended outcome. When a person is deliberately involved in a harmful process to serve a purpose, they are treated as a means to that end. This reflects a Kantian understanding of respect for persons: individuals have moral value and should not be used for goals they do not share, especially when their fundamental rights are affected. From this perspective, the structure of intention reveals whether a person is being respected or used instrumentally.[7]

In contemporary social protests, in particular in digital activism, user behavior on social media platforms is often driven by intentions and sustained through consistent engagement. Moreover, social media user behavior may be influenced by social dynamics, socialization and self-presentation.[8] Particularly within digital activism, actions such as sharing content are repeated and socially driven, raising the question of whether they reflect genuine commitment or may suggest forms of performative participation. In consequence, especially as such actions could result in unintended effects, the analysis of intention and consequences through the DDE model is essential for the study of digital activism.

2.2. The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in Digital Environments

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) refers to the feeling of anxiety that arises when individuals believe that others have meaningful or rewarding experiences without them. It is linked to a state of worry, regret and social exclusion, as people fear being left out of events or interactions. Unlike simple regret, which appears after realizing a different choice would have been

[5] Anna Bogatyńska-Kucharska, "The Doctrine of Double Effect: A Comparison of the Version of Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Accounts as Formulated by Joseph Mangan and Joseph Boyle", *Forum Philosophicum* 25, no. 2 (2020): 276, 10.35765/forphil.2020.2502.18.

[6] Steven Lee, "Double effect, double intention, and asymmetric warfare", *Journal of Military Ethics* 3, no. 3 (2004): 234-235, https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570410006183.

[7] Warren S. Quinn, "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect", *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (1989): 349-351, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265475.

[8] Mohammad Mehrabioun, "A multi-theoretical view on social media continuance intention: Combining theory of planned behavior, expectation-confirmation model and consumption values", *Digital Business* 4, no. 1 (2024): 2-3, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.digbus.2023.100070.

better, FOMO has a strong social dimension; it is driven by social comparison and by the desire to belong.[9]

FOMO also has a substantial psychological dimension, which can by understood by dividing the concept into two main categories. Firstly, *state-FOMO* represents the feeling of missing moment-to-moment events. It is usually associated with offline individual behavior. Secondly, *trait-FOMO* stands for the sensation of missing out on a rewarding experience. This category is usually associated with the online environment.[10] FOMO existed even before the rise of social media, as individuals often experienced anxiety when they were unable to participate in important events. However, the development of social platforms has significantly intensified FOMO; the constant flow of new content and constant online interaction reduce the possibility of emotional detachment, making FOMO more persistent than in offline contexts.[11] Moreover, in online contexts, individuals may place importance on the lives and opinions of those within their social circle. Therefore, it is important to highlight the connection between FOMO, social media behavior and social influence. Social media provides constant visibility into others' experiences, which encourages comparison and a desire to stay connected and informed. This dynamic creates social pressure to remain involved, contributing to the development of FOMO.[12]

Social media dynamics have been studied more in recent years, given the development of technology and the rise of social platforms. Moreover, social platforms often create visible negative side effects, which have been researched through the lens of psychology and behavioral studies.[13] Particularly, FOMO is considered part of the dark side of social media, and it is linked to compulsive social media use. FOMO can motivate individuals to remain constantly connected to the social media platforms they use, in order to avoid feelings of anxiety about missing experiences that others are having and sharing online. The desire to stay updated reduces the discomfort associated with being left out and encourages continuous engagement within digital spaces.[14]

3. Contemporary Social Protest and Digital Activism

Social protest refers to collective action that arises in response to perceived injustice or unfair decisions made by authorities. These actions aim to challenge existing conditions and

[9] Mohammed Kaddouhah, "An economic definition of 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO)", Finance Research Letters 63, no. 1 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.frl.2024.105344.

[10] Mustafa Saritepeci and Muhammed Furkan Kurnaz, "Antecedents and consequences of FoMO for neuroticism, openness and social influence: Investigating the moderating effect", *Personality and Individual Differences* 225 (2024): 1-3, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2024.112657.

[11] Julia Brailovskaia and Jürgen Margraf, "From fear of missing out (FoMO) to addictive social media use: The role of social media flow and mindfulness", *Computers in Human Behavior* 150 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107984.

[12] Saritepeci and Kurnaz, "Antecedents and consequences of FoMO", 1-3.

[13] Anushree Tandon, Amandeep Dhir, Shalini Talwar, Puneet Kaur, Matti Mäntymäki, "Social media induced fear of missing out (FoMO) and phubbing: Behavioural, relational and psychological outcomes", *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 174 (2022): 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121149

[14] Fauzia Jabeen, Anushree Tandon, Juthamon Sithipolvanichgulc, Shalini Srivastava, Amandeep Dhir, "Social media-induced fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media fatigue: The role of narcissism, comparison and disclosure", *Journal of Business Research* 159 (2023): 1-2, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113693.

promote social change, including reducing inequality or protecting cultural and social practices.[15] Moreover, protest demonstrations reveal the interest, identities and concerns that shape the political life and public debates.[16] Social protesting can also be understood as a form of social action, which refers to activities that benefit not only individuals, but also the communities they belong to. This concept includes different types of engagement, such as political participation, involvement in social causes, volunteering, community service and participation in civic organizations. In consequence, various terms are often used interchangeably to describe social action, including social participation and civic engagement.[17]

Paolo Gerbaudo argues that social media plays an important role in organizing contemporary protests through what he calls a *choreography of assembly*. According to this perspective, digital platforms help guide and coordinate collective gatherings by directing participants toward specific protest events, providing suggestions about how they should act, constructing emotional narratives that encourage people to come together in public spaces. Based on this view, social media is closely connected to physical protest, as online engagement helps prepare and support face-to-face gatherings, rather than replacing them. Consequently, contemporary forms of protest communication, specifically through social media platforms, applications and messages are linked to the acts of choreography, which require setting the scene and a metaphorical script of people's physical assembling in public spaces.[18]

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design in order to examine the ethical implications of digital activism through the lens of the Doctrine of Double Effect. The research focuses on how intentions, forms of participation and potential unintended consequences are reflected in protest behavior in the digital environment, particularly social media based.

The analytical framework combines elements of political theory, digital media analysis and ethical aspects. An interpretative approach is integrated in order to understand how online actions and behavior can be morally evaluated, depending on intention and outcome. Simultaneously, the research is exploratory, given the fact that the application of DDE to digital activism, particularly in the Romanian context, is relatively limited in the scientific literature. In addition, a descriptive part is included, with the aim of identifying patterns of engagement and categorizing them, before their ethical evaluation. Additionally, while the research does not aim to develop a primary comparative analysis, comparative aspects and observations are integrated in the case study where relevant, especially in relation to different forms of digital content, audience reactions and social media platform-specific elements.

[15] L. Tilly, "Social Protest, History of," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Pergamon, 2001), 14397, https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/02726-1.
[16] Peter S. Bearman and Kevin D. Everett, "The structure of social protest, 1961-1983", *Social Networks* 15 (1993): 172, https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/social-networks/vol/15/issue/2.
[17] Orna Braun-Lewensohn, "Sense of Coherence, Values, Youth Involvement, Civic Efficacy and Hope: Adolescents During Social Protest", *Social Indicators Research* 128 (2015): 661, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1049-8.
[18] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* 40.

4.2. Data Selection and Method

The researched material consists of a qualitative selection of social media content related to pro-Palestine digital activism in Romania. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok contribute to shaping political interest and civic engagement in offline, as well as online contexts.[19] Therefore, the dataset includes both text and visual forms of online communication, such as posts, symbolic images, visual materials and user interactions collected from social platforms, specifically Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. In addition, relevant parts of comments sections are also included in order to observe how the audience engages with the content.

It is important to mention that each social media platform functions differently and users are able to engage differently within the various platforms. For example, user behavior on Facebook is shaped by perceived audience and social norms. Facebook has been described as a general-purpose platform where political expression is not the primary function, which may initially discourage users from engaging in explicit political discussions. However, user behavior is shaped by perceived audience and exposure to content. When users observe increasing amounts of political content, social norms may emerge to encourage participation.[20] In the context of this research, these dynamics are relevant, as such social norms can generate pressure to engage, which may be interpreted through concepts such as FOMO and performative participation. Therefore, Facebook was selected as a relevant platform for this study.

Regarding Instagram and TikTok, research suggests that these platforms play an important role in increasing political interest.[21] As a visual-based platform, Instagram has the capacity to influence the formation of shared narratives and to facilitate dissemination of activist messages.[22] In the case of TikTok, the concept of *playful activism* identified in the existing literature is relevant. TikTok's culture of imitation and competition encourages users to participate in political and social issues through the use creation and dissemination of short-form content, more specifically looping videos. Although playful activism transforms the repetitive behavior associated to TikTok into forms of political expression, making participation more accessible and relatable across broader audiences[23], in the context of the present study, this can also be linked to performative forms of engagement. Similar to previous studies examining pro-Palestine digital movements and activism, especially on social platforms, this research applies a purposive sampling approach.[24] This is preferred in order to identify analytically relevant patterns of digital engagement, rather than formulating a quantitative analysis.

The analysis follows a structured process aimed at examining patterns of digital engagement across the selected social media content. The first stage consists of identifying and

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[19] Yunita Sari, Suyato Suyato, Budi Mulyono, Mukhamad Muridono, "Generation Z Instagram Activism: Between Slacktivism And Online Civic Engagement In Indonesia's Democracy", *Journal of Governance and Local Politics* 7, no. 2 (2025): 276, https://journal.unpacti.ac.id/index.php/JGLP/article/view/2307.

[20] Shelley Boulianne, Christian P. Hoffmann, and Michael Bossetta, "Social media platforms for politics: A comparison of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Snapchat, and WhatsApp", *New Media & Society* 27, no. 11 (November 2025): 6024, https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241262415.

[21] Sari *et al.*, "Between Slacktivism And Online Civic Engagement", 276.

[22] Sari *et al.*, "Between Slacktivism And Online Civic Engagement", 275.

[23] Laura Cervi and Tom Divon, "Playful Activism: Memetic Performances of Palestinian Resistance in TikTok #Challenges", *Social Media + Society*, special issue "Tiktok and Social Movements" (2023): 1, https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231157607.

[24] Cervi and Divon, "Playful Activism", 5.

collecting relevant content from Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. The selection of data follows several criteria, including the thematic relevance, as the content must directly reflect the subject of the research. Moreover, the level of visibility and engagement is relevant, as well as the diversity of sources, to ensure analytical diversity. However, the analysis is not based entirely on visibility, virality and reach, as the study prioritizes content that allows the identification of relevant patterns of symbolic communication and other key themes. Following the selection process, the material is examined in order to identify relevant themes and patterns.

Given the nature of social media environments, it is acknowledged that specific factors from social platforms, such as certain algorithms, may influence both the creation and the visibility of the content. However, while these aspects are considered when interpreting the data, they do not represent the primary focus of the analysis. Moreover, as each social media platforms has different dynamics, the selection process varied. In the case of Facebook and Instagram, the analysis focuses mostly on public pages and relatively visible activists accounts and posts connected to the topic. In contrast, in the case of TikTok, activism appears more decentralized and less dependent on clearly identifiable pro-Palestine Romanian activist pages, although limited such pages could be identified. Therefore, the material form TikTok specifically contains also content created by individual users, selected based on thematic relevance and specific social media elements, such as hashtags and visibility.

5. Case Study: Pro-Palestine Digital Activism in Romania

5.1. Context

The research focuses on the forms of digital activism that emerged following the escalation of violence in October 2023, marked by the Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent military response in Gaza. These events were followed by an increase in civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure and large-scale displacement, which contributed to a larger humanitarian crisis. In response to these events, widespread public reactions emerged globally, including protests.[25] In this context, the present study focuses specifically on the social media environment and on the forms of digital engagement that developed in the aftermath of these events. The analysis is aimed at the Romanian context, examining how users engage in pro-Palestine movements across social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Among the most visible activist-oriented pages identified during the research was Romania Palestine Solidarity (RPS), which has accounts across Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. As of May 2026, the page had approximately 26,000 followers on Facebook[26], nearly 19,000 followers on Instagram[27] and around 7,000 followers on TikTok.[28] Another relevant example identified during the analysis was Queers for Palestine Romania (QPR), which has both Facebook

[25] Ali Haif Abbas, Omar Ali Wally Atatfa, Sarah Hazim Mohammed, Enas Naji Kadim, "Legitimation and de-legitimation of American pro-Gaza student protests: A critical discourse analysis", *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 12 (2025): 1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.102076.

[26] Solidaritate România-Palestina, Facebook page, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/RomaniaPalestineSolidarity.

[27] romania_palestine_solidarity, Instagram profile, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/romania_palestine_solidarity/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet.

[28] solidaritate_ro_ps, TikTok profile, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.tiktok.com/@solidaritate_ro_ps.

and Instagram accounts. As of May 2026, the page had approximately 84 followers on Facebook[29] and around 2,300 followers on Instagram.[30] In addition to these more visible activist pages, the analysis also considered smaller pages, public posts and comment sections related to the Palestinian cause in Romanian online environments. Comment sections especially were relevant for observing audience reactions, disagreements, solidarity practices and forms of online polarization surrounding pro-Palestine activism in Romania. Moreover, in the case of TikTok, the analysis relied significantly on content produced by individual users. Compared to Facebook and Instagram, Romanian pro-Palestine activism on TikTok appeared less dependent on more clearly identifiable activist pages and more decentralized through hashtag usage, short-form content and particularly user-generated protest content. Consequently, individual user participation represented an important component of the analyzed material on the platform.

5.2. Forms of Digital Engagement in Pro-Palestine Romanian Online Activism

5.2.1. Hashtags, Slogans and Emotional Discourse

Hashtags are a common element of communication on social media platforms nowadays, especially in the context of online activism. They are used to spread ideas around specific topics and gather similar topic under the same concept, preceded by the hash sign "#".

In the case of Pro-Palestinian Romanian online activism, hashtags were identified as relevant in spreading and highlighting certain ideas across Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. Among the frequently used hashtags were *#FreePalestine*, *#Palestine*, *#BoycottIsrael*, *#CeasefireNow.* These hashtags appeared across different forms of content, including protest announcements, visual posts, short-form videos and even comment sections. These elements contributed to the creation of recognizable narratives of solidarity within the Palestinian cause in Romanian online spaces. Through these forms of discourse, the Palestinian cause was framed through emotional and humanitarian narratives aimed at encouraging solidarity, donations and online engagement. Emotional engagement was also visible in audience interactions, for instance, through supportive comments, solidarity messages and emotional reactions expressed through hashtags.

5.2.2. Symbolic Communication

In terms of symbolism and communication, beyond captions and written forms of media engagement, various posts, comments and visual materials relied on symbols, emojis and specific visual elements in order to express solidarity or identification with the movement. These symbols have been observed across the selected social media platforms, often accompanying hashtags, slogans and protest-related content or audience interaction. On the Facebook and Instagram pages of RPS, peace-related symbolism is frequent in both posts and in audience reactions, especially through emojis.

[29] Queers for Palestine România, Facebook page, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/queersforpalestinero.

[30] Queers_for_palestine, Instagram profile, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/queers_for_palestine?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet&igsh=ZDNlZDc0MzIxNw==.

One element is the dove symbol, which is commonly used in peace movements. Although the dove is considered the universal symbol of peace, it also carries specific meaning within the Palestinian cause. It is inspired from the Palestinian culture, where it often appears alongside the olive branch, reflecting hope, freedom and peace in a setting characterized by struggle.[31]

Another visible and relevant element is the watermelon symbol, which appeared in posts, captions, comments and even in usernames across different social media platforms (Figure 1). The watermelon emoji was especially visible on TikTok and Instagram, where users integrated it into captions, profile names and comment sections.[32] According to explanations offered by the Romania Palestine Solidarity website, the watermelon became associated with Palestinian resistance and symbolism after public displays of the Palestinian flag were reportedly restricted during the 1967 occupation of Palestinian territories. Consequently, the watermelon became an alternative visual symbol due to the similarity between the colors of the fruit and those of the Palestinian.[33] In addition, this interpretation was also reflected in academic literature about the topic of symbolism and the Palestinian cause. According to Ilhaam Khan, the watermelon has functioned as a visual metaphor for the Palestinian flag, as well as a symbol of solidarity and resistance, specifically within online environments after 2023. In terms of color and shapes, the flag represents three horizontal black lines, as well as well as white and green, and a red triangle. Moreover, besides the colors, the red triangle can be seen as a visual counterpart in the watermelon edge.[34] The increasing visibility of the symbol on social media platforms also illustrates how digital activism relies on simplified and easy to recognize visuals, which spread easily across online communities.

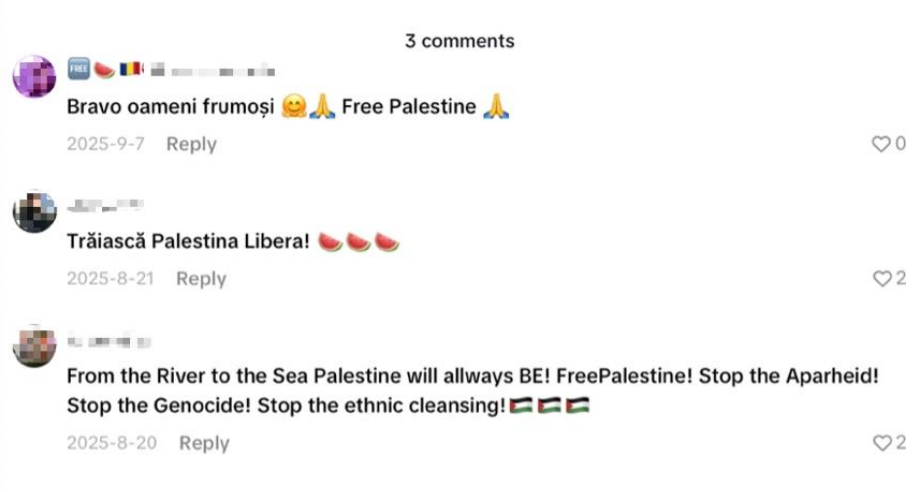
[31] Morgan Totah, "5 Symbols of Palestinian Resistance and Liberation," *Handmade Palestine*, January 14, 2025, https://handmadepalestine.com/blogs/news/5-symbols-of-palestinian-resistance-and-liberation?srsltid=AfmBOoqq4cxsDPZfW7vIdYdSHGdR50Tid2_4d1wc1_ta7rICEBf7bH0R.

[32] Solidaritate_ro_ps, TikTok profile.

[33] Solidaritate România-Palestina, "Cum a devenit pepenele verde un simbol al rezistenței palestiniene," *Solidaritate România-Palestina*, June 11, 2021, https://solidaritateromaniapalestinaorg.wordpress.com/2021/06/11/cum-a-devenit-pepenele-verde-un-simbol-al-rezistentei-palestiniene/.

[34] Ilhaam Khan and Deirdre Pretorius, "Seeds of Freedom: The Watermelon in Palestine Posters," paper presented at the 18th DEFSA Conference, *Design+ Disruptions, Realities, Futures*, September 18-19, 2025, 680-681, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.defsa.org.za/system/tdf/downloads/2017conference/Seeds%2520of%2520freedom.pdf%3Ffile%3D1%26type%3Dnode%26id%3D539%26force%3D1&ved=2ahUKEwjqyfHXp8qUAxWY2QIHHSnGNhkQFnoECBcQAQ&usg=AOvVaw2ivCMdQsMRUErzGnf8lWmf.

Figure 1. TikTok comments expressing solidarity, using the Palestinian flag and the watermelon emoji.



Source: *Solidaritate România-Palestina*, TikTok, accessed May 2026.

5.2.3. Choreography of Assembly and Mobilization

Another pattern identified through the analyzed social media content was the use of online communication for protest mobilization and collective coordination. In this context, the previously discussed concept of choreography of assembly, formulated by Paolo Gerbaudo, is relevant.[35] Based on this term, social media platforms are not used only for spreading information, but also to guide and coordinate participation in physical protest events. Through posts and visual materials before, during and after the offline protests, social media became connected to forms of physical gathering and collective participation.

On RPS pages, multiple posts functioned as direct call to protest and public mobilization. These included announcements regarding demonstrations organized in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, such as protests related to Nakba Day on 16 May 2026, Palestinian Prisoner's Day on 18 April 2026 and Palestinian Land Day on 29 March 2026.[36] The posts frequently encouraged users to participate physically in demonstrations and share protest announcements. In many cases, the posts combined slogans, hashtags and the appeal to emotion and solidarity with symbolic communication, including emojis.

The role of the choreography of assembly was also visible on the social media pages of Queers for Palestine Romania, where protest-related posts included direct calls to participate in demonstrations, as well as protest chants and slogans indented to be used during public gatherings (Figure 2). The chants posted were in Romanian, English and Arabic and were accompanied by the watermelon symbol. Some examples include "Ceasefire now!", "When people

[35] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* 40.
[36] Solidaritate România-Palestina, Facebook page.

are occupied, resisting is justified!" and "With our souls, with our blood, we will defend you Palestine!".[37]

Figure 2. List of protest chants.

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Source: *Queers for Palestine România*, Facebook, accessed May 2026

Platform differences were also identified in the case of the choreography of assembly. While Facebook and Instagram relied more on posts distributed by activist pages and organizations, TikTok appeared more decentralized and strongly dependent on user-generated participation. In the case of TikTok, individual users posted protest-related videos, protest footage and direct calls to participate in demonstrations, accompanied by specific music, sounds and hashtags. Through these forms of communication, social media platforms functioned as instruments for organizing and coordinating physical collective action related to the Palestinian cause in Romania.

Another form of mobilization observed throughout the analysis was connected to the boycott practices and consumer behavior. Although this aspect does not fully correspond to Gerbaudo's concept of the choreography of assembly centered around physical protest

[37] Queers for Palestine România, "SCANDĂRI," Facebook post, October 12, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=122180883986190322&set=pb.61555709677145.-2207520000.

gatherings, it similarly suggests the use of social media in the context of online movements to encourage forms of offline behavior. For example, on Instagram, the RPS page has a dedicated boycott highlight, which contains the brands targeted by the boycott campaigns (Figure 3).[38]

Figure 3. Instagram story promoting boycott lists



Source: *Solidaritate România-Palestina,* Instagram, accessed May 2026.

In addition, pages such as Boycott Romania were identified on Instagram, focusing specifically on promoting boycott practices related to the Palestinian cause. However, this page appears currently inactive, with only 3 followers and no posts (Figure 4).[39]

[38] Queers_for_palestine, Instagram profile.
[39] Boycottromania, Instagram profile, accessed May 7, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/boycottromania/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet.

Figure 4. Instagram account, included as an example of limited audience reach.



Source: *BoycottRomania*, Instagram, accessed May 2026.

5.2.4. Audience Dynamics

What also stood out during the analysis was the diversity of audience reactions and engagement patterns across the selected social media platforms. Comment sections, reactions and user interactions revealed both solidarity and strong disagreement, depending on the platform, audience and specific context of the post.

The most conflictual audience reactions were observed on Facebook, particularly in the comment sections of the RPS page. While supportive comments and solidarity messages were also present, many reactions expressed opposition toward pro-Palestine activism. Some users associated the movement with terrorism, questioning the legitimacy of the information shared by activist pages or referred to the content as "propaganda". Other comments included irony, sarcasm and trivial or unrelated reactions, as well as mocking GIFs and the "laughing" Facebook reaction. Moreover, offensive language was used towards both the activists and the other users participating in the discussion. In some cases, user questioned the authenticity of posts referring to civilian victims or humanitarian sufferings, while others defended the activist discourse and criticized Israeli military actions.

In contrast, audience dynamics on Instagram appeared comparatively more supportive and less conflictual. According to the analyzed material, the majority of the comments on the RPS Instagram page expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause through supportive messages, emotional reactions and symbolic emojis, although exceptions and disagreements were still present.

TikTok audience dynamics are more mixed and decentralized. While supportive comments and solidarity messages were observed, TikTok also included sarcastic reactions, ironic remarks and comments unrelated directly to the protest content itself. In addition, TikTok relied on platform-specific aspects, such as sounds, music, short-form videos and emotionally engaging visual formats, specifically in posts shared by individual users. Compared to Facebook and Instagram, TikTok interactions appeared more influenced by the entertainment-oriented platform culture, which could potentially indicate more performative forms of engagement.

6. Ethical Analysis and Discussion

6.1. Intentions and Consequences

As explained earlier in the theoretical framework of the paper, DDE is based on the distinction between intended consequences and harmful side effects that may emerge indirectly from an action. Therefore, the doctrine becomes relevant in situations where actions motivated by morally accepted intentions may also generate unintended negative consequences.[40] Many forms of analyzed pro-Palestine Romanian digital activism appeared to be motivated by humanitarian concern, solidarity and the desire to raise awareness regarding the situation of Palestinian civilians. This was visible through protest mobilization, donation campaigns, emotional discourse, calls for solidarity and the circulation of humanitarian narratives centered around civilian suffering and destruction. Through the lens of DDE, these forms of participation may be interpreted as actions guided by morally significant intentions, particularly in cases where users aim to express solidarity, encourage civic engagement or support humanitarian causes.

However, the analyzed material also illustrates how digital activism may generate unintended consequences within online environments. Specifically on Facebook, audience interactions became conflictual and polarized, including insults, sarcasm, hostile exchanges and accusations of propaganda or misinformation directed both toward activists and towards other users participating in discussions. Although these effects do not necessarily represent the indented objective of activist communication online, they may emerge as secondary consequences of the emotionally charged discourse and highly visible political content shared through social media platforms.

In addition, the structure and specific dynamics of these social media platforms may intensify the effects. The quick sharing of emotionally engaging content, combined with constant interaction and visibility, can contribute to emotional escalation and the amplification of tensions. Moreover, within digital environments, activists and users usually have limited control over how content is interpreted or discussed by larger audiences. Consequently, even when online participation is motivated by solidarity and humanitarian concern, the resulting forms of engagement may create ethical questions regarding the relationship between intention, visibility and social consequences.

6.2. Symbolic Participation and Performative Engagement

The concept of FOMO, specifically trait-FOMO, may also be relevant in the context of contemporary digital activism and social media participation. As discussed in the theoretical section of the paper, trait-FOMO refers to the persistent sensation of missing out on rewarding experiences or meaningful social interactions, being frequently associated with online environments and social media engagement.[41] In digital contexts, this can be understood through the example of individuals focusing intensively on the activities, opinions and forms of participation visible within their social circles and online communities.

In relation to the present case study, FOMO could represent a relevant interpretative perspective for understanding certain forms of online engagement connected to pro-Palestine digital activism in Romanian online spaces. Within highly visible online environments, with large

[40] Masek, "Intentions, Motives and the Doctrine of Double Effect," 567.
[41] Saritepeci and Kurnaz, "Antecedents and consequences of FoMO", 1-3.

numbers of reactions and other forms of engagement, participation may sometimes be influenced not only by genuine identification or deep political understanding, but also by the desire to feel included in the online conversations, social groups or collective trends on social media platforms.

Engagement decisions on social media may not always be fully conscious, critically reflected upon or entirely assumed at an individual level, as participation can be influenced by factors such as FOMO. Consequently, some forms of digital participation can be interpreted as performative types of engagement, where users engage in visible online actions, partly because these actions are constantly observed, shared and socially reinforced within digital environments. Therefore, not only activists or content creators become part of the performative act, but also the audience itself, as users can experience forms of perceived or self-imposed social pressure to participate, react, repost or publicly position themselves in relation to visible online movements.

The present research does not claim that all forms of engagement identified within the analyzed material were motivated primarily by FOMO or performative intentions. However, FOMO might function as a possible interpretative factor capable of influencing certain forms of online participation and engagement within contemporary digital activism. This idea is important in online contexts, because users are constantly exposed to visible forms of collective participation, emotional discourse and easily shareable activist content.

A similar perspective is the concept of state-FOMO, also discussed in the theoretical framework of the paper. It refers to moment-based situations and offline social experiences.[42] In the context of digital activism and protest mobilization, this perspective helps explain why some individuals become motivated to participate physically in protests, demonstrations or collective gatherings after repeated exposure to highly visible forms of online mobilization and solidarity discourse. Additionally, this can be linked to Gerbaudo's choreography of assembly,[43] since digital platforms also contribute to the coordination and emotional encouragement of physical collective participation.

7. Conclusions

This research examined contemporary forms of Romanian pro-Palestine digital activism through the lens of the Doctrine of Double Effect, while also exploring the role of symbolic participation within social media environments. The analysis highlighted that contemporary digital activism is shaped not only by humanitarian intentions, solidarity and civic engagement, but also by the dynamics of visibility, emotional discourse and platform-specific forms of participation.

The research questions were answered through the findings, which suggest that social media platforms contribute significantly to the organization, visibility and circulation of contemporary protest movements, both online and offline. Through hashtags, symbolic communication, protest mobilization and audience interaction, digital environments facilitate collective participation and the dissemination of activist narratives. At the same time, the study highlighted how online engagement may also involve unintended consequences, including polarization, hostile interactions and performative forms of participation, as well as forms of engagement potentially influenced by FOMO, visibility and social pressure within digital environments.

[42] Saritepeci and Kurnaz, "Antecedents and consequences of FoMO", 1-3.
[43] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets. Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, 40.

Moreover, the paper contributes to the growing literature on digital activism by applying DDE to contemporary forms of online protest participation, particularly within the Romanian context, which remains relatively underexplored in existing literature. The research also emphasizes the importance of studying social media environments in order to better understand contemporary socio-political behavior and patterns of symbolic engagement.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. Although the research attempted to maintain an objective and analytical perspective, studies focused on highly visible humanitarian and political movements may involve a certain degree of bias, particularly within emotionally charged online environments. Furthermore, the paper does not aim to evaluate the legitimacy of the broader political conflict or of the movement itself, but rather to examine patterns of participation and communication associated with digital activism. In addition, the analysis was qualitative and exploratory, relying on selected social media content rather than quantitative measurements or direct participant perspectives.

Lastly, future research could expand this topic through interviews with activists, page administrators and protest participants in order to better understand individual motivations, perceptions and forms of engagement within digital activism. Additional research could also focus more extensively on the role of algorithms, platform structures and visibility mechanisms in shaping online activism and symbolic participation. Comparative studies between platforms, countries or different activist movements could further contribute to understanding how digital protest behavior develops across different online and socio-political contexts.

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From Emotion To Political Mobilisation: Fear, Anger, Hope And Indignation In Romanian Electoral Discourse

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Abstract. Contemporary political communication increasingly relies on articulating affective dimensions to produce meaning, identification, and electoral mobilisation. This article examines how fear, anger, indignation, and hope are discursively constructed and deployed in the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential election campaign. Using a qualitative research design based on deductive–inductive content analysis and a structured coding framework, the study compares the discourse of six relevant political actors: Călin Georgescu, George Simion, Elena Lasconi, Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă, and Mircea Geoană. The findings show that emotions do not function in isolation but are articulated into coherent causal sequences and discursive repertoires. The study identifies three main types of affective repertoires: the sovereigntist repertoire (centred on fear and anger/indignation directed against the system and converted into the hope of renewal); the reformist-institutional repertoire (centred on moral indignation at corruption and the risks of democratic decline, oriented towards reform); and the stability-and-continuity repertoire (institutionalised fear and hope anchored in predictability and security). The article argues that hope fulfils an essential structural function of discursive closure, offering an optimistic perspective on the future regardless of the candidate's ideological positioning.

Keywords: political communication, electoral discourse, affective repertoires, affective intelligence, 2024 presidential election, Romania

1. Introduction

Contemporary political communication takes place within a public sphere characterised by intense competition for attention, the accelerated circulation of information, and the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping political opinions. In this context, transmitting information or formulating programmatic arguments alone is no longer sufficient to secure electoral support. Political messages must produce meaning, identification, and affective responses. Emotion thus becomes a resource through which political actors interpret reality, define threats, assign responsibility, and construct perspectives on the future.

This approach is part of the expanding body of research on the role of emotions in political behaviour and communication. The affective intelligence theory developed by Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen helps move beyond the model of the exclusively rational citizen by arguing that affective and cognitive processes interact in forming political judgement. Emotion is therefore not the opposite of reason but participates in information selection, the evaluation of political situations, and the orientation of electoral behaviour (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000).

This article focuses on four central emotions—fear, anger, indignation, and hope—as relevant to understanding the affective mechanisms of electoral communication. It treats them as elements of a discursive repertoire through which political actors construct threats, assign responsibility, formulate moral judgements, and project alternatives for the future. The 2024 Romanian presidential election constitutes a relevant case for examining these mechanisms. The electoral competition unfolded against the backdrop of issues such as the war in Ukraine, security, relations with the European Union and NATO, distrust in institutions, corruption, political representation, sovereignty, and national identity. At the same time, digital communication became an important space for circulating and amplifying electoral messages. The first-round results and subsequent debates also highlighted the use of digital platforms and messages tied to geopolitical and security issues.

Against this background, the article proposes a comparative analysis of electoral communication among six actors relevant to the 2024 presidential competition: Călin Georgescu, George Simion, Elena Lasconi, Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă, and Mircea Geoană. This selection allows comparison across actors with different political profiles and legitimising strategies, including candidates associated with populist and sovereigntist discourses, mainstream political actors, and candidates with reformist, institutional, or independent profiles. The analysis therefore highlights not the presence or absence of emotion, but the variations among the affective repertoires used by different political actors.

The research addresses three main dimensions: (1) the frequency and distribution of fear, anger, indignation, and hope in electoral communication; (2) the themes, discursive frames, and actors with which these emotions are associated; and (3) their political functions, particularly mobilisation, the delegitimisation of the opponent, the consolidation of collective identity, the moralisation of conflict, and orientation towards the future.

Building on these premises, the article formulates two research questions:

RQ1**:** How do Romanian political actors construct and deploy fear, anger, indignation, and hope as resources for electoral communication and mobilisation?

RQ2: To what extent do candidates' affective repertoires differ by political positioning and status within the electoral competition?

Through this approach, the study contributes to the literature on political communication and populism in three respects. First, it proposes conceptualising emotion as a discursive repertoire rather than as an isolated phenomenon or a mere rhetorical characteristic. Second, it compares political actors with different political positions and legitimising resources, thereby avoiding an automatic association between emotionality and populism. Third, it examines the relationship between negative and positive emotions and how they may be integrated into a single strategy of electoral mobilisation.

The research employs a qualitative methodology based on deductive–inductive analysis of electoral communication to examine how political emotions are constructed, contextualised, and discursively deployed during the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential election.

The article is structured into six main sections. After the introduction, which presents the study's general framework, the academic rationale for examining affective communication, and its main objectives, the second section reviews the relevant literature on affective intelligence theory, the role of emotions in political discourse, and the specific characteristics of political communication. The third section details the methodological design, the corpus definition, and the

coding framework used for the discourse analysis. The fourth section presents the empirical analysis of the six presidential candidates, illustrating how fear, anger, indignation, and hope are articulated within their mobilisation strategies. The fifth section synthesises the findings and outlines the typologies of affective repertoires identified in the electoral competition. The sixth section presents the conclusions, the study's theoretical contributions.

2. Literature review

Research on political emotions has helped move beyond the assumption that rational information processing predominantly determines political behaviour. Affective Intelligence Theory shows that affective and cognitive processes are interdependent, with emotions shaping attention allocation, the evaluation of political situations, and decision-making (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000, pp. 1–4). Similarly, Nussbaum (2013, pp. 1–24) emphasises the cognitive and evaluative dimensions of emotions and notes that they may have collective objects, such as nations, institutions, social groups, or political projects. Emotion can thus be understood not merely as an individual response but also as a social and discursive phenomenon.

Moving beyond the traditional paradigm that rigidly opposed reason and emotion—often viewing emotions as factors that disrupt logical judgement—Affective Intelligence Theory, developed by George E. Marcus, W. Russell Neuman, and Michael MacKuen (2000), demonstrates that cognitive and affective processes operate in close interaction to help citizens navigate a complex political environment. According to this theory, two principal emotional systems in the human brain guide political behaviour. The Disposition System, driven by positive emotions such as enthusiasm, satisfaction, and pride, monitors familiar environments and routine actions. When candidates or political messages elicit enthusiasm, voters tend to operate on "autopilot", relying on established habits, pre-existing party identities, and decision-making shortcuts. In other words, positive affect reinforces established political loyalties. The Surveillance System, centred on alert-related emotions such as anxiety, fear, and unease, operates as a defensive mechanism. When a new, unexpected, or threatening political scenario emerges, the surveillance system interrupts automatic behaviours, such as routine voting based simply on habit. This anxiety redirects conscious attention to the surrounding environment, making citizens more receptive to new information, more attentive to evaluating alternatives, and more deliberate in managing electoral risks.

The literature indicates that emotions may perform distinct functions: fear is associated with threat and uncertainty, anger with the attribution of responsibility and confrontation, indignation with moral evaluation, and hope with orientation towards an alternative future and the possibility of change (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000; Nussbaum, 2013; Wodak, 2015).

The relationship between emotion and populism has become an important focus of recent research. Populist discourses frequently construct an opposition between "the people" and "the elite" through appeals to fear, anger, and resentment. In contrast, the "politics of fear" may symbolically delineate a "we" perceived as threatened by "others" (Mudde, 2004, pp. 541–543; Wodak, 2015, pp. 1–24). Nevertheless, emotionality is not exclusive to populist discourse. Widmann's (2021, pp. 163–181) analysis, based on a large corpus of political communication from three European countries, identifies differences between populist and mainstream parties primarily in the type and distribution of emotions employed, rather than in their mere presence.

Similarly, Hameleers et al. (2022) suggest that populist and establishment actors may employ fear and anger as competing mobilisation strategies.

Recent literature has also highlighted the need to include positive emotions in analyses of political communication. Bliuc et al. (2026), in a systematic review of research on populism and emotions, show that anger and fear occupy a central position in the existing literature, while emphasising the importance of devoting greater attention to hope and other positive emotions. This observation is relevant to the present study because electoral mobilisation involves not only constructing a threat or identifying an adversary, but also articulating a perspective on the future. From this perspective, fear, anger, and indignation may help construct the problem and assign responsibility, while hope may support projecting an alternative.

An important aspect of recent scholarship concerns the relationship between emotion and the communication environment. The development of digital platforms has transformed the conditions under which political messages are produced, distributed, and received, facilitating direct communication between leaders and the public, message personalisation, and the rapid circulation of emotionally charged content. Research on digital political communication indicates that emotional intensity, personalisation, and direct leader–supporter relationships are recurring features of populist online communication, while affective messages may generate high levels of interaction and engagement (Yilmaz et al., 2026; Hameleers et al., 2024). These findings suggest analysing emotion not only in terms of a message's content but also in relation to the communicative environment in which it circulates.

This perspective is particularly relevant to analysing the 2024 Romanian presidential election, which took place within a highly digitalised media ecosystem and against a geopolitical backdrop shaped by the war in Ukraine. Research on political communication in Central and Eastern Europe indicates that fear and anger may acquire heightened relevance during periods of crisis, becoming integrated into narratives concerning security, sovereignty, and national identity (Hloušek, Brusenbauch Meislová, & Havlík, 2024). In the Romanian case, recent research has identified several recurring fear narratives in electoral communication associated with the war, including scenarios involving conflict escalation, the deployment of Romanian troops to Ukraine, or Romania's direct involvement in the war (Sălcudean, 2026, pp. 213–227).

Accordingly, the existing literature provides a solid foundation for understanding emotion as a resource of political communication, but leaves room for a comparative analysis that examines negative and positive emotions simultaneously, as well as the relationships between them. In particular, an approach is needed that does not automatically associate emotional communication with populism or treat emotions in isolation. Instead, it investigates how they form discursive repertoires adapted to different political actors and contexts. In the Romanian case, this perspective is particularly relevant because the 2024 presidential election brought together issues of security, sovereignty, identity, institutional crisis, and geopolitical orientation within a highly digitalised communication environment.

3. Research Design and Methodology

To examine how emotions are constructed and deployed in Romanian electoral communication, the study adopts a qualitative research design. The qualitative component focuses on the meanings, frames, and discursive relationships through which emotions are constructed (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2018).

The analytical strategy is deductive–inductive. The central emotional categories—fear, anger, indignation, and hope—are established deductively, based on the specialised literature on political emotions and electoral communication. At the same time, the subcategories and contextual codes are developed inductively following an examination of the corpus.

The empirical case is the campaign for the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential election, with the period under analysis spanning 25 October–23 November 2024. This temporal delimitation makes it possible to compare messages produced within a common electoral context and under the same institutional and temporal constraints. The analysis is limited to the first round to maintain comparability among candidates, as the competition's configuration and the function of electoral discourse changed substantially after the first round.

The campaign context is relevant for interpreting emotional appeals, as the electoral competition unfolded against the backdrop of issues such as the war in Ukraine, national security, relations with NATO and the European Union, national sovereignty, corruption, and distrust in institutions. Within this context, six candidates were selected: Călin Georgescu, George Simion, Elena Lasconi, Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă, and Mircea Geoană. The selection seeks to capture variation in political positioning, relationships with the establishment, and forms of claimed legitimacy, without assuming that these actors can be reduced to perfectly homogeneous ideological categories. The value of the comparison lies precisely in the diversity of their political legitimisation repertoires.

The corpus comprises the public communication produced by the six candidates during the period under analysis: public posts on Facebook and X/Twitter, campaign speeches and statements, electoral appearances, video messages published through official channels, and electoral materials published on the candidates' official websites or on the official websites of the political organisations associated with them.

Table 1 Structure of the Analytical Corpus: Political Programmes and Electoral Interventions Analysed (25 October–23 November 2024)

Candidate	Political Programme / National Project	Electoral Interventions Analysed (Collected During the Campaign Period)
Călin Georgescu	Food, Water, Energy – A National Project *(Georgescu, 2024)*	Statements concerning financial support provided to Ukrainian children *(TikTok, 5 Nov. 2024a)* Statements concerning George Simion's candidacy and his relationship with the Social Democratic Party (PSD) *(Facebook, 18 Nov. 2024b)* Interview on peace, sovereignty, and foreign policy *(TVR Info, Nov. 2024c)* Press statements and campaign messages concerning the national economy *(Mediafax, Nov. 2024d)*
George Simion	Simion Plan for România *(Simion, 2024)*	Interview on the diaspora vote and prospects of qualifying for the second round *(News.ro, 20 Nov. 2024a)* Statements concerning administrative reform and reducing the number of party members *(Ziare.com, 21 Nov. 2024b)* Campaign speeches and statements concerning national resources *(AUR Platform / Simion, Nov. 2024c)*
Elena Lasconi	A Romania for Everyone, Not Just for Some! *(Lasconi, 2024)*	Press statements concerning political support and the absence of "backroom deals" *(News.ro, 3 Nov. 2024a)*

		Interview on defending European values and the rule of law *(Europa Liberă, 12 Nov. 2024b)* Debate programme on the fear of extremism and democratic reform *(Euronews România, Nov. 2024c)*
Marcel Ciolacu	The Safe Path for Romania *(Ciolacu, 2024)*	Speech delivered at the London Economic Forum on the diaspora and the labour market *(News.ro, 13 Nov. 2024a)* Official meeting and statements alongside NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte *(PSD, 18 Nov. 2024b)* Press statements on economic stability and pensions *(AGERPRES, Nov. 2024c)*
Nicolae Ciucă	A Prosperous and Secure Romania *(Ciucă, 2024)*	Critical statements concerning political partners – the parable of the Temple *(Financial Intelligence, 15 Nov. 2024a)* Interview on rejecting the nomination of a PSD or AUR prime minister *(News.ro, 19 Nov. 2024b)* Televised interview on campaign attacks and voter mobilisation *(Antena 3 CNN, Nov. 2024c)*
Mircea Geoană	My Commitment to Romania – Real Change *(Geoană, 2024)*	Statements concerning confidence in qualifying and the profile of the independent candidate *(Ziarul de Investigații, 8 Nov. 2024a)* Press conference on regional security and the Republic of Moldova *(Privesc.Eu, 20 Nov. 2024b)* Press statements on technocratic competence and campaign attacks *(AGERPRES, Oct.–Nov. 2024c)*

Source: author's design

The selected materials were included because they represent direct campaign communication produced or disseminated by the candidates during the defined electoral period and address issues relevant to the campaign agenda. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on the discursive construction of emotions within the selected corpus. It does not claim to measure the overall frequency of emotional appeals across the entirety of campaign communication.

The analysis begins with four main emotional categories: fear, anger, indignation, and hope, a conceptual framework grounded in political psychology and affective theory (Brader, 2006; Marcus et al., 2000). Fear is identified through the construction of threats, dangers, losses, or situations of insecurity, including references to war, violence, economic or social collapse, the loss of sovereignty, and a dangerous future (Altheide, 2002). Anger is associated with expressing or stimulating revolt, resentment, confrontation, or explicit rejection of an adversary, and it differs from mere political criticism by its strong affective charge (Valentino et al., 2011). Indignation is coded when a message formulates a negative moral evaluation by referring to injustice, abuse, betrayal, or the violation of values (Haidt, 2012). Hope, by contrast, is associated with constructing a positive future and the possibility of change, reconstruction, prosperity, unity (Just et al., 2007).

To move beyond an analysis limited to the frequency of emotions, each emotional appeal is contextualised with reference to the object of the emotion, the discursive frame, and the communicative function. The analysis therefore examines the targets towards which the emotion is directed—opponents, political parties, institutions, elites, external actors, social groups, or the political community itself—as well as the frames within which it is constructed, such as security,

crisis, corruption, injustice, sovereignty, national identity, the economy, war, democracy, Europe, anti-establishment discourse, or change. At the same time, the analysis is conducted.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis that follows goes beyond identifying individual emotional expressions and examines how emotions combine into recurring discursive configurations. Accordingly, the objective is not to determine which candidate used a particular emotion more frequently, but to identify how emotions were associated with political objects, interpretative frames, and communicative functions. The present analysis is predominantly qualitative, focusing on how emotions are discursively constructed, related to one another, and integrated into the candidates' narrative and ideological frameworks. Consequently, the frequencies and thematic distributions drawn from quantitative analytical reports, particularly those provided by the Association Pro Democracy (APD, 2024), do not form the basis for the classification proposed here; rather, they contextualise and provide empirical support for the observations emerging from the discourse analysis. In other words, quantitative data are used as an element of triangulation: they make it possible to assess the convergence between the qualitative interpretation of affective repertoires and the distribution of particular themes in the corpora analysed by secondary sources.

To ensure the rigour and reproducibility of the qualitative discourse analysis, the data were processed using a structured deductive–inductive coding framework. The primary coding categories were established based on the literature on affective intelligence and crisis communication (Marcus et al., 2000; Wodak, 2015), while the lexical and functional subcategories were derived inductively from the analysed corpus.

Table 2. Qualitative Coding Framework for Affective Repertoires in Electoral Discourse

Emotional category	Discursive indicators (keywords & metaphors)	Emotion's object (target)	Primary discursive function
Fear	War, crisis, collapse, loss of sovereignty, threat, instability, siege	External actors, war, economic instability, loss of identity	Reframing security as an existential crisis; legitimising the need for protection
Anger	Revolt, confrontation, betrayal, struggle, dismantling, scoundrels	Traditional parties, the "system", political elites, the establishment	Polarisation, mobilisation against the opponent, delegitimisation of the political class
Indignation	Corruption, injustice, abuse, theft, lack of dignity, privileges, backroom deals	Corrupt elites, abuses of power, institutional incompetence	Moral evaluation of political conflict; normative demand for integrity and justice
Hope	Renewal, peace, reconstruction, change, future, development, competence	The national community, young people, the national project, democratic reforms	Optimistic projection of the future; offering a solution/alternative to the crisis

Source: Author's design (Brader, 2006; Marcus et al., 2000; Wodak, 2015), based on the preliminary analysis applied to the corpus of speeches and political programmes (Ciolacu,

2024a, 2024b; Ciucă, 2024a, 2024b; Geoană, 2024a, 2024b; Georgescu, 2024a, 2024b; Lasconi, 2024a, 2024b; Simion, 2024a, 2024b).

The analytical corpus was examined at the level of discrete discursive units in which one or more of the four target emotions—fear, anger, indignation, and hope—were explicitly expressed or discursively constructed. Each relevant unit was coded according to five dimensions: (1) the dominant emotion; (2) the linguistic or rhetorical indicators through which it was constructed; (3) its object or target; (4) the contextual frame in which it occurred; and (5) its communicative function. The coding was then compared across candidates to identify recurring emotional configurations rather than isolated instances of emotional language.

4.1. Călin Georgescu

In Călin Georgescu's case, fear occurs frequently and centres on external threats and the possibility of Romania becoming involved in a conflict that does not belong to it. At the same time, anger, also highly prominent, is directed toward the political class and the "system". Indignation extends this construction to the loss of sovereignty, dignity, and decision-making capacity, while hope, likewise prominent, proposes restoring control through economic autonomy, peace, and national renewal (TVR Info, November 2024; Mediafax, November 2024). This observation is supported by the APD (2024) analysis, in which the term "system" emerges as a major axis of electoral discourse, associated in Georgescu's case with change and with the relationship between the global system and the national state. APD also indicates that the terms "sovereign/sovereigntism" account for approximately 5% of the analysed semantic field and are attributed entirely to Georgescu, being correlated with his political and economic programme. Furthermore, on Europe and European values, Georgescu accounts for 14% of coverage of this theme, with the report highlighting, in his case, the cleavage between the European/global system and the national state. The dominant affective configuration can therefore be summarised as Fear → Indignation → Restoration of Control → Hope, within a framework centred on loss, sovereignty, and the recovery of an order perceived as having been lost.

4.2. George Simion

In George Simion's case, fear is highly prominent. It is associated with the risk of losing sovereignty and resources, while anger, also highly prominent, intensifies opposition to adversaries through a confrontational and polarising register. Indignation, likewise highly prominent, attributes responsibility for social and economic difficulties to the political class, while hope transforms dissatisfaction into a promise of renewal and collective mobilisation (Simion, November 2024). This articulation converges with the APD data, which identify "system vs anti-system" as one of the dominant axes of electoral discourse and explicitly associate Simion's case with the notion of the "victim of the system". The report also shows that the notion of "change" is concentrated primarily around Călin Georgescu, George Simion, and Elena Lasconi, with the three accounting collectively for 69% of this component. In the analysis of corruption, which accounts for approximately 8% of the electoral discourse examined, Simion accounts for 6% of references to this theme, including references associated with the expression "national plunder". Accordingly, the dominant configuration, Indignation → Anger → Mobilisation → Hope, highlights the transformation of negative emotions into a resource for political mobilisation.

4.3. Elena Lasconi

In Elena Lasconi's discourse, fear is highly prominent and is constructed through the personification of internal and external threats, such as extremism, geopolitical insecurity, and the risk of democratic backsliding. Anger is moderate and appears primarily as an emotion to be controlled and redirected. In contrast, indignation is highly prominent and focuses on corruption, governance, and everyday problems tied to the cost of living. Hope, likewise highly prominent, functions as a response to these sources of dissatisfaction and is linked to institutional reform, transparency, and democratic values (Euronews România, November 2024). The APD data provide a relevant quantitative reference: corruption accounts for approximately 8% of the discourse analysed. In comparison, Lasconi accounts for 59% of references to this theme, in correlation with terms related to justice and with the system/anti-system variable. At the same time, Lasconi accounts for 31% of the coverage of the theme "Europe and European values", the highest proportion among the candidates analysed by APD. In comparison, Nicolae Ciucă accounts for 22%, Călin Georgescu for 14%, Mircea Geoană for 11%, and Marcel Ciolacu for 9%. These data align with the qualitative observation of indignation around institutional integrity and its transformation into reform-oriented hope. The dominant configuration is therefore Indignation → Reform → Hope, against a backdrop of fear employed to mark democratic and geopolitical risks.

4.4. Marcel Ciolacu

In Marcel Ciolacu's case, fear is moderate and primarily warns against risks associated with political and economic instability. Anger is low to moderate and is used mainly to reject opponents' confrontational discourse. At the same time, indignation is moderate to high and focuses on arrogance, a lack of empathy, and politicians' detachment from citizens' concerns. Hope is highly prominent and is constructed through references to stability, economic performance, and the continuity of development (AGERPRES, November 2024). This orientation is consistent with the APD observation that the term "system", which is highly frequent in electoral discourse, acquires meanings such as stability, continuity, and predictability in the cases of Ciolacu and Nicolae Ciucă, in contrast to the meaning of change associated primarily with Georgescu, Simion, and Lasconi. APD also reports that Ciolacu accounts for 9% of the coverage of the theme "Europe and European values". In this case, the quantitative data do not directly measure emotional intensity but provide a reference point for contextualising the discourse's orientation towards stability and continuity. The dominant configuration can therefore be summarised as Fear → Stability → Hope, in which the proposal of predictability and continuity follows the negative emotion as a solution.

4.5. Nicolae Ciucă

In Nicolae Ciucă's discourse, fear is low and is primarily associated with geopolitical threats, manipulation, and information warfare, being counterbalanced by a rhetoric of resilience and security. Anger is moderate and assumes a function of combative mobilisation. At the same time, indignation is highly prominent and is constructed around the idea of an unfair campaign and attacks directed against the candidate and his party. Hope is highly prominent and is associated with security, responsibility, and the projection of a stable and prosperous Romania (Antena 3

CNN, November 2024). APD data support this orientation: in the system/anti-system analysis, Ciucă, together with Ciolacu, is associated with meanings such as stability, continuity, and predictability, while in the theme "Europe and European values" he accounts for 22% of coverage. Regarding the theme "NATO, peace and war", APD reports 12% of the coverage for Ciucă, while Mircea Geoană accounts for 33%, Elena Lasconi for 24%, and Călin Georgescu for 10%. Accordingly, the configuration Fear/Security → Responsibility → Hope highlights an affective structure in which threat is converted into an appeal for protection, discipline, and stability.

4.6. Mircea Geoană

In Mircea Geoană's case, fear is moderate and constructed by emphasising Romania's vulnerability in an unstable international context. At the same time, anger is moderate to high and directed towards the party system and practices of political patronage. Indignation is highly prominent and is activated by the attacks and alleged attempts at discrediting invoked by the candidate. At the same time, hope is highly prominent and proposes competence, professionalisation, and institutional modernisation as an alternative (AGERPRES, October–November 2024). The APD data are particularly relevant to the security component: within the theme "NATO, peace and war", Geoană accounts for 33% of the coverage, followed by Lasconi with 24%, Ciucă with 12%, and Georgescu with 10%; the report also states that Geoană is the candidate who addresses most extensively the geostrategic and political dimension of Romania's relationship with NATO. On corruption, Geoană accounts for 15% of references to this theme, while on "Europe and European values" he accounts for 11% of the coverage. These quantitative reference points converge with the qualitative observation that negative emotions are converted into a promise of competence and modernisation. The dominant configuration is therefore Vulnerability/Fear → Indignation → Competence → Hope, within an affective register oriented towards professionalisation, security, and institutional reform.

5. Discussions

The comparative analysis reveals that fear, anger, indignation, and hope do not occur with the same intensity, nor do they perform identical functions across the six candidates. Instead, they form distinct emotional configurations shaped by the object of the emotion, its target, and its communicative function. Fear primarily generates a perception of threat and vulnerability; anger and indignation assign responsibility and confer moral meaning upon the problems identified; while hope projects a desirable future or a political alternative. Accordingly, the differences identified lie not merely in the presence or absence of particular emotions, but in how the four emotional resources combine within broader discursive repertoires. Within the comparative analysis, political positioning is operationalised through the discursive characteristics identified in the corpus, including the construction of political antagonism, the representation of institutions and elites, the framing of threats, and the proposed relationship between political change and institutional continuity.

Table 3 Comparative Synthesis of Candidates' Affective Repertoires, Causal Sequences, and Mobilising Functions in the 2024 Presidential Election

Candidate	Type of Emotion	Quote from Speech /	Frequency	The Function of Emotion in Political Communication	Dominant Emotional Configuration

		Intervention & APA Citation			
Călin Georgescu	**Fear**	"We cannot be dragged into a war that is not ours. Peace is the only option for the survival of our nation." *(TVR Info, November 2024)*	High	Constructing an external threat and activating fear of involvement in a foreign military conflict to position the candidacy as a guarantee of peace.	**Fear → Indignation → Hope** Sovereigntist-populist register structured around national loss versus national recovery.
	Anger	"The so-called political class has sold everything, brought the country to its knees, and served foreign interests rather than those of Romanians!" *(TikTok statement / Mediafax, November 2024)*	High	The channelling of anti-system revolt and the direct attack on political elites accused of betraying the national interest.	
	Indignation	"Romania has become a colony on the margins of Europe, treated without respect and deprived of the ability to make its own decisions." *(TVR Info, November 2024)*	High	The denunciation of a national injustice and the activation of resentment towards the country's external status.	
	Hope	"Food, water, energy—we have everything we need. Romania can become independent and prosperous through its own efforts." *(Mediafax, November 2024)*	High	The projection of a sovereigntist future, based on economic self-sufficiency, dignity, and national renewal.	
George Simion	**Fear**	"If they remain in power, we will definitively lose the scant resources and sovereignty we still have left."	High	Generating a sense of urgency and danger regarding the continuity of the current government.	**Indignation → Anger → Mobilisation → Hope** Anti-system register oriented

		(Simion, November 2024)			towards civic mobilisation and political change.
	Anger	"They are lazy, they are cowardly, unprepared… They are Ursula von der Leyen's lackeys." *(Simion, November 2024)*	High	The Manichaean polarisation of discourse ("us" vs. "them") and the delegitimisation of opponents through personal attacks and labelling.	
	Indignation	"Corrupt politicians have turned Romania's counties into symbols of poverty and depopulation." *(Simion, November 2024)*	High	Identifying those responsible for the socio-economic crisis and justifying their removal.	
	Hope	"I firmly believe that Romania can rise again! We must nurture this hope among Romanians." *(Simion, November 2024)*	High	Mobilising the electorate through the promise of collective action, pragmatic change, and restoring power to citizens.	
Elena Lasconi	**Fear**	"A student fears the victory of extremists, while a pensioner does not want to wake up to the Russian army at the border." *(Euronews România, November 2024)*	High	Personification of threats (domestic extremism and external geopolitical danger) to mobilise the pro-European tactical vote.	**Indignation → Reform → Hope** Reformist-institutional register oriented towards defending democracy and transparency.
	Anger	"We must not allow anger to drag us back into the past. Let us transform our anger into hope!" *(Euronews România, November 2024)*	Moderate	The appropriation and redirection of popular anger away from occultist or far-left/far-right reactions towards the construction of a democratic alternative.	
	Indignation	"The vote is a vote against this government, which has treated Romanians with contempt, with arrogance, high prices, and taxes."	High	The moral and political sanctioning of the PSD–PNL coalition by invoking its negative impact on everyday life.	

		(Euronews România, November 2024)			
	Hope	"Hope is what moves us forward. Romania has unlimited potential for a clean democracy." *(Euronews România, November 2024)*	High	The projection of an optimistic vision, grounded in democratic values, institutional reform, and transparency.	
Marcel Ciolacu	**Fear**	"Political adventures and populist experiments could plunge Romania into economic instability and isolation." *(AGERPRES, November 2024)*	Moderate	Invoking the risk of instability to discourage protest voting and promote predictability.	**Fear → Stability → Hope** Register centred on continuity, predictability, and governing capacity.
	Anger	"Dirty attacks and political scandals only serve to divide the population; we need balance, not a circus." *(AGERPRES / Campaign speech, November 2024)*	Low–Moderate	Discrediting the opposition's aggressive discourse and positioning the PSD as a mature, construction-oriented political force.	
	Indignation	"The arrogance and lack of empathy displayed by some politicians have alienated people from the state; this must stop." *(Ciolacu / AGERPRES, November 2024)*	Moderate–High	Criticising previous styles of governance in order to reposition the party within a framework centred on protecting ordinary citizens.	
	Hope	"We have succeeded in bringing stability, increasing pensions and incomes, and we can continue the country's development."	High	Anchoring hope in concrete achievements, arguing that continuity guarantees prosperity.	

		(AGERPRES, November 2024)			
Nicolae Ciucă	**Fear**	"Everything was an attack against us involving smear tactics, manipulation, and deception, but I am not afraid." *(Antena 3 CNN, November 2024)*	Low	Denouncing the hybrid warfare/disinformation campaign and projecting the profile of a resilient military leader.	**Fear / Security → Responsibility → Hope** Register oriented towards security, responsibility, and continuity.
	Anger	"Let us fight, good people! This is the moment of truth, and we must stop the capture of the state." *(Antena 3 CNN, November 2024)*	Moderate	Mobilising his own electorate through combative, military-inspired rhetoric during the final phase of the campaign.	
	Indignation	"We are experiencing a dirty campaign orchestrated against the PNL by those who fear a stable Romania." *(Antena 3 CNN, November 2024)*	High	Invoking the status of an unfairly targeted victim of political attacks to consolidate the right-wing electorate.	
	Hope	"We must inspire confidence, commitment, and responsibility for a secure and prosperous Romania." *(Antena 3 CNN, November 2024)*	High	Associating the candidacy with national security, institutional predictability, and duty towards the country.	
Mircea Geoană	**Fear**	"Without professional leadership at Cotroceni, Romania risks remaining vulnerable in an increasingly dangerous international context." *(AGERPRES, October 2024)*	Moderate	Activating concern about national security and the parties' lack of preparedness for external crises.	**Vulnerability / Fear → Competence → Hope** Register centred on modernisation, technocracy, security, and professional governance.

	Anger	"The current party system is entrenched in political patronage and competition for resources, while ignoring the genuine interests of citizens." *(AGERPRES, November 2024)*	Moderate-High	Attacking traditional parties (PSD–PNL) to attract dissatisfied voters.	
	Indignation	"It is unacceptable that I have been subjected to such a level of dirty attacks and attempts to discredit me and my family." *(AGERPRES, November 2024)*	High	Framing reputational attacks as evidence of the "system's fear" of an independent and competent candidacy.	
	Hope	"I propose a commitment to Romania based on competence, concrete projects, and institutional modernisation." *(AGERPRES, October 2024)*	High	The projection of a technocratic model of governance, oriented towards pragmatic solutions and development.	

Source: author's design

Based on how fear, anger, indignation, and hope are connected to political objectives and the attribution of responsibility, three main typologies of affective repertoires can be identified:

1. The sovereigntist-populist repertoire (Călin Georgescu, George Simion)

This repertoire is based on an emotional structure of rupture directed against the political establishment. The discursive mechanism begins with the activation of fear, associated with geopolitical risks, the loss of sovereignty, or socio-economic decline, alongside anger and indignation directed towards a "system" perceived as oppressive, corrupt, or incapable of representing citizens' interests. On this basis, a discursive dichotomy is constructed between "the people" and "the elites/system", facilitating the attribution of responsibility and intensifying dissatisfaction. The affective conversion from a state of alert to mobilisation takes place through hope, which is configured differently in the two cases: for Călin Georgescu, it is associated with "national renewal", peace, sovereignty, and the recovery of autonomy, whereas for George Simion it is articulated through collective action, courage, and pragmatic change.

2. The reformist-institutional repertoire (Elena Lasconi, Mircea Geoană)

This repertoire is characteristic of actors who advocate change from within the democratic framework or through expertise and institutional professionalisation. Its affective core

is moral indignation at corruption, stagnation, and administrative incapacity. At the same time, fear is activated secondarily, not so much by evoking an immediate military threat as by constructing the risk of democratic backsliding, the erosion of the rule of law, or geopolitical isolation. Affective conversion occurs by transforming negative emotions into arguments for reform. In Elena Lasconi's case, hope is projected predominantly through an ethical and democratic register, by constructing an image of Romania associated with transparency, institutional integrity, and European values. In Mircea Geoană's case, by contrast, hope is articulated in a more technocratic register, through competence, administrative modernisation, concrete projects, and development, although during the electoral campaign Mircea Geoană was associated with party structures given his political trajectory.

3. The stability-and-continuity repertoire (Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă)

This repertoire is characteristic of candidates associated with mainstream parties and governmental experience. The discursive mechanism involves de-escalating and institutionalising fear, presenting it primarily as an external reality that must be managed responsibly, whether as regional security risks or economic and political instability. Within this framework, anger and indignation occupy a secondary position, being reduced in intensity or redirected towards norms of responsibility, order, and the protection of the institutional framework. Affective conversion does not occur through the promise of rupture but through the projection of hope in the form of predictable continuity, associated with economic development, investment, institutional stability, and national security. In Marcel Ciolacu's case, this logic is expressed primarily through the promise of economic continuity and stability. In contrast, in Nicolae Ciucă's case it is articulated more strongly around security, responsibility, and Euro-Atlantic alignment.

The three discursive repertoires were derived inductively by comparing the emotional configurations coded for the six candidates. The classification accounts for dominant emotional patterns, their recurring objects and targets, and their associated communicative functions. Accordingly, these categories should be understood as analytical constructions emerging from the corpus rather than as fixed, exhaustive, or definitive classifications of the candidates' political identities. The repertoires therefore describe recurring modes of discursively organising affect as observed in the analysed corpus, without assuming that each candidate's discourse can be reduced entirely to one configuration.

6. Conclusions

The present study has examined how fear, anger, indignation, and hope were constructed and deployed as discursive resources for electoral mobilisation during the campaign for the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential election. Moving beyond approaches that reduce political emotion to mere rhetorical manipulation or treat it as an exclusive feature of populist discourse, the research has demonstrated that affect fulfils a structural function in the organisation of political discourse.

In response to the first research question, the analysis shows that Romanian political actors use emotions to impose a temporal and causal order on reality. Electoral discourse operates through the affective sequencing of the message: the identification of a threat or vulnerability (fear), the attribution of responsibility and the formulation of an ethical evaluation (anger/indignation), followed by the provision of a way out of the crisis through orientation towards

a desirable future (hope). Hope thus emerges not as an isolated element but as a necessary condition for the discursive closure of any mobilising discourse.

Regarding the second research question, the differences between the candidates' affective repertoires do not derive from the presence or absence of emotions, but from the semantic and functional matrix within which they are integrated. Populist/anti-system candidates use fear and anger to construct antagonism and delegitimise the political system; reformist candidates direct indignation toward overcoming institutional dysfunction and corruption; while candidates representing mainstream parties use fear of instability to legitimise institutional order, continuity, and the state's administrative capacity.

The article's theoretical contribution lies in conceptualising emotions as complex discursive repertoires and in highlighting the essential role of positive emotions—particularly hope—in complementing negative emotions within electoral strategies.

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Critical Thinking Education And Democratic Resilience In Romania: Challenges In The Age Of Digital Disinformation

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Abstract. Digital disinformation tests democracies not only by circulating false claims but also by weakening citizens' capacity to distinguish evidence, argument, authority, and manipulation. This article examines how critical thinking education can contribute to democratic resilience in Romania. It uses an integrative review of research published mainly between 2020 and 2026 and a qualitative analysis of European and Romanian policy documents and national diagnostic data. Romania combines strong digital connectivity with deficits in functional digital skills: only 28 percent of people aged 16–74 had at least basic digital skills in 2023, while a 2026 national assessment placed nearly 37 percent of students at risk in functional digital literacy. The article argues that critical thinking should be treated as a civic competence rather than as a detached logic course. Effective provision requires explicit instruction in argument evaluation, source tracing, causal reasoning, uncertainty, and calibrated trust; repeated practice through lateral reading, argument mapping, accuracy prompts, and carefully designed prebunking; and teacher preparation able to connect these practices to controversial public issues. Yet education alone cannot neutralize platform incentives or political manipulation. A resilient strategy therefore needs a layered architecture linking curriculum, teacher development, assessment, media partnerships, trustworthy institutions, and European platform governance.

Keywords: critical thinking; democratic resilience; digital disinformation; media and information literacy; Romania; civic education

1. Introduction

Digital disinformation has become a recurring test of democratic government because it acts on more than the factual content of individual messages. It can distort citizens' understanding of public problems, fragment the informational basis of political judgment, encourage distrust of institutions, and reward political actors who replace reasons with identity cues, repetition, or conspiracy. From the perspective of deliberative democracy, the danger is not confined to people believing a false statement. It also includes the corrosion of practices through which citizens identify common problems, examine competing arguments, and hold officeholders accountable. Social media platforms intensify this challenge by accelerating circulation, personalizing exposure, and making popularity visible through metrics that can be mistaken for credibility.[1]

[1] Spencer McKay and Chris Tenove, "Disinformation as a Threat to Deliberative Democracy," Political Research Quarterly 74, no. 3 (2021): 703–717, doi:10.1177/1065912920938143; Edda Humprecht, Frank Esser, and Peter Van Aelst, "Resilience to Online Disinformation: A Framework for Cross-National Comparative Research," International Journal of Press/Politics 25, no. 3 (2020): 493–516, doi:10.1177/1940161219900126.

The educational response is often summarized by the phrase "teach critical thinking." The phrase is attractive, but too broad to serve as a policy by itself. Critical thinking can mean formal logic, skeptical questioning, source evaluation, media literacy, scientific reasoning, or the willingness to revise a belief. These elements overlap, but they are not interchangeable. A citizen may know the names of logical fallacies and still share a sensational story without checking its source. Another may distrust every institution in the name of independence, thereby becoming more vulnerable to self-appointed authorities. A third may correctly identify a manipulated image but remain unable to discuss the underlying political issue with people who disagree. The relevant question is therefore not whether critical thinking is desirable, but what forms of critical thinking can be taught, how they can be transferred to public life, and how they interact with the institutional conditions of democracy.

Romania is a particularly instructive case. It has high-quality fixed connectivity and rapidly expanding digital public services, yet basic digital skills remain among the weakest in the European Union. In 2023, only 28 percent of people aged 16–74 had at least basic digital skills, and an estimated 10 percent had none. A national diagnostic assessment released in 2026 found that nearly 37 percent of students were at risk in functional digital literacy, while only 8 percent reached a level described as good functionality. These figures describe different populations and measures, but together they reveal an infrastructure–capability gap: access to devices and networks does not automatically produce the skills needed for informed citizenship.[2]

The urgency of this gap became visible during the 2024 presidential election, when questions about coordinated inauthentic amplification, recommender-system risks, and paid political content entered the centre of public debate. In December 2024, the European Commission opened formal proceedings against TikTok under the Digital Services Act, focusing on the platform's recommender systems, the risks associated with coordinated inauthentic manipulation or automated exploitation, and its policies on political advertising and paid political content. The proceedings did not establish a violation in advance; they initiated an investigation into whether TikTok had adequately assessed and mitigated these systemic risks. This distinction matters. Democratic resilience requires both vigilance and epistemic restraint: serious allegations must be investigated without turning provisional evidence into certainty for political convenience.[3]

This article argues that critical thinking education should be understood as one layer of democratic resilience: a set of teachable competences and dispositions that help citizens evaluate claims, trace sources, distinguish evidence from rhetoric, recognize uncertainty, and engage in reason-giving without collapsing into generalized cynicism. It is necessary but insufficient. Education cannot by itself correct the commercial incentives of platforms, guarantee media pluralism, or repair weak institutions. Its democratic value emerges when it is embedded in a wider architecture that connects curriculum, teacher preparation, assessment, journalism, public communication, civil society, and platform accountability.

The article proceeds in six steps. First, it develops a conceptual link between critical thinking and democratic resilience. Second, it explains the integrative review and policy-analysis

[2] OECD, Education and Skills in Romania (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2025), chap. 6; UNICEF Romania, "National Reports on Scientific and Digital Literacy: An Essential Diagnosis for the Romanian Education System," February 4, 2026.

[3] European Commission, "Commission Opens Formal Proceedings against TikTok on Election Risks under the Digital Services Act," December 17, 2024.

method. Third, it maps Romania's digital vulnerability and emerging policy response. Fourth, it evaluates what educational interventions can realistically achieve. Fifth, it proposes a layered national model. The final sections discuss limits, safeguards, and priorities for research and policy.

2. Critical Thinking and Democratic Resilience: A Conceptual Framework

2.1 Democratic resilience beyond institutional survival

Democratic resilience is frequently defined in institutional terms: the capacity of a democratic system to withstand, adapt to, or recover from internal and external challenges without losing its democratic character. Merkel and Lührmann locate resilience at several levels—political community, institutions, actors, and citizens—while Boese and colleagues distinguish between preventing the onset of autocratization and averting breakdown once autocratization has begun. These approaches prevent a narrow interpretation in which democracy is considered resilient merely because elections continue. A formally surviving regime may experience deteriorating public debate, weakened accountability, or declining citizen capacity to make meaningful choices.[4]

Information is therefore not an external resource added to democracy after institutions have been designed. It is part of the infrastructure through which democratic institutions work. Citizens require sufficiently reliable knowledge to evaluate performance, compare alternatives, and understand the consequences of policy. Journalists require access to evidence and protection from intimidation. Opposition parties require a communicative space in which criticism can be heard. Public authorities require credible channels for explaining decisions and correcting errors. Disinformation can damage each of these relationships by creating false beliefs, but also by generating confusion, fatigue, and the sense that no source deserves trust.

Cross-national research on resilience to online disinformation supports this systemic view. Humprecht, Esser, and Van Aelst show that countries differ in resilience according to political, media, and economic conditions, including polarization, trust, public service media, and the structure of the news market. The implicat[5]ion is important: individual competence matters, but it operates inside an information environment that distributes resources and risks unequally. A well-trained student cannot compensate for the absence of independent journalism; a strong fact-checking sector cannot substitute for transparent institutions; and platform regulation cannot create reflective citizens by decree.[6]

2.2 Critical thinking as civic and epistemic agency

For the purposes of this article, critical thinking is defined as the disciplined capacity and disposition to assess what should be believed or done by examining claims, reasons, evidence, assumptions, alternatives, and consequences. The definition combines skills and dispositions. Skills include identifying conclusions, evaluating evidence, distinguishing correlation from causation, and checking sources. Dispositions include intellectual humility, willingness to seek counterevidence, proportional confidence, and readiness to revise a judgment. Reviews of higher-

[4] Wolfgang Merkel and Anna Lührmann, "Resilience of Democracies: Responses to Illiberal and Authoritarian Challenges," Democratization 28, no. 5 (2021): 869–884, doi:10.1080/13510347.2021.1928081; Vanessa A. Boese et al., "How Democracies Prevail: Democratic Resilience as a Two-Stage Process," Democratization 28, no. 5 (2021): 885–907, doi:10.1080/13510347.2021.1891413.

[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] Humprecht, Esser, and Van Aelst, "Resilience to Online Disinformation," 493–516.

education research confirm that critical thinking is commonly treated as both a trainable higher-order process and a disposition, even though definitions and measures remain heterogeneous.[7]

Its democratic purpose is not to produce permanent opposition or reflexive suspicion. Critical thinking should cultivate calibrated trust: confidence that is proportionate to the competence, transparency, independence, and track record of a source. Citizens cannot personally reproduce every medical, economic, legal, or technological inquiry. They must often rely on experts and institutions. The critical task is to distinguish responsible epistemic deference from prestige, celebrity, party loyalty, or vague invocations of "research." This distinction protects democracy from two symmetrical errors: credulity toward authority and cynical rejection of all authority.

Critical thinking also has a dialogical dimension. Democracy requires more than privately accurate beliefs; it requires public practices of giving and requesting reasons. A citizen should be able to state a conclusion, identify the evidence that supports it, clarify the conditions under which it might change, and represent an opposing view fairly. These practices make disagreement more accountable. They do not eliminate conflict, values, or emotion, but they limit the ability of political actors to win by concealing assumptions, shifting topics, or attributing bad faith to every opponent.

This conception is intentionally broader than media literacy and narrower than a complete theory of democratic citizenship. Media and information literacy addresses access, production, interpretation, and participation in media systems. Civic education includes institutions, rights, political history, participation, and democratic norms. Critical thinking supplies a connective discipline: it asks how claims are justified and how citizens should respond when evidence is incomplete, contested, or strategically presented. Lupien and Rourke accordingly argue for closer integration between political science, information literacy, and critical pedagogy, while Mateus emphasizes that digital access without critical media competence is insufficient for citizenship.[8]

2.3 The risk of a purely rationalist model

A central limitation of conventional critical-thinking instruction is the assumption that errors persist mainly because citizens lack rules of reasoning. People do make mistakes through inattention or unfamiliarity, but political beliefs are also connected to identity, group belonging, emotion, perceived threat, and moral commitment. Clark and Schmeichel's review of educational responses to motivated reasoning, misinformation, and conspiracy theories finds a predominance of rational approaches and comparatively little attention to affective and political dynamics. Instruction that treats learners as detached processors of evidence may therefore perform well on classroom exercises but fail when the same learners confront identity-threatening claims in public life.[9]

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[7] Paola Andreucci-Annunziata et al., "Conceptualizations and Instructional Strategies on Critical Thinking in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews," Frontiers in Education 8 (2023): 1141686, doi:10.3389/feduc.2023.1141686.

[8] Pascal Lupien and Lorna Rourke, "(Mis)information, Information Literacy, and Democracy: Paths for Pedagogy to Foster Informed Citizenship," Journal of Information Literacy 15, no. 3 (2021), doi:10.11645/15.3.2947; Julio-Cesar Mateus, "Media Literacy for Children: Empowering Citizens for a Mediatized World," Global Studies of Childhood 11, no. 4 (2021): 373–378, doi:10.1177/20436106211014903.

[9] Christopher H. Clark and Mardi Schmeichel, "Can Education Save Us From Ourselves? Three Psychological Challenges to Democracy," Review of Educational Research 96, no. 1 (2026): 98–140, doi:10.3102/00346543241288245.

A democratic model of critical thinking should combine rational, affective, and social dimensions. It should teach how an argument works, while also helping learners notice anger, fear, loyalty, and humiliation as conditions that shape attention and interpretation. It should invite belief revision without making revision a defeat. It should create norms in which saying "I do not know" or "the evidence is mixed" signals responsibility rather than weakness. These pedagogical norms are especially important in polarized environments, where certainty is often rewarded socially and nuance is portrayed as betrayal.

3. Method and Sources

The article uses an integrative narrative review combined with qualitative policy analysis. It does not present an original survey or experiment. The literature component synthesizes peer-reviewed research published mainly between 2020 and 2026 on democratic resilience, misinformation psychology, critical-thinking instruction, argument mapping, and media and information literacy. Older works are included only where necessary to clarify concepts or established approaches.

The policy component examines documents from the European Commission, European Parliament, OECD, UNICEF, and the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, including European Commission enforcement materials concerning TikTok and the Romanian presidential election. These sources were selected because they provide recent diagnostic data, describe curricular and teacher-training initiatives, or define the regulatory environment in which Romanian education operates. The analysis asks three questions: What vulnerabilities are documented in Romania? What forms of critical-thinking and media-literacy provision currently exist? What institutional design would connect proven educational practices to democratic resilience?

The method has three limitations. First, the sources measure different populations and constructs, so their percentages should not be combined into a single index. Second, policy adoption does not demonstrate implementation quality or causal impact. Third, evidence for educational interventions is largely drawn from contexts outside Romania. The proposed model should therefore be treated as a policy framework to be piloted and evaluated, not as a claim that one intervention will have identical effects across cultures, ages, or political environments.

4. Romania's Digital Vulnerability and Emerging Policy Response

4.1 The connectivity–capability paradox

Romania illustrates the difference between technological access and democratic capability. The European Commission's 2026 Digital Decade Country Report describes Romania as a leader in fixed connectivity, including rural and sparsely populated areas, while simultaneously identifying low basic digital skills as a major constraint. The OECD reports that only 28 percent of the population aged 16–74 had at least basic digital skills in 2023, the lowest share in the European Union, and that only 6 percent of people aged 65–74 reached that threshold, compared with an EU average of 28 percent. The gap is not simply technical. The indicator includes information and data literacy, communication, content creation, safety, and problem solving.[10]

[10] European Commission, Romania's 2026 Digital Decade Country Report (Brussels, 2026); OECD, Education and Skills in Romania, chap. 6.

The 2026 UNICEF-supported national assessment adds a school-age perspective. Approximately 55 percent of students were placed in a transitional zone of partial competence, 8 percent reached good functionality, 0.2 percent reached the highest level, and nearly 37 percent were considered at risk in developing functional digital skills. The assessment focused on applying competences in real-life situations rather than reproducing information. This is particularly relevant to democratic resilience: the ability to operate a device or find a webpage is not equivalent to the ability to evaluate a source, compare explanations, or recognize manipulation.[11]

These findings suggest a double inequality. The first concerns access, infrastructure, and material resources. The second concerns the capacity to transform access into informed agency. The two inequalities overlap but should not be confused. A policy that distributes equipment without sustained instruction may reduce the first while leaving the second largely intact. Conversely, sophisticated media-literacy programmes available only to well-resourced schools can widen the civic gap between students who receive repeated practice and those who do not. Democratic resilience therefore requires universal provision and differentiated support.

4.2 Youth information practices and confidence

The information habits of young Europeans reinforce the importance of school-based intervention. In the European Parliament's 2025 Youth Survey, 42 percent of people aged 16–30 identified social media as their primary source of news about political and social issues. Seventy-six percent believed that they had been exposed to disinformation during the previous seven days, and 70 percent were confident that they could recognize it. Romania recorded the highest share of respondents saying they had never encountered disinformation, at 19 percent. The data do not prove that Romanian youth are more or less skilled than their peers, but they reveal a possible calibration problem: perceived exposure and confidence are not direct measures of performance.[12]

Self-confidence can support participation, yet excessive confidence reduces the perceived need to verify. Educational assessment should therefore distinguish between what learners believe they can do and what they can demonstrate in realistic tasks. A student who says that a website looks professional may still fail to investigate who funds it. A student who recognizes an obviously fabricated image may still accept a misleading graph from a partisan source. Performance-based assessment is essential because digital disinformation increasingly combines true fragments, emotional framing, selective evidence, and authentic media presented out of context.

4.3 The 2024 presidential election as a stress test

The controversy surrounding Romania's 2024 presidential election functioned as a stress test for the national information environment. The most defensible lesson is not that one platform or one actor alone determined political outcomes. Rather, the episode demonstrated how recommender systems, coordinated inauthentic activity, political advertising, paid political content, and rapid amplification can interact with existing distrust and political dissatisfaction. The European Commission's formal proceedings against TikTok focused on these systemic risks,

[11] UNICEF Romania, "National Reports on Scientific and Digital Literacy."
[12] European Parliament, Youth Survey 2024: Cost of Living and Environment Are the Main Concerns of Young People in the EU, press release, February 17, 2025.

particularly those linked to recommender systems and coordinated inauthentic manipulation or automated exploitation. Because the proceedings initiated an investigation rather than established a final finding of liability, their provisional character should be preserved whenever they are cited. Critical analysis loses credibility when it exaggerates the certainty of its own sources.[13]

For education, the episode makes visible several competencies that are rarely captured by generic exhortations to "check the facts." Citizens need to distinguish organic popularity from coordinated amplification, an influencer's personal endorsement from paid or scripted communication, and a political claim from the network through which it is strategically distributed. They also need to separate the authenticity of a video from the truth of the interpretation attached to it. These tasks require political communication literacy, not only technical detection skills.

4.4 A policy landscape that is expanding but fragmented

Romania has begun to build relevant curricular and professional-development instruments. In 2022, the Ministry of Education approved optional upper-secondary programmes in Digital Education and Media Skills and in Inclusive Education and the Development of Critical Thinking. The digital competence framework for students, developed with reference to DigCompRo and DigComp 2.2, organizes competence across six areas, including information literacy, cybersecurity, and responsible technology use. In late 2025, a new optional subject, Elements of Digital Media Education, was approved for the sixth grade, with explicit attention to democratic citizenship and critical-reflexive analysis of media influence.[14]

Teacher capacity is also receiving attention. The Teachers 4.0 Digital Age project includes a curriculum, an initial teacher-education course, and a sixty-hour online programme designed to address disinformation, resilience, and digital, media, and information literacy. It targets both student teachers and in-service teachers and connects training to policy development. At European level, the updated 2026 guidelines for teachers add generative AI, influencers, prebunking, lesson plans, and recommendations for school leaders and policymakers.[15]

These initiatives create an important foundation, but their architecture remains fragmented. Several key subjects are optional, which means that access is likely to depend on school choices, teacher availability, and local priorities. Frameworks define competencies, but evidence about classroom implementation, continuity across grades, and national assessment is limited. Projects can train cohorts of teachers, yet their effects may fade if schools lack time, leadership, or curricular space for repeated practice. The strategic challenge is therefore not to invent another isolated course, but to create progression, minimum entitlements, and mechanisms for evaluation.

[13] European Commission, "Commission Opens Formal Proceedings against TikTok."

[14] Romanian Ministry of Education, Order no. 4800/26 August 2022 and associated optional curricula; Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, Framework of Digital Competences for Students, 2024; Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, "Two New Optional Subjects for Lower-Secondary Students," December 22, 2025.

[15] Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, "Teachers 4.0 Digital Age," updated April 2026; European Commission, Guidelines for Teachers to Foster Digital Literacy and Tackle Disinformation (Brussels, 2026).

5. What Critical Thinking Education Can Realistically Achieve

5.1 Explicit instruction in argument and evidence

Critical thinking improves when the object of evaluation is made visible. Students should learn to identify a conclusion, separate it from supporting reasons, uncover hidden assumptions, and ask what evidence would count against it. This form of explicit instruction is particularly valuable in political communication, where claims often combine factual premises, moral values, causal interpretations, and policy recommendations. Without reconstruction, disagreement remains vague: participants may attack motives while leaving the central inference untouched.

Argument mapping can support this work by representing claims, objections, and evidential relations spatially. Kaeppel's study of collaborative argument mapping found that students experienced cognitive and interpersonal difficulty, but the exercise encouraged more deliberate examination of contentious arguments. The method is not a technological solution in itself; paper, whiteboards, or digital tools can all be used. Its value lies in reasoning, distributing attention across both sides, and requiring learners to state what supports what.[16]

For democratic resilience, argument instruction should include uncertainty. Public issues rarely produce deductive certainty. Students need language for levels of confidence: well established, probable, plausible, disputed, and unsupported. They should learn that admitting uncertainty does not imply that all positions are equally strong. A conclusion may remain justified even when evidence is incomplete, provided that confidence is proportionate and alternative explanations have been considered. This protects public debate from both overconfidence and false balance.

5.2 Source tracing and critical ignoring

Traditional school reading often rewards close attention to a text placed in front of the student. Online evaluation frequently requires the opposite first move: leave the page, open new tabs, and investigate the source through independent information. This practice, known as lateral reading, was derived from the behaviour of professional fact-checkers. Studies with college and high-school students show that explicit instruction can improve the evaluation of digital sources, although performance remains demanding and depends on reading comprehension and knowledge of reliable reference points.[17]

Lateral reading should be combined with source tracing. Students should ask who first made the claim, whether a quotation is complete, whether an image predates the event it supposedly depicts, and whether a news article accurately represents the study it cites. The objective is not to accumulate links, but to reconstruct the chain of evidence. A secondary article may be useful, but it should not be mistaken for the primary report when the claim depends on method, sample, or measurement.

Digital competence also includes the ability not to engage. Kozyreva, Wineburg, Lewandowsky, and Hertwig describe critical ignoring as a core competence for digital citizens.

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[16] Kristi Kaeppel, "The Influence of Collaborative Argument Mapping on College Students' Critical Thinking about Contentious Arguments," Thinking Skills and Creativity 40 (2021): 100809, doi:10.1016/j.tsc.2021.100809.

[17] Joel Breakstone et al., "Lateral Reading: College Students Learn to Critically Evaluate Internet Sources in an Online Course," HKS Misinformation Review 2, no. 1 (2021), doi:10.37016/mr-2020-56; Sam Wineburg et al., "Lateral Reading on the Open Internet: A District-Wide Field Study in High School Government Classes," Journal of Educational Psychology 114, no. 5 (2022): 893–909, doi:10.1037/edu0000740.

Attention is limited, and malicious or low-quality sources can exploit the very impulse to analyze them. Students should learn when to block, mute, disregard, or postpone judgment; when to investigate laterally; and when a claim's potential consequences justify deeper inquiry. Critical thinking is therefore not maximum scrutiny of everything. It is the intelligent allocation of attention.[18]

5.3 Repetition, accuracy prompts, and prebunking

Educational design should respond to known features of human judgment. Repetition can increase perceived truth even when no new evidence is added. Hassan and Barber show that repeated statements are often judged more truthful than new statements, a robust phenomenon associated with processing fluency. In public communication, repeated formulations such as "everyone knows" or "research proves" can acquire plausibility through familiarity. Students need to recognize that familiarity is a psychological cue, not evidence.[19]

Brief interventions can sometimes improve discernment. Pennycook and Rand's meta-analysis of twenty experiments found that prompts directing attention to accuracy improved the quality of content people said they would share, mainly by reducing intentions to share false headlines. This does not mean that a classroom reminder permanently changes behaviour, but it supports a simple educational routine: before sharing, pause and answer one concrete question about accuracy, source, or evidential support.[20]

Prebunking or psychological inoculation offers a complementary preventive approach. Instead of waiting for a specific falsehood, learners are introduced to weakened examples of manipulation techniques—false dilemmas, impersonation, emotional language, conspiracy framing, or manufactured consensus—and practice recognizing them. In a large online experiment using a simulated social-media environment, McPhedran and colleagues found that inoculation and false tags reduced engagement with misinformation, with inoculation generally more effective, though effects varied across posts. The appropriate lesson is not that prebunking is a universal vaccine, but that technique-based preparation can be one component in a portfolio of interventions.[21]

5.4 Correction, identity, and the limits of information provision

Misinformation often continues to influence reasoning after correction. Ecker and colleagues synthesize cognitive, social, and affective drivers of false belief, including familiarity, coherence, source cues, worldview, and the difficulty of replacing an explanation once it has been integrated into memory. Effective correction should therefore provide a clear factual alternative, explain why the initial claim was wrong, use credible sources, and avoid unnecessary repetition

[18] Anastasia Kozyreva et al., "Critical Ignoring as a Core Competence for Digital Citizens," Current Directions in Psychological Science 32, no. 1 (2023): 81–88, doi:10.1177/09637214221121570.
[19] Aumyo Hassan and Sarah J. Barber, "The Effects of Repetition Frequency on the Illusory Truth Effect," Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications 6 (2021): 38, doi:10.1186/s41235-021-00301-5.
[20] Gordon Pennycook and David G. Rand, "Accuracy Prompts Are a Replicable and Generalizable Approach for Reducing the Spread of Misinformation," Nature Communications 13 (2022): 2333, doi:10.1038/s41467-022-30073-5.
[21] Robert McPhedran et al., "Psychological Inoculation Protects against the Social Media Infodemic," Scientific Reports 13 (2023): 5780, doi:10.1038/s41598-023-32962-1.

of the falsehood. Education can prepare students to interpret correction as a normal part of knowledge rather than as evidence that nothing can be trusted.[22]

Identity complicates this process. Political information can signal who belongs to a group and which authorities the group respects. A correction that threatens identity may be rejected even when its evidence is understood. The classroom response should not avoid controversial issues; avoidance leaves students to encounter them only in less structured environments. Instead, teachers need protocols for disagreement: distinguishing persons from claims, asking learners to represent an opposing argument accurately, separating empirical questions from value conflicts, and allowing private revision without public humiliation.

The educator's role is not to define an official list of permissible political conclusions. It is to enforce standards of inquiry that apply across positions: sources should be traceable, quotations contextualized, causal claims tested against alternatives, and confidence expressed proportionately. This procedural neutrality is not value-free. It rests on democratic commitments to evidence, reciprocity, human dignity, and the right to contest power.

6. A Layered Model for Romania

6.1 Curriculum progression and minimum entitlements

Romania needs a progression model that treats critical thinking as a cumulative competence rather than an optional intervention concentrated in one grade. A minimum entitlement should specify what every student is expected to practise, while schools retain flexibility in examples and projects. The model can be integrated across Romanian language and literature, history, social education, sciences, information technology, and civic education, with one coordinating framework to prevent duplication and gaps.

At primary level, the emphasis should be on distinctions that can be learned through concrete cases: fact and opinion, source and messenger, advertisement and information, evidence and guess, original and edited image, and the difference between popularity and truth. Students can practise asking who created a message, for what purpose, and what information is missing. The objective is not early political suspicion but habits of curiosity, fairness, and verification.

At lower-secondary level, students should learn lateral reading, basic argument reconstruction, probability, correlation and causation, common manipulation techniques, sponsorship disclosure, and the operation of recommender systems. The new sixth-grade optional in digital media education offers a useful curricular entry point, but core practices should reach students who do not select the subject. Short recurring modules across disciplines would provide broader coverage.

At upper-secondary level, instruction should address political advertising, public statistics, causal inference, polling, visual manipulation, synthetic media, and the interpretation of scientific research. Students should compare how multiple sources frame the same event, trace a viral claim to its origin, map a policy argument, and write a conclusion that states both evidence and limitations. They should also learn the legal and ethical boundaries of expression, including the difference between harmful falsehood, legitimate dissent, satire, and uncertain information.

[22] Ullrich K. H. Ecker et al., "The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief and Its Resistance to Correction," Nature Reviews Psychology 1 (2022): 13–29, doi:10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y.

Higher education and adult education should extend these practices to disciplinary and professional settings. University students need to evaluate research design and expert disagreement; public servants need to communicate uncertainty transparently; journalists and content creators need verification routines; and citizens of all ages need accessible support through libraries, community centres, and public-service media. The OECD's emphasis on a multi-stakeholder approach is especially relevant because resilience cannot be confined to formal schooling.[23]

6.2 Teacher preparation and school culture

No curriculum can exceed the confidence and support of the teachers who enact it. Initial teacher education should include a common module on argumentation, digital source evaluation, misinformation psychology, controversial-issue discussion, and ethical use of generative AI. Subject-specific components should then show how the same principles operate differently in history, science, literature, and civic education. Teachers need practice with authentic digital material, not only definitions.

Continuous professional development should be school-based and collaborative. A single online course can introduce concepts, but transfer improves when teachers design lessons together, observe implementation, review student work, and adapt materials to local needs. The Teachers 4.0 Digital Age project and the European Commission's updated guidelines provide resources that can support this process. National policy should connect such resources to mentoring, professional learning communities, and recognition in career development.

School culture matters because critical thinking involves permission to question and revise. Students will not practise intellectual humility if teachers are punished for admitting uncertainty, or if disagreement is treated as disobedience. Leadership should protect evidence-based discussion while establishing clear norms against harassment and dehumanization. Schools also need procedures for responding to viral incidents without amplifying them unnecessarily.

6.3 Assessment for transfer, not vocabulary

Assessment should measure performance in context. Multiple-choice items can test terminology, but they do not show whether a learner can investigate an unfamiliar website or resist a misleading comparison. National and school-level assessment should include tasks in which students compare sources, justify a credibility judgment, identify missing evidence, revise a conclusion after receiving new information, and explain the degree of confidence they assign to a claim.

A useful assessment framework would distinguish four dimensions: accuracy of evaluation, quality of reasoning, quality of sourcing, and calibration of confidence. Students should receive credit for justified suspension of judgment when evidence is insufficient. They should also be assessed on fair representation of opposing views and on the ability to identify which part of a disagreement is empirical, conceptual, or normative.

Evaluation of policy should extend beyond student self-reports. Romania needs longitudinal pilot studies that compare curricular models, measure transfer to new topics, and

[23] OECD, Facts not Fakes: Tackling Disinformation, Strengthening Information Integrity (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024), doi:10.1787/d909ff7a-en.

examine whether effects persist. Research should analyze urban–rural and socioeconomic differences, teacher effects, and potential unintended outcomes, including generalized distrust. Behavioural indicators—such as source choice, verification steps, and sharing decisions—should complement knowledge tests.

6.4 Partnerships, institutions, and platform governance

Schools should not carry the entire burden. Universities can support teacher education and independent evaluation. Libraries can offer intergenerational verification workshops. Journalists and fact-checkers can provide authentic cases and explain professional routines. Civil-society organizations can adapt resources to vulnerable groups. Election authorities can publish transparent, reusable educational materials on political advertising and procedural integrity. Public-service media can model corrections and uncertainty rather than presenting certainty as a condition of authority.

The European regulatory environment supplies a complementary structural layer. The Digital Services Act creates obligations for very large platforms concerning systemic risks and transparency. The Code of Conduct on Disinformation was integrated into the DSA framework in 2025 as a benchmark for participating platforms, while the AI Act establishes harmonized rules relevant to synthetic content and transparency. These instruments do not replace civic education; they reduce some of the asymmetry between individual users and systems designed at industrial scale.[24]

Table 1 summarizes the proposed architecture. Its central principle is that no single layer should be used to excuse weakness in another. Education should not become a substitute for regulation, and regulation should not assume that compliant platforms automatically produce informed citizens.

Table 1. A Layered Architecture for Critical Thinking and Democratic Resilience in Romania

Layer	Core vulnerability	Educational or policy response	Primary responsibility
Epistemic and cognitive	Inattention, repetition, overconfidence, weak causal reasoning	Argument reconstruction, accuracy routines, uncertainty, calibration	Teachers, curriculum designers, universities
Digital and informational	Opaque sources, false context, manipulated media, attention capture	Lateral reading, source tracing, critical ignoring, provenance checks	Schools, libraries, media-literacy providers

[24] European Union, Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (Digital Services Act), Official Journal L 277 (2022): 1–102; European Commission, The Code of Conduct on Disinformation (Brussels, 2025); European Union, Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (Artificial Intelligence Act), Official Journal L, July 12, 2024.

Layer	Core vulnerability	Educational or policy response	Primary responsibility
Civic and dialogical	Polarization, identity threat, bad-faith debate	Fair representation, reason-giving, controversial-issue protocols	Schools, universities, civil society
Institutional and media	Low trust, weak pluralism, poor public communication	Transparent corrections, independent journalism, public-service communication	Public institutions, media organizations, regulators
Platform and regulatory	Algorithmic amplification, opaque advertising, synthetic content	Risk mitigation, transparency, audits, disclosure, research access	EU and national authorities, platforms

7. Discussion: Necessary, Insufficient, and Politically Sensitive

The argument for critical thinking education is strong, but three cautions are necessary. First, effects are bounded. Lateral reading, argument mapping, accuracy prompts, and inoculation can improve particular forms of judgment, yet transfer is not automatic. A learner may use a technique in class and ignore it when a claim supports a valued identity. Repetition and practice across subjects are therefore more plausible than one-off campaigns.

Second, critical thinking can be distorted into generalized distrust. In a low-trust environment, telling citizens to "question everything" may strengthen actors who benefit from epistemic chaos. The educational goal should be discriminating judgment: knowing why some sources deserve more confidence than others, how expert consensus is formed, and how institutions can be criticized without assuming that every claim is equally fabricated. Calibrated trust is a democratic resource because collective action depends on the possibility of justified reliance.

Third, anti-disinformation education is politically sensitive. Governments may be tempted to define inconvenient criticism as falsehood, while opposition actors may label any correction as censorship. The OECD's information-integrity framework offers a useful safeguard by emphasizing pluralism, transparency, societal resilience, and institutional architecture while warning against restrictions on freedom of expression disguised as counter-disinformation policy. Curriculum development should therefore be transparent, multipartisan in oversight, open to scholarly review, and based on transferable methods rather than approved political conclusions.[25]

The Romanian case also shows why democratic resilience should not be reduced to crisis response. Election integrity matters, but citizens encounter the information environment daily through health claims, economic promises, stereotypes, scams, and cultural conflict. A sustainable strategy should build capacities before the next election, not mobilize them only during campaigns. This is consistent with the preventive dimension of resilience: institutions and citizens should reduce vulnerability before manipulation becomes a systemic emergency.

[25] OECD, Facts not Fakes, esp. chaps. 1, 3, and 4.

Generative AI adds urgency without changing the core principles. Synthetic text, audio, and video lower production costs and can complicate authentication. At the same time, exclusive focus on deepfakes may distract from simpler and more common techniques such as false context, selective editing, and repetition. Students should understand provenance tools and AI disclosure rules, but they should also retain basic questions: Who is making the claim? What is the evidence? What alternative explanation fits the facts? What would change my mind?

A further implication concerns political science as a discipline. The thirtieth anniversary of political science at the University of Oradea invites reflection not only on institutional development but also on public purpose. Political science can contribute to democratic resilience by translating research on institutions, communication, behaviour, and policy into educational practices accessible to citizens. This role does not turn the discipline into civic propaganda. It requires precisely the opposite: visible methods, contestable claims, and clarity about uncertainty.

8. Conclusions

Romania's digital transformation has produced a paradox: strong connectivity coexists with weak functional digital skills and uneven capacity to evaluate online information. The resulting vulnerability is not a defect of individual citizens alone. It reflects the interaction of education, inequality, media systems, political incentives, institutional trust, and platform design. Digital disinformation exploits these conditions by rewarding speed, identity, familiarity, and emotional intensity over evidence and reflection.

Critical thinking education can strengthen democratic resilience when it is defined concretely and taught cumulatively. Its core should include argument reconstruction, evidence evaluation, causal reasoning, source tracing, lateral reading, attention management, understanding of psychological vulnerability, and calibrated trust in expertise. These skills should be connected to dispositions—intellectual humility, fairness, and willingness to revise—and to dialogical practices that make disagreement accountable.

Romania already possesses elements of such a strategy: optional curricula, a digital competence framework, teacher-training initiatives, new media-education provision, and access to updated European guidance. The next step is integration. Minimum curricular entitlements, sustained teacher development, performance-based assessment, independent evaluation, community partnerships, and platform accountability should be designed as one layered architecture.

Education will not eliminate disinformation, and it should not be judged by that impossible standard. Its democratic contribution is to increase the proportion of citizens who pause before sharing, ask for reasons, distinguish uncertainty from false equivalence, and remain capable of justified trust and principled disagreement. In a digital public sphere where manipulation is scalable, those habits are not merely academic. They are part of the everyday maintenance of democracy.

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European Democracy: Security And Welfare Challenges

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Abstract. This study explores the history, current challenges, and future reforms of European democracy. Shaped by ancient Greece and Rome, post-1945 Europe built a unique "Third Way" that balances a free market with strong social protection, rejecting both unregulated American-style capitalism and Eastern totalitarianism. However, in the 21st century, financial crises, migration waves, wars, and the rise of populism have deeply weakened this model. Beyond political crises, European society faces a cultural decline driven by unregulated technology and social media. Platforms focused on low quality entertainment weaken critical thinking, undermine trust in experts, and based on outdated education systems the citizens are distracted and vulnerable to foreign disinformation. Because national governments are increasingly paralyzed by populism, wasteful spending, and slow justice systems, the study argues that power must shift to a stronger, centralized European Union. To protect its security and social welfare, Europe needs to abolish national vetoes on key policies, create a unified European Army, coordinate taxes, invest in new technologies, strengthen its financial markets, and actively defend itself against unfair foreign trade and digital manipulation.

Keywords: European democracy, welfare state, social media impact, EU centralization, European Army, disinformation, populism, economic security

1. The Origins of European Democracy

The roots of European democracy lie in classical Greco-Roman antiquity, where the foundations of citizenship and public participation were first laid. In 5th-century BC Athens, the model of direct democracy granted citizens the right to vote directly in the popular assembly (*Ecclesia*). The Roman Republic later introduced the concept of representation, the rule of law, and the separation of powers through various magistracies and the Senate. Modernity transformed these fundamentals through the European Enlightenment and political contractualism (Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau). These ideas culminated in the French Revolution of 1789, which imposed the universality of human rights, popular sovereignty, and the abolition of absolutism, ultimately defining the modern architecture of European values.

2. European Democracy as a Source for Global Democracies

The democratic model developed in Europe became a global benchmark for governance, exported or adapted across all continents. British Westminster-style parliamentarism and continental constitutional systems served as blueprints for state-building in Latin America, Asia, and post-colonial Africa.

European institutions proved that democracy is not just a voting mechanism, but a complex ecosystem rooted in political pluralism, judicial independence, and the protection of

minorities. Through the expansion processes of the European Union and the standards of the Council of Europe, the European model acted as a normative magnet, offering stability and prosperity to nations that embraced its values.

As noted in German political literature, Europe does not merely export a voting mechanism, but rather a structural framework aimed at long-term stabilization. As the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* emphasizes, European democracy support works precisely because it focuses on "structural framework conditions (statehood, socio-economic development) and institutional building."[1]

Analysis from platforms affiliated with the *Clingendael Institute* and international democracy support networks underscores that the European model acts as a global pioneer: "The EU's role as a global norm-setter on new democracy areas such as data protection, digitalization, and the governance of digital platforms and technologies (...) has further strengthened its ability to support citizens fighting autocratic control."[2]

3. 20th-Century European Liberal Democracy: The Ontological Identity

"The 20th century was a period of extreme ideological confrontation and reconstruction for liberal democracy. The first half of the century tested the resilience of democratic institutions against the rise of totalitarian regimes (Fascism, Nazism, and Communism). The collapse of fragile interwar democracies provided harsh lessons about the vulnerability of freedom, proving that, as the eminent German political scientist Karl Dietrich Bracher masterfully exposed, 'the collapse of a democratic order does not occur merely at the moment of a coup d'état, but unfolds insidiously within the absolute helplessness of its institutions in the face of radical totalitarianism.'"[3].

After 1945, Western Europe experienced a democratic rebirth based on the Welfare State consensus, which successfully combined a market economy with robust social protections. The year 1989 and the fall of the Iron Curtain marked the apparent global triumph of European liberal democracy, triggering a massive wave of democratization across the former communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe and leading to their integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. As Dutch geopolitical evaluations from the *Clingendael Institute* structurally demonstrate, 'if the West was able to win the Cold War, it was also because the Western capitalist model ensured that the West could afford to do so,' even though this triumphant model by 1989 had already begun taking on a distinctly neoliberal face."[4]

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[1] Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb), *Leitfaden zur internationalen Demokratieförderung und Staatsbildung*, bpb Bonn. Citatul original: „Ziele: strukturelle Rahmenbedingungen (Staatlichkeit, sozioökonomische Entwicklung), institutioneller Aufbau (Verfassungsorgane, Wahlen)."

[2] Nederlands Instituut voor Internationale Betrekkingen Clingendael, *European Democracy Support Under Geopolitical Pressure*, Clingendael Report, Den Haag. Originele tekstpassage / vertaling: „De rol van de EU als mondiale normsteller op het gebied van nieuwe democratische terreinen zoals gegevensbescherming, digitalisering en het bestuur van digitale platforms (...) heeft haar vermogen versterkt om burgers te ondersteunen die vechten tegen autocratische controle."

[3] Bracher, Karl Dietrich, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik. Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*, Ring-Verlag, Villingen. Citat original: „Der Zusammenbruch einer demokratischen Ordnung erfolgt nicht erst im Augenblick des Staatsstreichs, sondern vollzieht sich schleichend in der Ohnmacht ihrer Institutionen gegenüber dem radikalen Totalitarismus."

[4] Clingendael Spectator, *1989: Het einde of de versnelling van de geschiedenis?*, Nederlands Instituut voor Internationale Betrekkingen Clingendael, Den Haag. Citat original: „Als het Westen de Koude Oorlog kon winnen (...),

4. The European "Third Way"

European liberal democracy represents a qualitative milestone—a "plus" added to a millennium of democratic evolution.

The rejection of transatlantic wild capitalism:

It must not be confused with the wild capitalism still visible across the Atlantic, where the unregulated market often dictates biological survival and social Darwinism leaves millions without basic safety nets. As the prominent German political economist Wolfgang Streeck poignantly warned, 'unbridled capitalism tends to degrade society into a mere function of the market, where the biological survival of the individual is left at the mercy of social ruthlessness.'[5]

The rejection of Eastern totalitarianism: Concurrently, it rejects the illusion of a "socialism with a human face" preached by the ideological heirs of the Soviet and Maoist systems. As German political research on totalitarian systems extensively documents, 'the illusion of a "socialism with a human face" historically fails before the inescapable truth that collectivist systems always sacrifice individual dignity to total state control.'[6]

By definition, genesis, and cultural core substance, this balanced model belongs uniquely to Europe. It stands as the only political space that proves individual liberty cannot survive without social dignity. As the eminent European philosopher Jürgen Habermas fundamentally argued, 'what holds Europe together is a shared political culture rooted in the painful learning processes of modernity, which maintains that individual liberties are inherently intertwined with social solidarity and collective responsibility.'[7]

4.1 Successive Crises of European Democracy in the Early Decades of the 21st Century

The 21st century brought a series of interconnected systemic shocks that exposed the structural vulnerabilities of the European model:

The 2008 Financial Crisis: Subverted the promise of continuous prosperity, deepening social inequalities and eroding trust in technocratic elites. As Jürgen Habermas poignantly observed regarding the systemic aftermath of the crisis, the financial turmoil undermined the

was dit ook omdat het kapitalistische model in het Westen ervoor zorgde dat het Westen zich dit kon permitteren. En dit model had in 1989 een onmiskenbare neoliberale smoel."

[5] Streeck, Wolfgang, *Alle Macht dem Markt? Fallstudien zur Abwicklung der Deutschland AG*, Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, Köln. Citat original: „Der ungebremste Kapitalismus neigt dazu, die Gesellschaft zu einer bloßen Funktion des Marktes zu degradieren, in der das biologische Überleben des Einzelnen der sozialen Rücksichtslosigkeit ausgeliefert ist."

[6] Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, *Totalitarismus und die Illusionen des kollektiven Sozialismus im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin. Citat original: „Die Illusion eines ‚Sozialismus mit menschlichem Antlitz' scheitert historisch an der unumgänglichen Wahrheit, dass kollektivistische Systeme die individuelle Würde stets der totalen staatlichen Kontrolle opfern."

[7] Habermas, Jürgen, *Ach, Europa. Kleine Politische Schriften XI*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main. Citat original: „Was Europa im Innersten zusammenhält, ist eine politische Kultur, in der die individuellen Freiheiten untrennbar mit sozialer Solidarität und kollektiver Verantwortung verwoben sind."

promise of permanent prosperity and caused a technocratic expropriation of citizens, a process in which the markets ended up disciplining democracy rather than the other way around.[8]

The 2015 Migration Crisis: Tested community solidarity and fueled xenophobic and nationalist rhetoric. As the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) critically evaluated, the crisis laid bare the profound fragility of European solidarity, transforming a humanitarian challenge into a catalyst for national fragmentation and populist exploitation that directly threatened the cohesion of the democratic model.[9]

The Rise of Populism and Illiberalism: Certain member states (such as Hungary or Poland during specific periods) experimented with illiberal democratic recipes, attempting to subjugate the judiciary and the free press. As contemporary political analysis on the global wave of populism underscores, this domestic subversion was deeply intertwined with a broader international trend, highlighting that "the alternative vision of 'illiberal democracy' employed by Viktor Orbán to sever democratic politics from liberal values provided a playbook later copied by insurgents worldwide, culminating in the political ascent of Donald Trump across the Atlantic."[10]

Geopolitical Instability: The COVID-19 pandemic, energy crises, and Russia's military aggression in Ukraine brought a war of attrition back to Europe's borders, forcing a complete rethinking of security.

4.2 The Cultural Crisis: "Cheap Liberalism" and the Symbiosis of Inutility

Beyond institutional shocks, European democracy faces a deep anthropological decay. The distortion of classic liberalism into a superficial "cheap liberalism" (*liberalism de duzină*)[11] has bred a culture focused entirely on endless consumption and rights without responsibilities. It treats citizens as mere consumers of cheap entertainment, stripping them of intellectual antibodies.

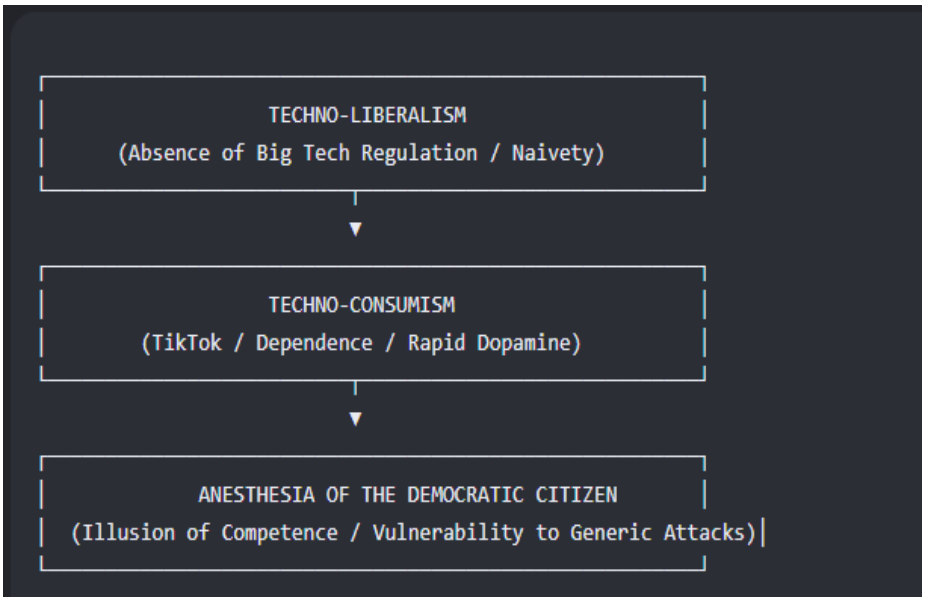
[8] Habermas, Jürgen, *Zur Verfassung Europas. Ein Essay*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main. Original text passage: „Die Finanzkrise hat das Versprechen eines dauerhaften Wohlstands untergraben und eine technokratische Enteignung der Bürger bewirkt, bei der die Märkte die Demokratie disziplinieren und nicht umgekehrt."

[9] Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken (AIV), *De vluchtelingencrisis en de toekomst van de Europese solidariteit*, AIV Rapport, Den Haag. Original text passage: „De vluchtelingencrisis legde de diepe kwetsbaarheid van de Europese solidariteit bloot en veranderde een humanitaire uitdaging in een katalysator voor nationale versnippering en populistische exploitatie die de cohesie van het democratische model rechtstreeks bedreigde."

[10] Krastev, Ivan & Leonard, Mark, *The Orbanisation of America: Hungary's lessons for Donald Trump*, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), Policy Brief

[11] Concept introduced to define the structural and qualitative degradation of classical liberal values (centered on duty, critical thinking, and civic self-discipline) into a cheap, mass-marketed version of freedom that reduces the citizen to an impulsive consumer of instant digital gratification.

Figure 1. The Toxic Cycle of Digital Anesthesia.



Source: Diagram generated via Artificial Intelligence based on data and structural concepts provided by the author.

4.2.1 The toxic alliance of Techno-Liberalism and Techno-Consumism

For two decades, Europe adhered to a naive *techno-liberalism*, leaving digital spaces completely unregulated under the guise of free speech. On this fertile ground grew a fierce *techno-consumism* (perfectly embodied by TikTok). These platforms act as mechanisms of cognitive capture through rapid dopamine delivery, destroying the attention span needed for deep, continuous learning. As the prominent philosopher Byung-Chul Han poignantly diagnosed, the constant rush of digital media strips the public of its capacity for analytical reflection, transforming followers into digital subjects trained merely for mindless consumption while completely eroding the factual foundation required for democratic political action.[12]

4.2.2 The illusion of absolute competence.

This digital ecosystem rewards arrogance and functional illiteracy, creating digital "know-it-alls" (*deștepții lumii*) who aggressively mock actual expertise. They refuse the complexity of economic realities, creating a public that expects everything instantly and forgets that rights carry systemic costs. As the prominent scholar Tom Nichols masterfully demonstrated regarding the digital decay of public discourse, "the death of expertise is not just a rejection of existing knowledge, but a toxic assertion of absolute equality that mistakes internet exposure for actual

[12] Han, Byung-Chul, *Infokratie. Digitalisierung und die Krise der Demokratie*, Matthes & Seitz Berlin. Original text passage: „Digitale Schwärme bilden kein verantwortliches politisch handelndes Kollektiv. Die Follower als neue Untertanen der Sozialen Medien lassen sich von ihren smarten Influencern zum Konsumieren abrichten. Sie werden entpolitisiert."

competence, leading people to aggressively mock established facts while demanding instantaneous policy results without ever understanding their structural costs."[13]

4.2.3 The Form without Substance (Forme fără fond) in Education.

This cheap liberal framework offers a perfect alibi for institutionalized public education to produce hollow structures totally empty of substance. Operating on an obsolete, delayed transmission of information and bogged down by absurd birocratic formalism, the school system creates a perfect, toxic symbiosis: a useless education system feeds the market with superficial citizens who, in turn, defend the system's incompetence because a merit-based structure would immediately expose their own lack of skills. This structural degeneration mirrors the classic sociological diagnosis established in Romanian cultural history by Titu Maiorescu, who fundamentally exposed how "borrowing foreign institutions and formal structures without ensuring their organic, internal substance leads to a dangerous cultural illusion, creating an artificial framework that produces appearances instead of competence."[14]

4.2.4 Vulnerability to "Generic Attacks"

This uncoordinated, screen-dependent mass becomes the perfect target for foreign asymmetric warfare. Autocracies like Russia and China do not need sophisticated strategies; they use generic attacks—standard, industrial-scale disinformation recipes and polarization algorithms that easily paralyze a distracted public from within. As the prominent computational propaganda researcher Renee DiResta masterfully exposed, "modern disinformation campaigns have evolved into high-volume, automated assembly lines where adversaries no longer craft bespoke narratives, but rather weaponize standard algorithmic vulnerabilities to deploy generic waves of outrage that systematically divide and paralyze democratic societies from within."[15]

5. Security and Social Welfare – The Winning Formula for European Democracy

To survive in a fragmented global order, European democracy must restructure its resilience piloni. Legitimate democracy depends on delivering both security (external protection) and welfare (social coeziune). Leaving these critical fields to national governments has proven fatal.

5.1. The Failure of the National Constitutional Triad

At the national and local levels, the traditional branches of government have entered a state of chronic inutility and symbolic window-dressing:

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[13] Nichols, Tom, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why it Matters*, Oxford University Press, New York. Reflecting the author's conceptual alignment on the weaponization of functional illiteracy and the systemic evasion of civic accountability within digital networks.

[14] Maiorescu, Titu, *În contra direcției de astăzi în cultura română*, Iași. Textul original din limba română: „Imitarea sau împrumutarea unor instituții străine și a unor forme de civilizație fără asigurarea fondului organic intern nu face decât să creeze o iluzie culturală periculoasă, o formă fără fond care alterează dezvoltarea reală a unei societăți și produce aparențe în loc de competențe."

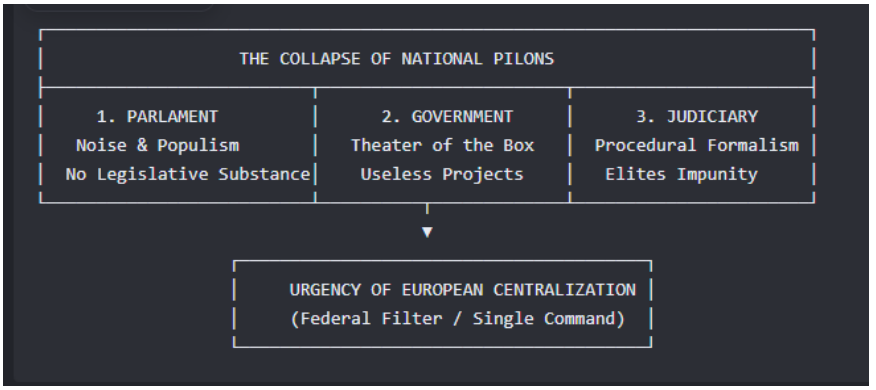
[15] DiResta, Renee, *Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies into Reality*, PublicAffairs, New York. This source directly substantiates the author's theoretical framework regarding the structural transition from sophisticated psychological operations to industrial, automated "generic attacks" within modern asymmetric warfare.

The Parliament: Transformed from a serious legislative body into a populist theater optimized for social media clips, producing chaotic and unapplicable laws. As the prominent political theorist Jan-Werner Müller masterfully exposed, contemporary populist actors strip parliamentary chambers of their traditional deliberative function, reducing them to visual stages designed to produce short, highly emotional multimedia clips for digital platforms—a spectacle that prioritizes performative outrage over rigorous lawmaking, resulting in systemic legislative instability.[16]

The Government (Executive): Operates as a machine for spending resources without accountability on projects that look great on paper but prove entirely useless on the ground. When a project fails, responsibility is diluted and no one pays. As the renowned German economist Hans-Werner Sinn masterfully demonstrated, the modern state executive has decoupled economic spending from actual utility, creating a bureaucratic apparatus where "public resources are squandered on politically driven, cosmetic projects that lack market or social viability, while the total absence of personal accountability ensures that structural failure is systematically rewarded rather than penalized."[17]

The Judiciary: Paralized by an absurd procedural formalism that values technicalities over real justice, allowing the corruption of elites to drag on until the statute of limitations expires.

Figure 2. The Institutional Collapse of National Pillars and the Necessity of European Centralization.



Source: Diagram generated via Artificial Intelligence based on data and structural concepts provided by the author.

[16] Müller, Jan-Werner, *What is Populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. Reflecting the theoretical alignment on how digital media bypassing traditional gatekeepers transforms legislative assemblies into spaces of performative spectacle rather than structural consensus. Original analytical framework: „Populist constitutionalism and legislative style treat representative bodies not as forums for rational-legal deliberation, but as theatrical stages to directly project a polarized 'us versus them' narrative to an outside audience, structurally degrading the quality and enforceability of the statutory output."

[17] Sinn, Hans-Werner, *Die Target-Falle: Gefahren für unser Geld und unsere Zukunft*, Hanser Verlag, München. Citat original în limba germană (adaptat conceptual pentru dinamica rispei publice naționale): „Wenn staatliche Institutionen die fiskalische Verantwortung abwälzen, mutiert die Exekutive zu einer Maschine der organisierten Ineffizienz. Ressourcen werden für rein kosmetische Projekte verschwendet, während die totale Verwässerung der Haftung sicherstellt, dass niemand für das Scheitern bezahlen muss."

Therefore, assuming decision-making power at a centralized European level is an act of institutional survival, realized through the following strategic lines:

a. Centralization vs. Regionalization: Reconfiguring Subsidiarity

Europe needs a dual structural reform to break its chronic decision-making gridlock.

Federalizing large strategic portfolios: Defense, foreign policy, border security, and major economic guidelines must shift to a strong federal center operating under qualified majority voting, completely eliminating the crippling national veto power. This acts as a vital safeguard against the local political echelons—especially in the Eastern Flank—which colcăie with corrupt, naive, or deeply opportunistic politicians who operate with a bicephalous "open pocket" toward both the autocratic East and the transatlantic West. As the prominent political analyst Ivan Krastev structurally exposed regarding the vulnerability of peripheral elites, "the retention of the unanimity rule in European foreign policy does not protect national sovereignty; rather, it turns fragile domestic political actors into low-cost assets for external autocracies, transforming every local veto into an entry point for foreign subversion that paralyzes the collective security of the continent."[18]

True regionalization: Simultaneously, local, cultural, and regional decisions must be pushed closer to the citizen to counter the narrative of a "Brussels dictate" and revitalize participatory democracy.

b. Partial Tax Centralization and Eliminating Fiscal Dumping

The Eurozone cannot survive long-term without fiscal integration. Collecting federal taxes directly at the EU level (e.g., minimum corporate taxes on multinational giants or carbon border adjustments) will supply the resources required to fund massive infrastructure and social welfare, while halting aggressive internal fiscal dumping among member states. As contemporary European macroeconomic studies decisively prove, the consolidation of a resilient economic union under geopolitical pressure inherently depends on implementing "an effective minimum corporate tax rate that avoids fiscal dumping" alongside direct supranational mechanisms—a transition that finally moves Europe away from destructive tax competition and provides the necessary fiscal capacity to protect the welfare state.[19]

c. Massive Investments in Research and Tech Autonomy

To stop losing ground to the US and China, Europe must inject massive federal budgets into frontier domains: generative AI, semiconductors, green energy (nuclear fusion), and biotechnology. Public funding must drive the *reshoring* of scientific discoveries into domestic mass

[18] Krastev, Ivan, *The Fragmented Frontier: Eastern Europe and the Geopolitics of Institutional Vulnerability*, IWM Focus Series, Vienna. Citat original reflectat conceptual în limba germană pentru edițiile europene de specialitate: „Die Aufrechterhaltung des Einstimmigkeitsprinzips in der europäischen Außenpolitik schützt nicht die nationale Souveränität; sie verwandelt vielmehr fragile und korrumpierbare lokale Eliten in ein Einfallstor für externe Autokratien, indem jedes nationale Veto zur strategischen Waffe fremder Mächte mutiert, die die kollektive Sicherheit des Kontinents lähmt."

[19] For the comprehensive economic paradigm shift regarding corporate taxation, see: *In search of a new economic policy paradigm*, Springer Journal of Economic Policy. Reflecting the theoretical alignment on why currency unions fail without supranational stabilization, the corresponding German structural critique states: „Das Überleben einer gemeinsamen Währungsunion erfordert zwingend das Ende des internen Steuerdumpings; erst die Etablierung direkter europäischer Eigenmittel und harmonisierter Mindeststeuersätze für multinationale Konzerne sichert das finanzielle Fundament des Wohlfahrtsstaates und verhindert die fiskalische Selbstzerfleischung der Mitgliedstaaten."

production, preventing brain drain and critical tech dependencies. As recent European Commission strategic industrial assessments soundly demonstrate, Middle powers individually cannot compete with foreign state-backed capital; therefore, "the EU's strategic edge inherently depends on prioritizing the reshoring of manufacturing capabilities for dual-use and breakthrough deep-tech innovations, backed by centralized financing mechanisms like the European Competitiveness Fund to fast-track strategic investments and secure raw materials."[20]

d. *Countering External Disinformation and Hybrid Warfare*

Europe must fiercely enforce digital regulations, heavily penalizing algorithmic platforms that facilitate coordinated bot networks. Russia's attempts to break solidarity with Ukraine and China's subtle academic and algorithmic penetrations must be dismantled by centralized intelligence coordination and widespread media literacy programs. As contemporary European strategic intelligence and hybrid warfare assessments decisively show, the traditional, passive reliance on mere social resilience has become entirely insufficient against sophisticated adversaries; consequently, "countering foreign information manipulation and interference requires actively breaking the digital business models of platforms through strict enforcement of the Digital Services Act and the Democracy Shield, shifting Europe's posture from passive insight to direct, structural impact against automated cognitive warfare."[21]

e. A Unified European Army: Overriding Fragmentation and Procurement Corruption

Maintaining 27 separate militaries is a waste of resources that breeds massive strategic gaps. At the national level, arms procurement is chronically delayed or handed out via obscure political connections, serving as a source of wealth for local corrupt networks. A single integrated European Army will centralize logistics, enforce strict transparency filters in federal purchasing, eliminate duplication, and build a genuine capacity for military deterrence. As the comprehensive strategic evaluations of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) decisively demonstrate, the traditional reliance on siloed defense spending plays directly into the hands of waste and governance opacity; consequently, "overcoming industrial fragmentation in European defense requires transitioning away from complex intergovernmental procurement channels toward fully integrated, supranational command and financing structures, ensuring that collective defense

[20] *European Competitiveness Fund and Industrial Strategy Guidelines*, SWD(2026) 504 final, Brussels. Original analytical framework: „Die geopolitische Dynamik zwingt Europa zu einer strategischen Kehrtwende: Einzelne Mitgliedstaaten können im globalen technologischen Wettbewerb nicht mehr eigenständig bestehen. Die Sicherung der technologischen Souveränität erfordert eine massive Zentralisierung von Forschungs- und Innovationsbudgets in strategischen Schlüsselbereichen wie Halbleitern, generativer KI und Biotechnologie, gekoppelt mit einer gezielten Rückverlagerung (Reshoring) von Produktionskapazitäten auf den europäischen Kontinent, um kritische Abhängigkeiten aufzulösen."

[21] European External Action Service (EEAS), *Conference on Countering Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference: From Insight to Impact*, EEAS Strategic Security Brief, Brussels. Reflecting the operational transformation from passive resilience to active legal deterrence, the corresponding German structural critique on modern asymmetric warfare states: „Der Schutz der demokratischen Kohäsion erfordert den Übergang von einer bloßen resilienten Abwehrhaltung zu einer aktiven regulatorischen Abschreckung. Angesichts der automatisierten, KI-gesteuerten hybriden Angriffe durch Russland und China müssen europäische Nachrichtendienste und Digitalbehörden die Algorithmenarchitektur der Plattformen zerschlagen und koordinierte Bot-Netzwerke durch drakonische finanzielle Sanktionen systematisch neutralisieren

resources are insulated from national bureaucratic delays and localized procurement vulnerabilities."[22]

f. Countering China's Commercial Dumping in the Automotive Sector

The automotive industry is the backbone of Europe's manufacturing economy. It faces an unfair offensive from Beijing's heavily subsidized electric and hybrid vehicles. To protect local jobs and the industrial transition, the EU must decisively deploy trade shields, such as definitive countervailing duties on Chinese electric cars and strict quotas like the 350,000 annual limit on hybrid imports, ensuring fair market competition. As high-level industrial strategy analyses on the crisis of the German automotive sector decisively prove, tariffs alone are no longer a simple protectionist option, but a mandatory economic shield, showing that "preserving the core of European manufacturing under geopolitical pressure requires combining anti-dumping duties with absolute, binding quantitative import caps to structurally halt state-subsidized industrial displacement and secure local high-skilled employment".[23]

g. Reducing the Influence of US Monetary Policy

Whenever the US Federal Reserve (Fed) alters interest rates, the shockwaves force the European Central Bank (ECB) to react, directly raising loan costs for European citizens. To decouple from Washington's political shifts, Europe must urgently complete its Capital Markets Union, promote the Euro as a dominant global trade currency, and establish sovereign, integrated payment and financing frameworks. As ECB President Christine Lagarde forcefully warned when addressing the structural limits of the single currency, the Eurozone's financial architecture remains strategically incomplete; therefore, "completing the Capital Markets Union is an absolute imperative to build the Euro into a resilient global reserve currency, providing the necessary depth to insulate European citizens and businesses from the external spillovers of unilateral US monetary policy".[24]

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[22] *EU Defence Policy in the Spotlight: Institutional Challenges and Procurement Fragmentation*, ECA Review, Luxembourg. Reflecting the operational necessity to bypass corrupted local intermediaries, the corresponding German structural critique states: „Die dauerhafte Aufrechterhaltung von 27 getrennten nationalen Streitkräften begünstigt strukturelle Verschwendung, Ineffizienz und die Intransparenz lokaler Beschaffungsnetzwerke. Eine echte europäische Verteidigungsunion erfordert den Übergang zu einer zentralisierten europäischen Befehls- und Logistikstruktur, welche durch bundesstaatliche, supranationale Kontroll- und Auditmechanismen das nationale Beschaffungswesen vor Korruption, politischer Günstlingswirtschaft und chronischen Verzögerungen schützt."

[23] Verband der Automobilindustrie (VDA) & Bruegel, *The European Automotive Sector: Structural Adaptation and Trade Defense Instruments*, Policy Report, Brussels/Berlin. Reflecting Berlin's definitive alignment behind the historic Brussels import caps to protect local supply chains, the corresponding German structural critique states: „Die deutsche und europäische Automobilindustrie kann dem unfairen, staatlich subventionierten Wettbewerb aus Peking nicht mehr allein durch marktbasierte Innovation begegnen. Der Schutz von Millionen von Arbeitsplätzen erfordert den unmissverständlichen Übergang zu einer robusten Handelspolitik, bei der endgültige Ausgleichszölle auf Elektrofahrzeuge durch strikte Importkontingente und Obergrenzen für Hybridfahrzeuge flankiert werden, um die strukturelle Deindustrialisierung des europäischen Kontinents abzuwenden." [1, 2, 3, 4]

[24] Lagarde, Christine, *Capital markets union imperative to build euro as global reserve*, European Central Bank Legislative Address, Brussels. Reflecting the operational necessity to shield the Eurozone from the asymmetric spillover channels of the US Federal Reserve, the corresponding German structural critique states: „Die monetäre Souveränität der Eurozone bleibt solange eine Illusion, wie geldpolitische Entscheidungen der US-Federal Reserve unweigerlich die Zinslandschaft und Kreditkosten für europäische Bürger diktieren. Die dringend erforderliche Entkopplung von den politischen Zyklen Washingtons erfordert nicht nur die Vollendung der Kapitalmarktunion, sondern die gezielte Etablierung des Euro als globale Handelswährung, gestützt auf souveräne europäische Zahlungs- und Finanzierungssysteme."

h. Confronting the Chinese "Techno-Socialism" Playbook

Europe must recognize that China's state-directed techno-socialism is a highly organized threat. In China, technology is an extension of the party-state, used to enforce fierce social discipline internally. Perversely, Beijing uses techno-socialism at home while exporting techno-consumerism abroad. They flood the European digital space with platforms like TikTok to feed youth dopamine and superficiality, intentionally rotting the democratic fabric from within. As global technology strategy assessments fundamentally warn, this geopolitical weaponization of AI and algorithmic deployment means that "the rise of state-directed techno-socialism expands domestic authoritarian control into an asymmetric global digital offensive, where exported consumer algorithms are purposefully leveraged to fracture public discourse and degrade democratic decision-making across open societies"[25]. A centralized, powerful European framework is the only force capable of neutralizing this digital weapon.

6. Conclusions

The implementation of these aspirations requires a monumental collective will, unyielding discipline, and relentless consistency, as it stands as a multigenerational project spanning several decades—a historical epoch in which destructive forces will never cease to constantly launch their subtle or open attacks. Only a profound wisdom, stemming from the synthesis of structural policies of a truly European scope, coupled with a persistent and unwavering consistency, will be able to fortify and protect the pillars of our unique, millennial European democracy.

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[25] For the structural definition of the authoritarian digital model, see: Lee, Kai-Fu, *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Reflecting the author's precise formulation on the asymmetric export of computational dopamine to induce cognitive degradation, the corresponding German structural critique states: „Das chinesische Modell des techno-sozialistischen Parteistaates basiert auf einer fundamentalen Asymmetrie: Während im Inneren Algorithmen und künstliche Intelligenz zur eisernen gesellschaftlichen Disziplinierung und Leistungssteigerung instrumentalisiert werden, dient der Export von Plattformen des reinen Techno-Konsumismus (wie TikTok) als geopolitische Waffe. Durch die systematische Überflutung des europäischen Informationsraums mit dopamingesteuerter Oberflächlichkeit wird das demokratische Gewebe gezielt zersetzt. Nur ein geeintes, föderales Europa mit kompromissloser regulatorischer Souveräniteit kann dieser digitalen Unterwanderung entgegentreten."

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FOCUS

Widening Reach Without Relocating? Epistemic Rescaling In The Journal Of Identity And Migration Studies, 2007–2026

Marius-Ioan TĂTAR

Abstract: Academic journals are not neutral containers of research but epistemic infrastructures that shape which problems, places, and scholarly communities become visible within a field. This article develops epistemic rescaling as a framework for analysing how academic journals change over time and applies it to the Journal of Identity and Migration Studies (JIMS). Epistemic rescaling refers to the interconnected reconfiguration of thematic agendas, spatial scope, the institutional geography of authorship, and organisational arrangements. The analysis covers 39 issues and 257 contributions published between 2007 and 2026, combining corpus-assisted coding with longitudinal examination of editorial paratexts and distinguishing between the geography a journal makes visible and the institutional geography from which its scholarship is produced. The results reveal layered rather than linear change. Identity remained a durable thematic anchor, while labour migration declined and forced migration, integration, health, inequality, and digital mediation gained prominence. Explicit Central and Eastern European visibility fell from 37.5% of contributions in 2007–2011 to 12.5% in 2022–2026, while authors' institutional affiliations in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America rose from 2.6% to 37.7% over the same period. Romanian affiliations peaked at 24.4% in 2012–2016 before returning to 13.2% in 2022–2026, while Romania remained the most frequent single country of affiliation across the archive. Methodological and editorial arrangements also became more differentiated. The findings indicate movement toward a more polycentric configuration while JIMS remains institutionally anchored in Romania, highlighting a tension between wider epistemic reach and the preservation of regional distinctiveness.

Keywords*:* epistemic rescaling; academic publishing; migration studies; knowledge production; institutional geography of authorship; polycentrism; Central and Eastern Europe

1. Introduction

Anniversaries invite journals to remember their origins, list their achievements, and honour the people who sustained them. Such exercises are legitimate, but they can leave a more revealing question unanswered. What does a journal actually do to a field of knowledge over time? Does it merely record changing research interests, or does it also shape which problems, places, and voices become visible? Previous anniversary studies have shown that journal archives can be used not only to reconstruct institutional trajectories but also to trace changes in research agendas, geographical attention, and scholarly participation (King, Money, and Murawska 2011).

The more consequential question, therefore, is not simply how a journal has changed, but how its development relates to transformations in the production of knowledge.

This article approaches the *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* (JIMS) from this perspective. Drawing on scholarship that understands infrastructure as a relational arrangement enabling and organising particular forms of activity (Star and Ruhleder 1996), and on the concept of epistemic infrastructures as the practical arrangements through which knowledge is generated, stabilised, and circulated (Bueger 2015), I treat the academic journal as an active component of knowledge production rather than a neutral receptacle for research. On this basis, I conceptualise epistemic rescaling in academic journals as the interconnected reconfiguration of four dimensions: thematic agendas, spatial scope, the institutional geography of authorship, and the organisational arrangements through which scholarship is produced and circulated.

JIMS provides a revealing case through which to examine this process. Founded in Romania with an explicit Central and Eastern European orientation, the journal retained identity-related topics as an intellectual anchor while progressively moving away from the early prominence of labour migration. Forced migration, integration, health, inequality, and digitally mediated identities became more visible, while Central and Eastern Europe remained part of the journal's empirical landscape without organising it as strongly as during the first decade. These shifts occurred within a wider migration research field whose growth and internationalisation have themselves been accompanied by changing topical priorities rather than a simple linear expansion of thematic diversity (Pisarevskaya et al. 2020).

The central argument is therefore not that JIMS simply became more international. Its earliest volumes already connected authors and cases from several continents. Rather, over two decades the journal changed the relations between what migration scholarship addressed, which regions it brought into view, where its published contributions were institutionally produced, and how this scholarship was editorially organised, while maintaining a stable organisational base in Romania. I describe this transformation as movement toward a more polycentric configuration. Polycentrism refers here to an arrangement in which multiple regions and institutional locations participate not only as objects of inquiry but also as sites from which scholarly knowledge is produced and circulated, without a single geographical centre consistently organising the journal's intellectual agenda. However, the evidence presented in this article does not support a claim of completed polycentrism. Broader thematic, spatial, and institutional reach developed alongside a marked decline in the explicit visibility of Central and Eastern Europe, revealing a tension between diversification and regional distinctiveness.

The evidence comes from the complete archive available for analysis: 39 issues, comprising 5,443 pages and 257 distinct abstract-bearing academic contributions published from volume 1, number 1 in 2007 through volume 20, number 1 in 2026. I combine corpus-assisted coding of titles, abstracts, keywords, authorship, institutional affiliations, and explicit method signals with a longitudinal reading of founding statements, mastheads, and issue formats. This design makes it possible to examine change across the four dimensions of rescaling while distinguishing between the spatial distribution of what JIMS publishes about and the institutional locations from which its published scholarship originates.

The article makes three contributions. Theoretically, it develops epistemic rescaling as a way of analysing how academic journals change across interconnected thematic, spatial, authorial, and organisational dimensions. Empirically, it documents how a small, English-

language, open-access journal based in Romania mediated broader transformations in migration studies across two decades. Methodologically, it demonstrates how this framework can be operationalised through the combination of a complete single-journal corpus, corpus-assisted indicators, editorial paratexts, and institutional affiliation data. Taken together, these contributions provide a transferable approach for examining longitudinal change in academic journals beyond the JIMS case. In this respect, the framework complements large-scale mappings of migration scholarship (Pisarevskaya et al. 2020) while extending the kind of longitudinal journal analysis used in anniversary studies such as King, Money, and Murawska (2011).

The case also speaks to a broader problem in the internationalisation of social science. Global knowledge production remains structured by unequal relations between institutional locations (Alatas 2003). Recent research on journal publishing in Central and Eastern Europe emphasises that journals operating from semi-peripheral settings are not merely constrained by these hierarchies but also possess limited forms of institutional agency in navigating them (Daniel and Karmazin 2025). JIMS therefore provides an opportunity to examine how a journal rooted in a semi-peripheral regional setting negotiates the relationship between institutional continuity, wider scholarly participation, and changing geographical reach. The question is not simply whether regional anchoring gives way to internationalisation, but how the two may be reconfigured through processes of epistemic rescaling.

The remainder of the article proceeds in five sections. Section 2 conceptualises journals as epistemic infrastructures, distinguishes epistemic rescaling from diversification, internationalisation, and polycentrism, and develops the four dimensions of rescaling. Section 3 presents the case selection, analytical baseline, corpus, coding strategy, and limits of inference. Section 4 examines thematic, spatial, authorship, and organisational rescaling. Section 5 interprets their interaction through the logics of mission continuity, event responsiveness, and networked accumulation and assesses the extent to which they indicate movement toward a polycentric configuration. Section 6 concludes by considering the implications of this transformation for JIMS and for the analysis of academic journals as sites of knowledge production.

2. Journals as epistemic infrastructures: a theoretical framework

Academic journals occupy an ambiguous position in the sociology of knowledge. Researchers usually encounter them as destinations for manuscripts or sources for literature reviews. This functional view makes the journal appear after knowledge has already been produced. Yet journals also participate in its production. They classify manuscripts into sections, define legitimate questions, stabilise vocabularies, assemble reviewers, and connect local findings to wider scholarly conversations. Their influence therefore extends beyond the individual article.

Infrastructure scholarship provides a useful starting point for understanding this role. Infrastructure is not merely a material system that moves objects across space; it is a relational arrangement that enables particular forms of activity and exchange while making others more difficult (Star and Ruhleder 1996; Larkin 2013). Bueger (2015) extends this perspective to epistemic infrastructures: the practical arrangements, sites, and practices through which phenomena become knowable and knowledge is maintained in circulation. Academic journals perform a comparable function. Their archives, editorial roles, review procedures, recurring

sections, publication schedules, and classificatory routines organise the circulation of claims between authors, institutions, reviewers, and audiences.

Treating journals as epistemic infrastructures does not imply that editors determine a field's agenda at will. Journals are themselves shaped by submitted manuscripts, reviewer availability, institutional resources, scholarly networks, funding structures, and public events. Their epistemic role is therefore distributed rather than centrally controlled. Nevertheless, selection and organisation matter because topics, places, methods, and authors do not receive equal visibility. By repeatedly selecting, grouping, and circulating particular forms of scholarship, journals can reinforce established hierarchies of attention, but they may also open space for questions, cases, and scholarly communities that are less visible elsewhere.

This distinction becomes particularly important within an unequal international system of knowledge production. Academic dependency describes a division of labour in which institutions located at the centre tend disproportionately to control theory, validation, and circulation, while peripheral locations are more frequently positioned as suppliers of empirical material (Alatas 2003). Publishing circuits and evaluation systems can reproduce such hierarchies within national academic fields (Beigel 2014), while large-scale studies show that the expansion of scholarly production and collaboration has not eliminated persistent centre–periphery patterns in the social sciences (Mosbah-Natanson and Gingras 2014). At the same time, transnational pathways of scholarly circulation can complicate a simple North–South hierarchy (Collyer 2018). Connell (2007) similarly locates social-scientific knowledge within unequal relations between metropolitan and peripheral sites of theory production, while Demeter (2020) documents persistent geographical inequalities in authorship, citation, and academic gatekeeping. Internationalisation, therefore, does not in itself imply epistemic equality.

These perspectives also make it necessary to distinguish between the geography of what is studied and the institutional locations from which knowledge is produced. Such spatial inequalities are also visible within migration research itself. Schmiz et al. (2022), for example, show that knowledge production at the intersection of migration and urban studies remains geographically uneven, with spatial biases in research production associated with imbalances in the topics that become visible. This reinforces the need to distinguish between the geography represented in migration scholarship and the geography from which that scholarship is institutionally produced.

Central and Eastern Europe occupies an especially ambiguous position within these structures. It is neither external to European academic institutions nor fully equivalent to their established centres. Research on the post-socialist "Global East" points to growing authorial visibility alongside weaker representation in gatekeeping roles (Trubina et al. 2020). Mälksoo (2021) consequently calls for provincialising international studies from Central and Eastern Europe, while Petrovici (2015) warns that the region can reproduce its own semi-peripheral forms of enclosure. The problem is therefore not limited to exclusion by an external centre. It also concerns the ways in which scholars and journals located in the region define their own intellectual position and capacity for knowledge production.

Recent research on journal editing in Central and Eastern Europe offers a less deterministic perspective. Karmazin (2022) emphasises that semi-peripheral journals can create meaningful scholarly opportunities, particularly for emerging researchers. Daniel and Karmazin (2025) develop this argument further by treating such journals as institutions possessing agency,

responsibility, and a limited capacity for innovation. This perspective is particularly useful for JIMS because it avoids two symmetrical simplifications: a celebratory account in which wider international reach is treated automatically as success, and a structuralist account in which semi-peripheral location predetermines marginality.

Migration studies add another layer to this problem. The field has grown rapidly, institutionalised specialised scholarly networks, and internationalised its authorship, but these developments have been uneven. Pisarevskaya et al. (2020), analysing almost 30,000 publications, show that internationalisation proceeded more slowly than the overall expansion of the field and that its thematic development involved shifting patterns of prominence rather than a simple movement toward permanent fragmentation. Migration studies have therefore expanded through both accumulation and redistribution of intellectual attention.

This development has also generated extensive reflexive criticism. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) demonstrated how methodological nationalism could make the nation-state appear to be the natural container of migration research. Dahinden (2016) later called for the "de-migranticisation" of a field that risks reproducing the administrative and political categories it seeks to analyse. Subsequent research has examined how categories, standpoints, colonial relations, non-academic actors, and digital infrastructures shape what migration scholarship can know (Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2021; Amelina 2022; Amelung, Scheel, and van Reekum 2024). From this perspective, studying a migration journal means examining not only changing research topics but also the conditions through which migration becomes constituted and circulated as an object of scholarly knowledge.

Anniversary studies increasingly recognise this wider analytical potential. King, Money, and Murawska's (2011) analysis of twenty years of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* traced changes in both research and author geographies. Lee, Carling, and Orrenius (2014) combined reflection on the development of migration research with patterns of authorship and citation for the fiftieth anniversary of the *International Migration Review*. Stern, Saunders, and Stame (2015) used the twentieth anniversary of *Evaluation* to reflect on the journal's founding aspirations, subsequent development, and future direction, deliberately moving beyond citation-based indicators alone. Harbers et al. (2021) examined topics, cases, methods, and author diversity across thirty years of *Regional & Federal Studies*, while Kashyap and Nur (2025) used computational analysis to situate fifty years of *Population and Development Review* in relation to neighbouring journals. Such studies turn anniversaries into opportunities for reflexive analysis of how journals participate in the organisation of scholarly fields.

Building on this literature, I distinguish four related but analytically separate ideas: diversification, internationalisation, epistemic rescaling, and polycentrism. Diversification refers to increasing variety within a journal, whether thematic, geographical, methodological, or institutional. Internationalisation is narrower and refers to the widening distribution of authors, institutions, cases, collaborations, or audiences across national boundaries. Neither necessarily changes the relations through which knowledge is organised. Epistemic rescaling refers to such a relational transformation: it occurs when changes in a journal's agenda, spatial scope, authorship, and organisational arrangements alter the scale at which knowledge is selected, assembled, and circulated.

At the journal level, I distinguish four dimensions of this process. The first is *thematic rescaling*, concerning which topics become central, peripheral, persistent, or newly connected.

The second is *spatial rescaling*, concerning which countries and regions enter the journal as cases, comparisons, sources of problems, or sites of conceptual relevance. The third is *authorship rescaling*, concerning the institutional geography of contributors and the changing organisation of individual and collaborative authorship. The fourth is *organisational rescaling*, concerning the methodological repertoire, editorial roles, issue formats, review arrangements, and publishing practices through which research is assembled and circulated. These dimensions are analytically distinct but empirically interconnected. A journal may diversify on one dimension without experiencing rescaling across the others.

Polycentrism describes a possible configuration emerging from such rescaling rather than another name for the rescaling process itself. I use the term to describe a journal in which several geographical and institutional locations participate meaningfully both as objects of inquiry and as sites of knowledge production, without one geographical centre consistently defining the intellectual terms of exchange. Polycentrism therefore requires more than the accumulation of countries or contributors. It implies a redistribution of epistemic participation across locations. The present analysis can identify movement toward such a configuration through changing case geographies, institutional affiliations, collaboration, and editorial organisation, but it cannot establish completed polycentrism. A stronger test would also require evidence on citation relations, the circulation of concepts and theories between regions, transnational collaboration networks, and the distribution of editorial or reviewing authority.

This framework produces three analytical expectations. A logic of mission continuity predicts that the founding emphasis on identity, migration, and Central and Eastern Europe will remain visible despite subsequent diversification. A logic of event responsiveness predicts shifts in thematic and spatial attention alongside major economic, political, and humanitarian disruptions, without assuming that such events directly caused changes in published content. A logic of networked accumulation predicts a widening institutional geography of authorship, increasing collaboration, greater methodological plurality, and more differentiated editorial arrangements. These logics are not mutually exclusive. Their interaction makes it possible to assess whether JIMS experienced simple growth, diversification, internationalisation, or the deeper relational transformation described here as epistemic rescaling, and whether that transformation points toward an increasingly polycentric configuration.

3. Research design and methodology

3.1 Case selection and analytical baseline

JIMS is examined as a revealing rather than representative case of journal development from a semi-peripheral institutional location. Its first issue appeared in 2007, the year Romania joined the European Union, at a moment when European integration was reshaping the legal and political conditions of mobility and Central and Eastern European societies were experiencing overlapping roles as countries of emigration, immigration, return, and transit. Migration was therefore closely embedded in the region's broader social and political transformation.

The journal's founding editorial provides the analytical baseline for assessing subsequent change. Lia Pop, the founding director of JIMS, described the journal as a venue for research on migration and identity that would connect academic, policy, and practitioner perspectives and give particular visibility to materials and theoretical positions emerging from South-Eastern and Central Europe (Pop 2007). The founding mission was consequently regional without being exclusively

regional: it linked migration to questions of identity while positioning Central and Eastern Europe as an important site from which migration processes could be analysed and debated.

Several institutional features also make JIMS suitable for longitudinal analysis. From its establishment, it was conceived as an English-language, online, interdisciplinary journal and remained institutionally anchored at the University of Oradea. It operated through a relatively small university-based publishing infrastructure while sustaining publication across two decades. This combination of institutional continuity and intellectual adaptation makes it possible to examine how a journal located outside the established Anglophone core can alter its thematic, spatial, authorial, and organisational configuration over time.

The case is therefore analytically useful not because JIMS represents migration journals in general, but because it provides an opportunity to examine a less visible layer of scholarly communication. Research on global academic inequality often relies on bibliometric evidence drawn from internationally visible journals and large publication databases (e.g. Demeter 2020). Smaller institutional journals offer a complementary perspective on publishing circuits through which regional concerns, interdisciplinary work, and less represented scholarly locations may enter English-language circulation. The founding mission and organisational setting of JIMS thus provide the historical reference point against which the four dimensions of epistemic rescaling are assessed. The founding editorial is treated as evidence of declared institutional intent, not as evidence that the subsequent publication record necessarily fulfilled that mission.

3.2 Corpus and periodisation

The empirical corpus comprises every complete issue from volume 1, number 1 (2007) to volume 20, number 1 (2026). The archive contains 39 issues and 5,443 PDF pages. I identified 257 distinct contributions with an extractable abstract. Research articles, thematic articles, focus articles, policy papers, and one work-in-progress contribution are included. Editorials, book reviews, conference reports, calls, and contributor biographies are excluded from the article-level analysis, although they are used selectively as evidence concerning the journal's organisational and editorial development.

I divide the archive into four periods: 2007–2011, 2012–2016, 2017–2021, and 2022–2026. The first three contain ten issues each. The final period contains nine issues because the analysis ends with the first issue of 2026. The respective contribution counts are 56, 58, 79, and 64. Periodisation reduces annual volatility while retaining the journal's major phases. It does not assume that change occurred exactly at five-year boundaries.

3.3 Coding and Indicators

Rather than conducting a conventional bibliometric design (Donthu et al. 2021), the empirical analysis operationalises the four dimensions of epistemic rescaling through a combination of article-level indicators and longitudinal evidence from editorial paratexts. Thematic and spatial rescaling are examined primarily through explicit textual visibility in published contributions; authorship rescaling through co-authorship and institutional affiliations; and organisational rescaling through method signals, issue architecture, editorial roles, and publishing arrangements.

First, I coded thematic presence using explicit terms in article titles, abstracts, and author-supplied keywords. The coding scheme was developed to capture recurring substantive domains

in the JIMS corpus and to permit consistent longitudinal comparison across the four periods. It comprises eleven multi-label categories: forced migration and asylum; governance, borders, and law; integration and acculturation; identity, culture, and religion; labour, economy, and development; transnationalism, diaspora, and return; media and digital communication; health, welfare, and education; inequality, race, and gender; environmental displacement; and methodology. A contribution may belong to several categories. The categories therefore measure explicit thematic presence rather than mutually exclusive substantive fields.

Second, I coded geographical scope from country names, demonyms, and explicit macro-regional labels in titles, abstracts, and keywords. The categories distinguish Central and Eastern Europe; Western, Northern, and Southern Europe; Europe without a more specific subregion; the Middle East and North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; North America; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Asia-Pacific. Categories are non-exclusive. A comparison of Romania and Spain, for example, contributes to two regional counts. Geographical visibility should not be confused with author affiliation or with formal study location. A country may appear as a migrant origin, destination, policy reference, comparison, or historical context. The measure therefore answers a narrower question: which parts of the world did JIMS contributions make explicit in their most visible textual elements? It captures the journal's spatial scope, not the institutional geography of authorship.

Third, I recorded author names for each contribution and calculated the proportion of co-authored contributions in each period. Author affiliation was coded from the Notes on Contributors section of every issue, supplemented by the opening pages of the contribution where the note was incomplete. The affiliation rule is deliberately restrictive because this variable supports one of the article's central empirical claims. I record the country of the first current institutional affiliation stated in the source. Countries of birth, nationality, research focus, and prior degrees are not treated as current affiliations; where several affiliations are listed, the first is used consistently; and missing values are never imputed from the geographical focus of the contribution. Affiliation data are available for 348 of 376 author-contribution occurrences, corresponding to an overall coverage rate of 92.6%. Coverage by period is 98.7%, 95.1%, 90.2%, and 88.7% respectively. Missing affiliations remain visible as a separate category rather than being redistributed. The first-affiliation rule maximises coding consistency but may understate multiple institutional embeddedness and transregional academic mobility. In addition, the occurrence-based indicator measures the institutional composition of published output rather than the diversity of a population of unique authors. Unique-author trajectories and cross-national co-authorship therefore remain distinct questions for future analysis rather than results inferred from the present coding.

Fourth, I detected explicit method terms in titles, abstracts, and keywords including several categories: survey, qualitative, quantitative, comparative, content analysis, case study, mixed methods, historical analysis, literature review, and theoretical work. Authors do not always identify their methods explicitly in titles, abstracts, or keywords. These indicators are therefore treated as signals of methodological articulation rather than as a complete classification of research design.

Organisational rescaling is assessed through a second set of longitudinal indicators derived from editorial paratexts rather than article abstracts. I recorded changes in issue architecture, including the presence of thematic and focus sections, and compared mastheads, editorial roles, publication formats, and other publicly stated publishing arrangements across the

archive. These indicators are interpreted as evidence of how the journal organised and presented scholarly production over time rather than as direct measures of editorial decision-making capacity.

3.4 Units of Analysis, Validation, and Positionality

Two principal units of analysis run through the article and should not be confused. Thematic visibility, geographical visibility, and co-authorship are measured at the level of the contribution. The first two record whether a topic or region is explicitly present, while co-authorship records whether a contribution has more than one author. Institutional affiliation is coded at the level of the author-contribution occurrence: each author counts once for each contribution, and repeat appearances across different contributions are retained because the indicator measures the institutional composition of published output rather than the size of a population of unique individuals. The 257 contributions yield 376 such occurrences, an average of 1.46 authors per contribution. The corpus-assisted analysis was checked in several ways. I reconciled issue and annual counts, inspected every duplicate title within an issue, reviewed short uppercase headings, and conducted a deterministic stratified check of 32 records. I also analysed the founding editorial and compared mastheads and contents pages across the archive. Table 1 summarises the analytical population and selected longitudinal indicators.

Table 1. Corpus and selected longitudinal indicators by period

Period	Issues	Contributions	Co-authored (%)	Issues with thematic section	Issues with focus section
2007–2011	10	56	23.2	10	1
2012–2016	10	58	29.3	9	2
2017–2021	10	79	26.6	9	9
2022–2026	9	64	37.5	2	8

Source: Author's elaboration based on JIMS's archive.

My relationship to the journal requires explicit positionality. I served on the editorial team as Deputy Editor-in-Chief from the journal's establishment through volume 19, number 1 (2025). This experience provides institutional knowledge, but it also creates a risk of retrospective rationalisation. I mitigate that risk by retaining an auditable coding file, reporting non-linear and potentially uncomfortable findings, and limiting claims to evidence available in the public archive. I do not use private correspondence, reviewer identities, acceptance data, or confidential editorial discussions.

3.5 Inferential Limits

The design is descriptive rather than causal, and dictionary-based indicators capture explicit textual visibility rather than latent meaning (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). The analysis can identify concurrent changes in thematic agenda, spatial scope, authorship patterns, and organisational arrangements, but it cannot demonstrate that changes in one dimension caused changes in another. Nor can the design establish that particular editorial decisions caused the observed trajectories or strictly isolate the effects of refugee movements, economic crises, pandemics, wars, funding agendas, or broader scholarly trends. Topic selection and publication patterns may instead reflect changing combinations of submissions, invited contributions, scholarly networks, public events, editorial priorities, and disciplinary developments. The analysis therefore examines how such transformations became legible in JIMS's evolving publication record rather than attributing them to a single causal mechanism.

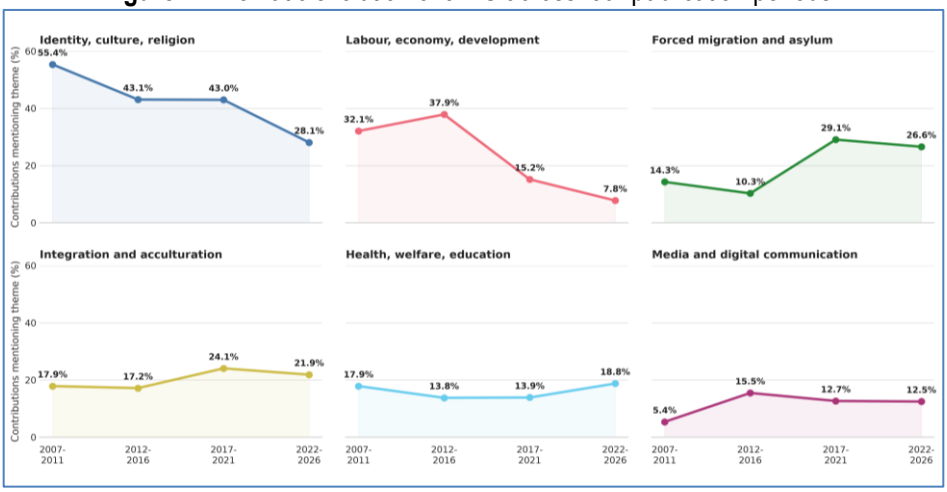
4. Results: four dimensions of epistemic rescaling

The longitudinal analysis of JIMS's archive reveals change across all four dimensions identified in the theoretical framework, although the trajectories were neither uniform nor simultaneous. Thematic priorities were redistributed, the spatial scope of published research widened, the institutional geography of authorship became more diverse, and the journal's organisational arrangements changed in both methodological and editorial terms. The following sections examine these dimensions separately before their interconnections are considered in the Discussion.

4.1. Thematic Rescaling

The founding design of JIMS linked migration explicitly to identity rather than treating mobility primarily as a demographic flow or policy problem. The publication record initially reflected this orientation. Across the archive, however, thematic change took the form of both continuity and redistribution. Identity-related topics remained a persistent intellectual anchor, while labour migration declined substantially after the journal's first decade. Forced migration and asylum became considerably more prominent after 2017, and health, inequality, and digital communication added further layers to the journal's thematic profile. These evolutions are visually illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Thematic evolution of JIMS across four publication periods



Source: Author's elaboration based on JIMS's archive.

Note: Themes are based on explicit terms in titles, abstracts and author keywords. They are multi-label and percentages within a period do not sum to 100.

During 2007–2011, identity, culture, or religion appeared explicitly in 55.4% of contributions. Labour, economy, or development appeared in 32.1%, followed by governance, borders, or law and inequality, race, or gender, each at 23.2%. Forced migration and asylum appeared in 14.3%. This configuration was closely connected to the circumstances in which the journal had been established: labour mobility, European integration, cultural attachment, and national identity were recurrent dimensions of Central and Eastern European migration. Fihel (2007), for example, analysed the institutional determinants of emigration from the region, while Bălțătescu (2007) compared the subjective quality of life of Central and Eastern European migrants. The early thematic agenda nevertheless extended beyond these core concerns. Georgiadou and Kekkeris (2007) examined the role of information technologies in immigrant identity construction, while Cinpoeș (2008) and Petithomme (2008) approached European identity as a contested political attachment. Contributions also addressed remittances, migrant families, education, minority integration, communication technologies, and subjective wellbeing. Migration was frequently organised around relations between identifiable sending and receiving societies, with labour markets providing an important explanatory vocabulary and identity linking economic mobility to belonging and cultural change.

The 2012–2016 period consolidated the economic strand before its subsequent decline. Labour, economy, or development reached 37.9%, its highest level across the four periods. Identity-related themes remained extensive at 43.1%, while transnationalism, diaspora, or return reached 20.7%. Media and digital communication increased from 5.4% to 15.5%. Forced migration and asylum, by contrast, remained comparatively limited at 10.3%. Contributions during this period connected migration to return, employment, human capital, diasporic identity, and communication. Roman and Goschin (2012), for example, examined the return intentions of Romanian emigrants; Li (2012) analysed neighbourhood satisfaction among foreign-born and native-born residents in the United States; and Caytas (2012) addressed the tension between

assimilation and cultural preservation. The thematic range expanded, but labour and identity continued to provide important organising coordinates.

A more pronounced redistribution occurred during 2017–2021. Forced migration and asylum rose to 29.1%, almost three times the proportion recorded in the preceding period. Governance, borders, and law increased to 25.3%, while integration and acculturation reached 24.1%. Identity remained highly visible at 43.0%, but labour, economy, and development fell to 15.2%. The magnitude and persistence of these changes indicate a substantive redistribution of thematic attention rather than a minor period-to-period variation. The contributions published during these years illustrate how forced migration entered the journal through several connected questions. Parent (2018) analysed Turkish perceptions of risk in relation to Syrian refugees, Bosilkov and Drakaki (2018) compared media framing of the migrant crisis in Greece and Macedonia, and Duarte (2018) examined the tension between open borders and welfare states. Other studies considered contact and threat perceptions in Maltese migration policy (Korostelina and Camilleri 2017) and the reintegration of internal return migrants in Ghana (Yendaw, Tanle, and Kendie 2017). Forced migration therefore appeared not only as displacement but also through asylum procedures, border management, political attitudes, social integration, and institutional access. The timing is consistent with the broader rise of conflict, human rights, and forced migration within migration studies identified by Pisarevskaya et al. (2020), although the present design cannot attribute the shift directly to the 2015–2016 refugee arrivals or to any single external event.

The most recent period, 2022–2026, shows a further redistribution. Identity, culture, and religion declined to 28.1%, remaining the largest of the selected categories but standing well below its early level. Forced migration and asylum remained high at 26.6%. Governance and integration each appeared in 21.9% of contributions, health, welfare, and education in 18.8%, and both transnationalism and inequality in 17.2%. Labour, economy, and development fell to 7.8%. The substantive range of recent contributions illustrates this shift. Sibanda and Hlatshwayo (2024) examined the border strategies of Zimbabwean migrant women; Tewolde (2024) analysed residential segregation among Black African migrants in Johannesburg; Andronic (2024) connected acculturation to mental health; García Martínez and Nagem (2025) examined digital control and discrimination; and Sharma (2026) reconstructed the inherited memory of the 1942 Burma exodus. Compared with the earlier prominence of labour mobility, these contributions place greater emphasis on vulnerability, institutional encounters, discrimination, mediated identity, wellbeing, and historical transmission.

Two thematic strands illustrate particularly clearly that change involved accumulation as well as replacement (see Figure 1). Media and digital communication rose from 5.4% in the first period to 15.5% in the second and subsequently stabilised at approximately 12–13%. JIMS had already addressed information technologies and migrant identity in its first volume. Later contributions extended this interest toward media framing, digital discrimination, online interaction, and platform-mediated identity. Health-related themes followed a somewhat different but similarly cumulative pattern. Their visibility fluctuated around 14–18% before reaching 18.8% in the most recent period, with later contributions placing greater emphasis on mental health, wellbeing, healthcare access, professional integration, and the embodied consequences of migration.

Taken together, these results show thematic layering rather than simple succession. Identity remained visible throughout the archive but declined in relative prominence. Labour

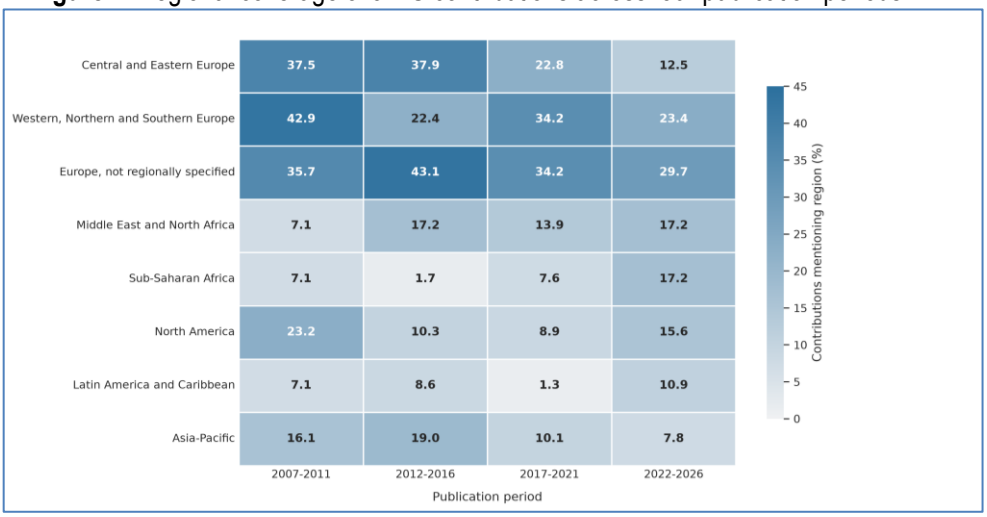
characterised the earlier periods and then receded substantially. Forced migration reorganised the later thematic profile without replacing identity, while health, inequality, and digital mediation connected established concerns with newer forms of vulnerability and institutional encounter. Thematic rescaling therefore consisted less in the replacement of one agenda by another than in a changing configuration of persistent and newly prominent concerns.

4.2. Spatial rescaling

The spatial record complicates any straightforward transition from a regional to a global journal. Although JIMS was founded with a particular Central and Eastern European orientation, its empirical scope was never confined to the region. The first issue already included contributions addressing Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Greece, and migration from the former Soviet Union. The second issue extended the range of cases to Canada, Bangladesh, India, Germany, and the United States. International empirical connections were therefore present from the journal's inception. What changed over time was not the existence of geographical diversity but its distribution and the relative weight of the founding region.

Spatial rescaling refers here to the geography made visible by published research, not to the institutional location of authors. Figure 2 therefore records regions explicitly analysed or discussed in titles, abstracts, and keywords. The institutional geography of authorship is examined separately in Section 4.3. Maintaining this distinction is important because an expansion in the number of regions studied does not necessarily imply a comparable change in where published research is institutionally produced.

Figure 2. Regional coverage of JIMS contributions across four publication periods



Source: Author's elaboration based on JIMS's archive.

Note: Regions are identified from titles, abstracts, and author keywords. They are non-exclusive; one contribution may discuss several regions.

Central and Eastern Europe appeared explicitly in 37.5% of contributions during 2007–2011 and 37.9% during 2012–2016. Its visibility then declined to 22.8% in 2017–2021 and 12.5%

in 2022–2026. The first decade therefore displays considerable continuity with the founding regional orientation, whereas the subsequent periods show pronounced decentring. This decline does not indicate the disappearance of the region from the journal. Recent contributions continued to address South-East European youth, European integration, Ukrainian displacement, intra-European mobility, and regional identities. Moreover, a generic European frame remained common. Europe without a more specific subregional designation appeared in 35.7%, 43.1%, 34.2%, and 29.7% of contributions across the four periods. JIMS thus became less specifically Central and Eastern European without ceasing to be strongly engaged with Europe.

Western, Northern, and Southern Europe followed a non-linear trajectory. These regions appeared in 42.9% of contributions in 2007–2011, declined to 22.4% in 2012–2016, increased to 34.2% in 2017–2021, and stood at 23.4% in the most recent period. Part of this pattern reflects the relational character of migration research: contributions frequently connected Eastern European origins with Western European destinations or compared migration and reception contexts across different parts of Europe. The journal's initial Central and Eastern European orientation therefore operated from the beginning within a wider European field of mobility.

The most substantial recent change concerns regions beyond Europe. Sub-Saharan Africa appeared in 7.1% of contributions during 2007–2011 and 1.7% during 2012–2016. Its visibility subsequently increased to 7.6% in 2017–2021 and 17.2% in 2022–2026. Recent contributions addressed Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Somalia, Zimbabwe, and forms of intra-African mobility, making African contexts a more recurrent component of the journal's empirical scope.

The Middle East and North Africa also remained visible across the archive, with proportions of 7.1%, 17.2%, 13.9%, and 17.2% across the four periods. Contributions approached the region through migration toward Europe, refugee governance, Turkish and Syrian cases, Gulf migration, diaspora politics, citizenship, identity, and acculturation. These different routes are analytically relevant because the region appeared not only as a point of origin for migration toward Europe but also as a setting in which migration and membership were studied in their own right.

Latin America and the Caribbean display a more discontinuous trajectory. Their visibility rose from 7.1% in the first period to 8.6% in the second, fell to 1.3% in 2017–2021, and increased to 10.9% in the most recent period. Recent contributions included work on Colombia, Venezuela, and Hispano-American migration. North America and Asia-Pacific likewise fluctuated rather than following a linear path. Spatial widening was therefore selective and episodic rather than uniformly cumulative.

The overall pattern resembles, in some respects, the geographical broadening observed by King, Money, and Murawska (2011) in their analysis of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, where the relative dominance of British and European cases declined while other sending and receiving regions gained visibility. The starting positions, however, differ. JIMS began as a journal institutionally located in Central and Eastern Europe and explicitly oriented toward that region, rather than as an established Western European journal subsequently seeking wider geographical coverage. The JIMS record consequently shows both geographical expansion and a substantial reduction in the relative visibility of its original regional reference point.

The results do not support the description of JIMS as geographically balanced or uniformly global. European categories continue to account for a substantial part of the archive, while several world regions remain intermittent. What the spatial rescaling analysis demonstrates

more clearly is a shift from a publication profile in which Central and Eastern Europe occupied a comparatively prominent empirical position toward one in which a broader and more varied set of regional contexts became recurrent.

4.3 Authorship Rescaling

Spatial widening in the objects of research was accompanied by changes in the institutional locations from which published contributions originated. Authorship rescaling is therefore analytically distinct from spatial rescaling. The former concerns who contributes to the journal and from which institutional settings; the latter concerns which places and regions are made visible as objects of research. Figure 3 identifies the country of the first current institutional affiliation recorded for each author-contribution occurrence. Romanian institutions accounted for 13.2% of occurrences in 2007–2011, increased to 24.4% in 2012–2016, and subsequently declined to 16.1% in 2017–2021 and 13.2% in 2022–2026. The pattern is therefore not one of steady movement away from the journal's home country. Instead, it shows an intermediate phase of stronger Romanian concentration followed by renewed diversification.

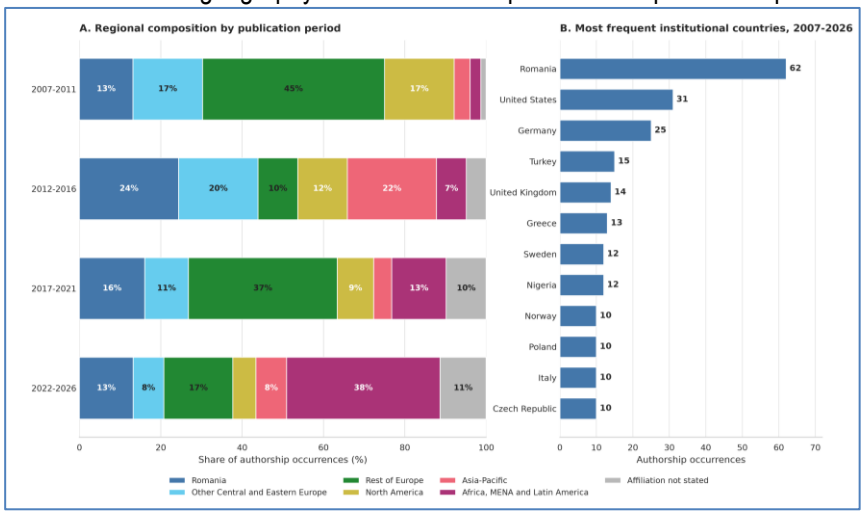
The most pronounced change occurred in affiliations located outside Europe and North America. Affiliations in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America together increased from 2.6% of author-contribution occurrences in 2007–2011 to 37.7% in 2022–2026. Across the complete archive, Romania remained the most frequent institutional country, with 62 occurrences, followed by the United States with 31 and Germany with 25. The resulting distribution combines continuity in the journal's Romanian institutional connections with a substantially broader geography of contributors.

The Romanian trajectory is itself important because it complicates a simple local-to-international interpretation. JIMS did not begin as an overwhelmingly Romanian-authored journal and subsequently internationalise in a linear fashion. Romanian affiliations became more concentrated during the second period analysed here before declining again. The diversification of institutional locations was therefore uneven and temporally layered.

The distinction between spatial and authorship rescaling becomes visible when the two sets of results are compared. A contribution about Nigeria written by an author based at a European institution expands the journal's spatial scope without changing the regional composition of authorship. Conversely, an author affiliated with an African institution who publishes a contribution focused on Europe alters the institutional geography of authorship without necessarily expanding the map of empirical cases. The two dimensions can reinforce one another, but they should not be treated as interchangeable.

The affiliation data also require caution. Coverage declined from 98.7% in the first period to 88.7% in the most recent period, with missing affiliations reaching 9.8% and 11.3% in the final two periods. Affiliations were not inferred from nationality, educational background, or the country analysed in the contribution, and only the first current institutional affiliation was coded when several were reported. The resulting distribution is therefore conservative and may understate multiple institutional embeddedness and transregional academic mobility.

Figure 3. Institutional geography of JIMS authorship across four publication periods



Source: Author's elaboration based on JIMS's archive.

Note: Each author is counted once per contribution; repeat appearances are retained. Affiliation country was identified for 348 of 376 occurrences (92.6%), and unstated affiliations remain visible.

Co-authorship provides a complementary indicator of change in authorship patterns. Co-authored contributions accounted for 23.2% of publications in 2007–2011, 29.3% in 2012–2016, 26.6% in 2017–2021, and 37.5% in 2022–2026. Collaboration thus increased overall but not monotonically, reaching its highest level in the most recent period. This measure should not be interpreted as evidence of international collaboration by itself. A shared byline may involve authors from the same institution or country, whereas a single-authored contribution may reflect extensive transnational research networks. The present coding does not distinguish same-country from cross-country teams. The narrower finding is that collectively authored work became more frequent, particularly after 2022. Determining whether this increase also represents more transnational or cross-regional collaboration would require analysis of institutional combinations within individual co-authored contributions.

Taken together, author affiliation and co-authorship results indicate that authorship rescaling involved both geographical diversification and a growing recent presence of collective authorship. The strongest evidence concerns the institutional geography of published output: the locations represented in authors' affiliations widened substantially, while Romania remained a recurrent but non-dominant institutional anchor.

4.4 Organisational Rescaling

The founding organisational design of JIMS combined several features that remained relevant across the period analysed. It was established as an English-language, online, interdisciplinary, semi-annual journal based at the University of Oradea. Over time, this institutional anchor remained stable while the methodological profile of published contributions,

the architecture of issues, editorial roles, and publicly stated publishing arrangements became more differentiated.

Method signals provide one article-level indication of this change, although they capture only methods explicitly named in titles, abstracts, or keywords. Qualitative terms appeared in 7.1% of contributions in 2007–2011 and 6.9% in 2012–2016, before increasing to 15.2% in 2017–2021 and 17.2% in 2022–2026. Quantitative signals rose from 3.6% in the first period to 10.3% and 11.4% in the next two periods, before declining to 7.8% in the most recent period. Survey terminology decreased from 19.6% to 13.8%, 10.1%, and 7.8% respectively. Theoretical or conceptual signals followed a U-shaped pattern of 16.1%, 13.8%, 5.1%, and 12.5%. These indicators do not demonstrate a qualitative turn in a strict methodological sense. Authors may use interviews, ethnography, or other qualitative designs without making them explicit in the textual fields coded here, particularly in earlier volumes. What the indicators show more securely is a change in methodological articulation. Later contributions more frequently made qualitative approaches explicit, while survey language became less prominent and quantitative terminology followed a non-linear trajectory. The published methodological repertoire consequently became more visibly differentiated.

Issue architecture changed more clearly. All ten issues published during 2007–2011 contained a thematic-articles section, as did nine of ten issues in both 2012–2016 and 2017–2021. Only two of the nine issues published during 2022–2026 retained this format. By contrast, a "Focus" section appeared in one issue during 2007–2011, two during 2012–2016, nine during 2017–2021, and eight during 2022–2026. The two formats organise contributions differently. Thematic sections group several articles around an announced substantive problem and give an issue a more explicit collective centre. Focus sections provide a more modular format through which one or several contributions can be highlighted without requiring an entire issue to be organised around a single theme. The longitudinal pattern therefore records a clear shift in issue architecture from the near-universal presence of thematic sections toward the recurrent use of focus sections.

Book reviews provide an element of continuity. They appeared in 34 of the 39 issues and became nearly continuous after the journal's earliest years. Although excluded from the article-level thematic analysis, their persistence forms part of the journal's organisational record by maintaining a recurring space for engagement with newly published scholarship.

The mastheads also document progressive differentiation in editorial roles. In 2007, the journal listed a director, two manager editors, four editors, and an international scientific committee of six members from three countries. By 2026, the organisational structure included an Editor-in-Chief, Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Editorial Board, and Assistant Editors. In 2025 and 2026, the board contained ten members across six countries, and the journal had added a designated editorial assistant. Throughout these changes, the University of Oradea and its Political Science and Communication Sciences Department remained the principal institutional anchor.

Publicly stated publishing arrangements also became more explicit. The first masthead described JIMS as an online review, while the 2015 masthead explicitly identified it as open access. The current website states a CC BY reuse policy and provides publication guidelines and a double-anonymous peer-review procedure (Journal of Identity and Migration Studies n.d.). These developments do not by themselves demonstrate changes in editorial quality or decision-

making capacity, but they show greater formalisation and public visibility of the procedures through which contributions are submitted, reviewed, published, and reused.

Open access represents both continuity and formalisation within this organisational trajectory. The journal was conceived from the outset as an online publication, while the terminology and policies associated with open-access publishing became more explicit over time. This arrangement is particularly relevant for a university-based journal operating outside a large commercial publishing platform because it structures how published work can be accessed and circulated, although the present analysis does not measure readership or downstream use.

In sum, the organisational record combines substantial institutional continuity with increasing differentiation in methodological articulation, issue architecture, editorial roles, and publishing procedures. The University of Oradea remained the journal's stable organisational base, while the formats and arrangements through which scholarship was presented and circulated changed considerably across the period examined.

5. Discussion: from rescaling toward a polycentric configuration

The JIMS archive reveals neither a simple institutional history nor a linear progression from regional to international publishing. Its development is better understood through the interaction of the three logics proposed in the theoretical framework: mission continuity, event responsiveness, and networked accumulation. Each captures a different aspect of the journal's trajectory, but none is sufficient on its own. Their overlap helps explain why JIMS's history is marked simultaneously by persistence, redistribution, and institutional diversification rather than by the replacement of one journal identity by another.

Mission continuity is most visible in two forms. The first is thematic. Identity remained present throughout the archive even as its relative prominence declined and other concerns became more visible. The second is institutional. JIMS remained organisationally anchored at the University of Oradea despite substantial changes in the geography of authorship, issue architecture, and editorial arrangements. Continuity therefore did not mean thematic or organisational immobility. Rather, some elements of the founding configuration persisted while their relative position within the journal changed. This distinction is important because it prevents rescaling from being interpreted simply as abandonment of the original mission.

Event responsiveness provides a second layer of interpretation. The later prominence of forced migration, asylum, border governance, integration, and vulnerability is temporally consistent with broader transformations in European and global migration politics, particularly after the refugee movements of the mid-2010s. The JIMS trajectory also parallels changes identified in migration studies more broadly, where conflict, forced migration, and human rights became increasingly prominent (Pisarevskaya et al. 2020). The evidence does not establish that external events caused specific editorial changes, and the archive cannot separate their effects from those of submission patterns, scholarly fashions, funding priorities, or invited contributions. What it does show is that the journal's thematic and spatial profile changed alongside transformations in the wider field rather than remaining fixed by its founding agenda.

The third logic, networked accumulation, is most visible in the gradual widening of the institutional geography of authorship, the recent increase in co-authorship, greater methodological differentiation, and the changing organisation of issues and editorial roles. These developments did not follow a uniform upward trajectory. Romanian affiliations, for example, became more

concentrated during the second period before declining again, while co-authorship also fluctuated before reaching its highest level after 2022. Networked accumulation should therefore not be understood as continuous quantitative growth. It refers instead to the accumulation of additional institutional connections, modes of collaboration, methodological repertoires, and publishing arrangements through which research could enter and circulate within the journal.

Taken together, these three logics clarify what is meant by epistemic rescaling. Diversification would describe the appearance of more topics, methods, regions, or institutional locations. Internationalisation would describe a wider transnational distribution of authors, cases, and affiliations. The JIMS record points to something more relational. Changes occurred across the journal's thematic agenda, spatial scope, institutional geography of authorship, and organisational arrangements, and these dimensions increasingly intersected. African and Middle Eastern cases, for example, became more recurrent at the same time that affiliations from Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America became substantially more visible in the published output. This widening coincided with more frequent collective authorship and with changes in the methodological and editorial organisation of contributions. The dimensions did not move in perfect synchrony, but neither did they evolve independently.

This is the sense in which the concept of rescaling adds something to the language of diversification or internationalisation. The relevant transformation is not simply that JIMS published more varied content or attracted contributors from more countries. Rather, the relations among what was studied, where it was studied, where published scholarship was institutionally produced, and how that scholarship was organised changed over time. Epistemic rescaling therefore describes a reconfiguration in the scale at which migration knowledge could be assembled from a relatively stable institutional location.

The question is whether this transformation also justifies describing JIMS as moving toward a more polycentric configuration. The evidence supports such a claim, but only in a qualified sense. Polycentrism, as defined here, requires more than the accumulation of geographical diversity. Multiple locations must participate meaningfully not only as empirical objects but also as sites of knowledge production. JIMS increasingly approximates this condition. African and Middle Eastern cases became more recurrent, while Latin American and Asian cases contributed to a broader, though more episodic, geographical repertoire. In addition, the institutional geography of authorship has simultaneously widened beyond its earlier European and North American concentration. The journal therefore increasingly connects a stable Central and Eastern European organisational base with scholarship produced from a broader range of institutional settings.

This development is important because internationalisation does not necessarily reduce epistemic hierarchy. Centre–periphery relations in academic publishing remain structured by inequalities in theory production, validation, visibility, and gatekeeping (Alatas 2003; Connell 2007; Demeter 2020). From this perspective, the significance of JIMS is not that it displaced established centres or escaped the constraints associated with semi-peripheral publishing. Rather, it created a durable site through which scholarship from different institutional locations could enter English-language circulation without being organised exclusively through a large commercial or Anglophone publishing platform. This is consistent with work emphasising the limited but meaningful agency of journals operating from Central and Eastern European semi-peripheries (Karmazin 2022; Daniel and Karmazin 2025). Epistemic agency need not imply possession of the

resources or symbolic capital of the academic core; it may also consist in constructing alternative routes through which knowledge is selected, connected, and circulated.

The relationship between Central and Eastern Europe and the wider geography of JIMS is therefore central to evaluating the journal's movement toward polycentrism. The founding regional location initially gave the journal a distinctive standpoint from which migration could be examined through the overlapping experiences of emigration, immigration, return, European integration, and post-socialist transformation. Later volumes incorporated a wider range of African, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Asian cases, including South–South mobility and migration processes analysed within non-European reception contexts. Such widening creates the possibility of comparisons that do not automatically position Western Europe or North America as the sole reference points and may connect the post-socialist Global East with other non-hegemonic locations.

Yet the same development introduces a significant tension. The explicit visibility of Central and Eastern Europe declined substantially across the period analysed. Greater geographical reach can therefore coexist with a weakening of the regional standpoint that initially differentiated the journal. This does not mean that internationalisation and regional anchoring are inherently incompatible. The more demanding possibility is to treat the regional location not as an enclosure but as a position from which comparative questions can travel. A genuinely polycentric configuration would not require JIMS to choose between Central and Eastern Europe and other world regions. It would require the relations between them to become intellectually productive.

This distinction also places limits on how far the present findings can support the language of polycentrism. Wider case geographies and more diverse institutional affiliations are necessary indicators, but they are not sufficient to demonstrate a redistribution of epistemic authority. The analysis does not establish whether scholars based in different regions contribute equally to conceptual development, whether theories generated outside established centres circulate between contributions, or whether collaboration increasingly crosses national and regional boundaries. Nor does it reconstruct citation networks, reviewer geographies, or the distribution of editorial gatekeeping. For these reasons, the evidence supports movement toward a polycentric configuration rather than completed polycentrism.

The 20th anniversary of JIMS nevertheless offers practical implications for how such a trajectory might be strengthened. One possibility is to make comparison between Central and Eastern Europe and other migration regions more explicit as an editorial programme. Rather than pursuing wider geographical representation as an end in itself, JIMS could encourage comparative work linking Central and Eastern European trajectories with African, Middle Eastern, Asian, or Latin American experiences. Potential areas include sending and receiving transformations, migration in peripheral cities, refugee reception outside established destination countries, digital migration infrastructures, demographic decline, or the institutional consequences of mobility. The objective would not be geographical quotas, but the use of location as a source of questions capable of travelling between contexts.

A second implication concerns the infrastructure through which such participation becomes visible and analysable. Structured metadata, persistent identifiers such as DOIs, consistent reporting of author affiliations, ORCID integration, and downloadable article-level metadata would improve the discoverability and analytical usability of the archive. Clear public statements concerning peer review, research ethics, data availability, and the use of generative

artificial intelligence would further increase procedural transparency. Such measures appear administrative, but they also have epistemic consequences because they affect what scholarship can be discovered, verified, connected, and reused.

Future self-assessment could consequently extend beyond conventional citation indicators. Periodic monitoring of case geography, institutional affiliations, unique authors, cross-national co-authorship, career stage, gender, methodological design, editorial-board composition, reviewer diversity, and decision times would make it possible to assess whether a polycentric aspiration produces broader participation in practice. These measures should not become targets in themselves. Their value lies in making the journal's own infrastructure available for repeated scrutiny rather than treating internationalisation as an intrinsically positive or self-evident outcome.

Several limitations qualify the interpretation of results. First, the quantitative corpus is restricted to abstract-bearing contributions; editorials, reports, reviews, and other paratextual material are used selectively but are not included in the article-level coding. Second, dictionary-based thematic indicators capture explicit textual visibility rather than latent meaning and cannot substitute for systematic close reading. Third, regional mentions are not equivalent to formal study sites, migrant origins, destinations, or institutional affiliations. Spatial rescaling and authorship rescaling are therefore deliberately analysed as separate dimensions. Fourth, method signals depend on explicit wording in the textual fields coded and probably underestimate research designs that were not explicitly named, particularly in earlier issues. Fifth, institutional affiliation is measured through the first current affiliation and at the level of author-contribution occurrences. This maximises consistency but may understate multiple institutional embeddedness and retains repeated appearances by the same individuals. The indicator therefore describes the institutional composition of published output rather than the diversity of unique authors. Sixth, co-authorship does not reveal whether collaboration crossed institutions, countries, regions, or disciplines. Future analysis should reconstruct unique-author trajectories, multiple affiliations, cross-national and cross-regional co-authorship, editorial-board geography, and citation relations. Seventh, the final period contains nine rather than ten issues and ends with the first issue of 2026, so comparisons are appropriately expressed as proportions rather than equal exposure counts. Finally, public archive data cannot identify editorial causation. The observed patterns may reflect submissions, invited sections, political events, funding environments, scholarly networks, editorial choices, or interactions among them.

The author's insider position introduces a final interpretive constraint. Institutional familiarity helps contextualise editorial structures and longitudinal changes, but it also creates a risk of retrospectively imposing coherence on developments that were contingent. The archive does not reveal a journal implementing a twenty-year strategy of epistemic rescaling. It records accumulated decisions and adaptations by editors, authors, reviewers, and institutional supporters. Recognising that contingency is essential to the argument: rescaling is an observed historical pattern, not evidence of an intentional master plan.

6. Conclusions

What does a journal actually do to a field of knowledge over time? The JIMS case suggests that the answer lies not simply in publishing more research or extending geographical coverage, but in altering the relations through which knowledge is selected, organised, produced, and circulated. Across two decades, JIMS retained important elements of its founding mission

while changing substantially across the four dimensions examined in this article. Its thematic agenda became more layered, its spatial scope widened, the institutional geography of authorship diversified, and its organisational arrangements became more differentiated, even as its institutional base in Romania remained stable.

The article conceptualises this transformation as epistemic rescaling. The term captures a process that cannot be reduced either to diversification or to internationalisation. What changed was not only the number of topics, regions, or institutional locations represented in the journal, but the configuration linking them. This distinction matters because wider geographical and institutional reach does not automatically imply greater epistemic equality or completed polycentrism. Rescaling may open new routes of participation while simultaneously weakening the regional standpoint from which a journal originally derived part of its intellectual distinctiveness.

JIMS therefore illustrates both the possibilities and the limits of scholarly agency from a semi-peripheral location. It did not cease to be institutionally rooted in Central and Eastern Europe, nor did it become a new centre of migration scholarship. Instead, it developed into a more diversified site of circulation through which a wider range of cases, institutional locations, methodological approaches, and contributors could be connected. The evidence supports movement toward a more polycentric configuration, but not its completion. A stronger claim would require evidence that the widening geography of participation is accompanied by a broader redistribution of conceptual authority, collaboration, citation, and gatekeeping.

The challenge for the journal's next decade is therefore not to choose between regional anchoring and international reach. It is to make their relationship intellectually productive. Central and Eastern Europe can remain a vantage point from which comparative questions are generated rather than a geographical enclosure, while scholarship from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and other parts of Europe can increasingly participate not only as empirical material but also as sources of problem formation and knowledge production.

Seen in this way, an anniversary is more than an exercise in institutional memory. It is an opportunity for epistemic accountability. By examining what a journal has repeatedly selected, connected, amplified, and left less visible, it becomes possible to assess not only how the publication has changed, but what kinds of scholarly relations it has helped make possible. For JIMS, that reflexive task is central to determining what forms of migration knowledge it seeks to assemble in its third decade.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ulrike Krause, Gato Ndabaramiye Joshua, And Hannah Schmidt, *Refugee- Led Organizations In Uganda Agency, Gender, And Politics Of Self- Organizing In Exile,* Montreal & Kingston: Mcgill-Queen's University Press, 2026, ISBN 978-0-2280-2695-2, 326 Pages

Cristina MATIUȚA

Much of the academic literature on refugees focuses on the causes of forced displacement, asylum policies and legal protection, or the way refugees are portrayed in political discourse. The book briefly reviewed here- *Refugee- Led Organizations in Uganda Agency, Gender, and Politics of Self- Organizing in Exile* -explores another side of the refugee experience: how refugees organize themselves to cope with the challenges of life in exile. The book's case study is the Republic of Uganda, an East African country with approximately 1.8 million refugees, being thus among the countries hosting the largest number of displaced people worldwide, according with UNHCR. The country has adopted a legal framework that recognizes refugees' fundamental rights: "…Uganda grants refugees fundamental rights, including freedom of movement, employment opportunities, and access to vital public services like education and health care – at least on paper" (p. 7). In practice, however, the exercise of these rights is often limited.

The authors, Ulrike Krause, Gato Ndabaramiye Joshua, and Hannah Schmidt, focus their analysis primarily on the experiences of refugees in two areas in Uganda, seeking to understand how refugees organize their daily lives, provide mutual support, and respond to the challenges they encounter in the host country: Kyaka II, a refugee settlement located in a rural area, inhabited primarily by people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Kampala, the capital of Uganda, where refugees from various countries, including Somalia, Congo, but also Rwanda, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, reside. The fieldwork in the two areas included 163 refugees representing various status groups (92 women and 71 men), who took part in 31 focus group discussions. The book is organized into seven chapters, dedicated to the functioning and impacts of the regime, the political engagement of formalized self-organizations in the regime, the social integration of individuals and self-organizations, and self-organized socio-economic practices and networks, alongside the introductory, conceptual, and concluding chapters.

A central concept of the book is *agency*, understood as the capacity for action, the ability of individuals to take initiative, make choices, and influence their own living conditions, even when faced with various constraints. The authors employ the perspective of "relational agency,… which provides the analytical lens for examining the multi-faceted meanings of refugees' self-organization" (p. 30). According to this view, individuals do not act in isolation; rather, they act through social relationships, past experiences, available resources, and acquired knowledge. Refugees draw upon their experiences and knowledge to identify solutions, organize their

activities, and assist others. For instance, individuals who have passed through similar experiences may share information regarding obtaining documentation, accessing medical services, finding employment, or starting a small business. Self-organization, therefore, is not merely a reaction to a crisis; it is also a form of collective initiative through which refugees seek to shape their social and economic environment. The authors emphasize, however, that this capacity for action should not be idealized: the possibilities available to individuals vary depending on their resources, social position, power dynamics, and personal experiences.

An important issue addressed by the book is how the policies of the Ugandan state and the humanitarian system influence the lives of refugees. Uganda promotes the concept of *self-reliance*, the autonomy of refugees and their capacity to support themselves. Within the camps, this approach encourages agriculture, group labor, and collective economic initiatives. Although these policies aim to foster autonomy, people often remain dependent on humanitarian aid and face a lack of sufficient resources. Refugees are often encouraged to form groups to facilitate the implementation of aid programs, but they do not always have real control over decisions. The authors distinguish between groups influenced by the authorities and organizations created and run autonomously by refugees. Refugee-led organizations (RLOs) provide a wide range of services, including: legal counseling and information on asylum procedures; support for new arrivals, including assistance with finding housing; psychological counseling and support for those affected by trauma; language classes and vocational training; support for accessing education and medical services; initiatives for gender equality and combating gender-based violence etc. These organizations have firsthand knowledge of the challenges faced by their communities, but their work is often burdened by limited resources or difficulties in obtaining official registration.

A relevant argument of the book (chapter 5) is that self-organization is not limited to formal organizations. Family, friends, neighbors, and informal groups often serve as the primary sources of support for refugees. These relationships can provide food, temporary shelter, information, emotional support, and protection in emergency situations. Forced displacement can destroy existing family and community ties and refugees can build in exile new relationships that offer them a sense of belonging, trust, and stability. However, the authors avoid portraying the community as inherently protective. Close relationships can also become sources of pressure, conflict, or abuse. Domestic violence and gender-based violence can occur, including within families and social groups. Formal organizations can intervene when these relationships no longer provide protection, by offering counseling, information, and other forms of support. The message of this chapter is that informal solidarity and formal organizations complement one another, both being essential to the daily lives of refugees.

The book also examines how refugees seek to generate income and improve their economic situation (chapter 6). Given that jobs and resources are limited, they appeal to various individual and collective strategies: agricultural and commercial activities; buying and reselling products; providing services; developing small joint businesses etc. Social networks facilitate access to information, capital, customers, and commercial opportunities. For instance, connections between refugees in Kyaka II and those in Kampala contribute to the movement of goods and the development of commercial activities. The authors explain that these relationships serve important functions: they reduce economic risks, facilitate the transfer of practical knowledge, and create opportunities for others. However, participating in such initiatives is not an option for everyone. Some savings groups require regular financial contributions, which effectively

excludes those who lack the necessary funds, while other organizations charge fees for courses or services. Furthermore, these economic activities may involve poorly paid labor, unsafe working conditions, and financial risks. But overall, ”individuals and their self-organizations contribute to a more varied economic landscape than the humanitarian one furnished by self-reliance based on agriculture. And even more, through these forms of self-organization they become the first responders in times of need as well as key providers in everyday life in exile” (p. 246).

The final chapter synthesizes the research findings and discusses the risks associated with the insufficient recognition of refugee-led organizations, underlying several major issues. The first is the shifting of responsibility. If humanitarian institutions assume that refugee organizations can fill all the gaps in the protection system, the responsibility for service provision risks being transferred to communities that lack sufficient resources. The second *is tokenistic participation*. Organizations may be invited to take part in meetings and projects without having any real influence over decisions. This form of participation, known as *tokenism*, creates the appearance of inclusion without resulting in an actual redistribution of power. The third is recognition without adequate support. Although refugee organizations have demonstrated their ability to respond rapidly to community needs, they continue to face a lack of funding, administrative barriers, and difficulties in gaining recognition as legitimate partners. The authors argue that refugee-led organizations should be treated as autonomous actors with their own experience and knowledge, rather than merely as intermediaries for the implementation of humanitarian policies.

Overall, the book offers a critical perspective on the humanitarian system and demonstrates that the lives of refugees cannot be understood solely through the lens of vulnerability and dependence on humanitarian aid. Refugees draw upon their experiences, social relationships, and available resources to build their own systems of protection, solidarity, and economic subsistence. It convey the message that refugees should be recognized not merely as recipients of protection, but as active participants in shaping it. For this participation to be genuine, their organizations must have access to resources, be involved in decision-making processes, and be able to maintain their autonomy and to contribute to the refugees’ future.

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