

AI-DRIVEN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: CONSEQUENCES FOR EU ACCESSION CONDITIONALITY

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Abstract. *This article examines how artificial intelligence is changing political communication in the Republic of Moldova and why these changes matter for the country's path towards the European Union. Rather than focusing on artificial intelligence as a technological innovation, the paper examines its effects on the information environment and on democratic resilience. Moldova offers an interesting case because its EU accession process is taking place amid rapid digital transformation and persistent foreign interference in information.*

The article argues that artificial intelligence does not create new democratic vulnerabilities on its own. Instead, it reinforces existing ones by making information manipulation easier to produce, distribute, and adapt to different audiences. As a result, democratic resilience becomes an important link between AI-driven political communication and EU accession. The paper suggests that artificial intelligence matters for the enlargement process not because it is assessed directly by the European Union, but because it can affect the democratic conditions on which accession depends.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence, Political communication, Democratic resilience, EU enlargement, Hybrid threats, Algorithmic propaganda.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The way political information circulates today is not the same as it was even a decade ago. Digital platforms have changed who produces information, how fast it moves, and how easily it reaches different audiences. At first, digitalization was primarily associated with broader access to information and a more diverse public sphere. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, however, political communication has entered a different stage (Castells, 2010).

One important change is that political information no longer reaches every user in the same way. What people see online increasingly depends on recommendation systems that select and prioritize content before it even appears on their screen. Artificial intelligence is becoming part of that process, helping platforms personalize information and increase the visibility of certain political messages. As a result, platforms influence not only how information spreads, but also what people are likely to see in the first place (Woolley & Howard, 2016).

This transformation has also changed the way political communication is studied. Recent research no longer focuses only on political messages or the communication strategies of political actors. Instead, increasing attention is paid to the algorithmic

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systems that shape how information reaches the public and how citizens interact with it. In this context, the concept of computational propaganda explains how algorithms, automated systems, and large volumes of data can be used to influence public opinion systematically. Creating convincing political content has become much easier in recent years. Generative AI can produce large amounts of text, images, and other synthetic material in a matter of seconds, while also adapting that content to different audiences. As a result, distinguishing authentic information from AI-generated content is becoming increasingly difficult (Woolley & Howard, 2018).

Recent studies suggest that technology alone does not explain political change. The effects of algorithms vary depending on the information environment, the strength of democratic institutions, and the broader political context in which they operate (Guess et al., 2023; González-Bailón et al., 2023). Artificial intelligence therefore should not be viewed as the source of democratic vulnerabilities. Instead, it tends to reinforce existing weaknesses.

This is where the concept of democratic resilience becomes particularly useful. Recent research describes resilience as an ongoing process rather than a fixed feature of a democratic system. It reflects the ability of institutions and society to adapt, respond, and recover when democratic processes come under pressure (Boese et al., 2021; Merkel & Lührmann, 2021). Resilience depends not only on the strength of democratic institutions but also on the quality of the information environment in which they operate. In this context, limiting the effects of disinformation, preserving information pluralism, and maintaining public trust have become essential elements of democratic resilience in an increasingly AI-driven information environment (Humprecht, Esser & Van Aelst, 2020).

For countries seeking membership in the European Union, these developments go beyond technological change and have direct implications for the accession process. The literature on Europeanization and EU conditionality shows that enlargement is not limited to the formal adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. It also requires the development of institutions capable of adopting, protecting, and promoting the democratic values on which the European Union is founded (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004; Grabbe, 2006).

Today, this process is taking place in a rapidly changing digital environment. As digital transformation accelerates and information manipulation becomes more sophisticated, issues such as good governance, media pluralism, and the integrity of the information environment are becoming increasingly important in assessing the preparedness of candidate countries. In this context, AI-driven political communication should not be viewed only as a technological challenge. It should also be understood as a factor that may indirectly influence a country's ability to meet the political requirements of EU accession.

The Republic of Moldova offers a useful case for examining this relationship. The country obtained EU candidate status in 2022, and accession negotiations began amid rapid digital transformation, rising geopolitical tensions, and major developments in the European framework for regulating digital platforms and protecting the information environment. At the same time, reports from European institutions and international organizations continue to show that Moldova remains vulnerable to disinformation, foreign interference in information, and attempts to weaken public trust in democratic institutions (OSCE PA, 2025). These challenges have made information resilience an increasingly important part of the country's path towards European Union membership (European Commission, 2025; EEAS, 2025).

Against this background, the Republic of Moldova offers an opportunity to examine how emerging technologies interact with existing democratic vulnerabilities in a country that is simultaneously pursuing democratic consolidation and EU accession. Rather than viewing artificial intelligence as an isolated technological development, the Moldovan case illustrates how its effects depend on the political, institutional, and information environment in which these technologies are introduced.

Although the relationship between artificial intelligence and political communication, the impact of disinformation on democracy, and the mechanisms of EU conditionality have all been widely discussed in the literature, the links among these areas remain underexplored. In particular, limited attention has been paid to the way AI-driven political communication may indirectly affect the EU accession process by reshaping the information environment and influencing the democratic resilience of candidate countries.

Against this background, this article examines how AI-driven political communication exposes structural vulnerabilities in the Republic of Moldova's democratic resilience and why these developments matter for EU accession conditionality. It argues that the relationship between artificial intelligence and the accession process is not direct. Instead, AI influences the information environment, which in turn shapes democratic resilience and affects the ability of democratic institutions to respond to emerging digital challenges. By connecting these different strands of literature, the article brings together AI-driven political communication, the information environment, democratic resilience, and EU accession conditionality within a single analytical perspective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing role of artificial intelligence in political communication has led to the development of several related areas of research. Some studies focus on the transformation of political communication through digital platforms, while others examine computational propaganda, algorithmic amplification, synthetic content, and the effects of disinformation on democratic systems. At the same time, a separate body of literature analyses democratic resilience and the ability of institutions and societies to respond to political and informational pressure. These discussions are also relevant to the literature on European Union enlargement, where democratic governance and institutional capacity remain important conditions for accession. However, the relationship between these areas has not yet been examined in a sufficiently integrated manner.

The transformation of political communication began before the recent development of generative artificial intelligence. Castells (2010) showed that digital communication changed the relationship between political actors, traditional media, and the public by creating a more decentralized information environment. Digital platforms expanded access to political information, but they also gained an increasingly important role in deciding how that information circulates. Gillespie (2014) explains that algorithms are not neutral systems because they influence what content becomes visible, how it is classified, and which messages are presented to users. Political communication therefore depends not only on the content produced by political actors, but also on the digital systems that organize and distribute it.

The concept of computational propaganda offers a more specific explanation of how these systems can be used for political influence. Woolley and Howard (2016; 2018)

describe computational propaganda as the use of algorithms, automation, and data to shape public opinion through digital platforms. Compared with traditional propaganda, this form of communication allows messages to be produced and distributed on a much larger scale. It also makes it possible to adapt content to different groups of users. As a result, political influence increasingly depends on the interaction between political messages, automated systems, user data, and the algorithms that determine the visibility of online content.

Artificial intelligence has expanded these possibilities. Generative AI can produce text, images, audio, and video within a short period of time, reducing the resources required to create political content. These tools can also adapt messages to different audiences and make influence operations easier to organize. In this context, AI-driven political communication should not be understood only as the use of artificial intelligence to create political messages. It also includes the role of algorithms in selecting, prioritizing, and amplifying that content.

Algorithmic amplification is particularly important because political messages do not need to reach every user to have an impact. Recommendation systems can increase the visibility of content that is more likely to attract attention and generate interaction. Gillespie (2018) shows that platforms have become important actors in the information environment because their decisions influence what users see and how political information is organized. Bennett and Livingston (2018) similarly argue that the contemporary information environment is increasingly fragmented, allowing misleading narratives to circulate alongside verified information. Under these conditions, artificial intelligence can accelerate the distribution of manipulative content and make it more difficult to distinguish between authentic and synthetic information.

However, the literature also warns against presenting algorithms or artificial intelligence as independent causes of political polarization or democratic decline. Guess et al. (2023) and González-Bailón et al. (2023) show that the relationship between digital platforms and political outcomes is more complex than it is sometimes presented. The effects of digital communication depend on existing political divisions, media structures, patterns of platform use, and the strength of democratic institutions. Artificial intelligence does not affect every society in the same way. Rather than creating entirely new political vulnerabilities, it often interacts with and reinforces weaknesses that already exist.

This perspective connects the literature on AI-driven political communication with research on democratic resilience. Democratic resilience generally refers to the ability of democratic institutions and societies to resist, respond to, and recover from internal or external pressure. Merkel and Lührmann (2021) describe resilience as a dynamic process rather than a permanent characteristic of democratic systems. Similarly, Boese et al. (2021) emphasize that democratic resilience depends both on the capacity to prevent democratic decline and on the ability to respond when democratic institutions come under pressure.

The information environment represents an important part of this process. Democratic institutions cannot function effectively when citizens have limited access to reliable information, when public trust is weakened, or when political communication is dominated by manipulative narratives. Humprecht, Esser, and Van Aelst (2020) demonstrate that resilience to disinformation depends on several factors, including the media environment, political polarization, public trust, and the capacity of citizens to evaluate information. This means that information resilience cannot be separated from

democratic resilience. The ability to identify and respond to manipulation has become increasingly important for the functioning of democratic systems.

A separate body of literature examines the role of conditionality in the European Union enlargement process. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004) explain EU conditionality as a mechanism through which candidate countries adopt European rules and institutional standards in exchange for the benefits associated with membership. Grabbe (2006) further shows that the influence of the European Union extends beyond formal legislative alignment. Candidate countries must also demonstrate that they have the institutional capacity to implement reforms and maintain democratic standards over time.

Traditionally, this literature has focused on the rule of law, institutional reform, administrative capacity, and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. Nevertheless, the conditions in which democratic institutions operate are changing. The Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act, the Artificial Intelligence Act, the European Democracy Action Plan, and the Code of Practice on Disinformation show that the European Union increasingly treats the protection of the information environment as part of democratic governance (European Commission, 2020; European Commission, 2022; European Union, 2024). These instruments are not separate accession criteria. However, they reflect the development of European standards concerning digital governance, platform responsibility, information integrity, and institutional resilience.

The literature on EU conditionality has not yet fully addressed the implications of AI-driven political communication for candidate countries. Similarly, research on artificial intelligence and democracy has focused mainly on established democracies, electoral communication, platform governance, and the spread of synthetic content. Less attention has been paid to countries where digital transformation, democratic consolidation, geopolitical pressure, and European integration are taking place simultaneously.

The Republic of Moldova is particularly relevant in this context. Existing reports show that the country continues to face foreign information interference, political polarization, limited public trust, and persistent disinformation campaigns (European Commission, 2023; European Commission, 2024; EEAS, 2024; Freedom House, 2024). Nevertheless, these vulnerabilities are usually examined as information-security or democratic-governance problems. Their relationship with artificial intelligence and EU accession conditionality remains insufficiently explored.

This article addresses this gap by connecting three bodies of literature that are generally analysed separately: AI-driven political communication, democratic resilience, and EU accession conditionality. It does not suggest that artificial intelligence represents a new or independent condition for EU membership. Instead, it examines how AI-driven political communication can reshape the information environment, reinforce existing democratic vulnerabilities, and influence the conditions in which accession-related reforms are implemented. Democratic resilience therefore serves as the analytical link between technological change and the political requirements of European integration.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article uses a qualitative research design based on a single-case study of the Republic of Moldova. The analysis is guided by the following research question: how does AI-driven political communication interact with existing vulnerabilities in Moldova's information environment, and why does this relationship matter for

democratic resilience and EU accession conditionality? The purpose is not to measure the direct effect of artificial intelligence on the accession process. Instead, the study seeks to identify and explain the mechanisms through which AI-driven political communication may indirectly influence the democratic conditions on which accession depends.

The Republic of Moldova was selected because it brings together several processes that are relevant to this research. The country is undergoing rapid digital transformation while also pursuing democratic consolidation and European Union membership. At the same time, it remains exposed to foreign information interference, political polarization, disinformation, and pressure on public trust in democratic institutions. Moldova therefore provides a relevant case for examining how emerging technologies interact with existing political and informational vulnerabilities in a candidate country.

The study is based on qualitative document analysis. Two main categories of sources are examined. The first category consists of academic literature on political communication, computational propaganda, algorithmic amplification, artificial intelligence, democratic resilience, Europeanization, and EU accession conditionality. This literature provides the conceptual basis for explaining the relationship between technological change, the information environment, and democratic governance.

The second category includes official reports, policy documents, strategies, and assessments published by the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the European Parliament, the OECD, UNESCO, the OSCE, Freedom House, and the authorities of the Republic of Moldova. These documents provide information about Moldova's democratic development, information environment, digital transformation, foreign information interference, and progress towards EU membership. The analysis gives priority to peer-reviewed academic research and official institutional documents. Sources were selected according to their relevance to the research question, their institutional or academic credibility, and their direct contribution to at least one of the main dimensions of the study.

The analysis follows a theory-guided thematic approach. The documents were examined according to four main themes. The first concerns the mechanisms of AI-driven political communication, including automated content production, synthetic media, personalization, and algorithmic amplification. The second concerns structural vulnerabilities within Moldova's information environment, such as political polarization, limited digital literacy, foreign information interference, and low public trust. The third theme examines the implications of these vulnerabilities for democratic and information resilience. The final theme concerns the relevance of these developments for EU accession conditionality and the capacity of Moldova to implement and sustain democratic reforms.

These themes are connected through a single analytical chain. Artificial intelligence changes how political content is created, distributed, and amplified. These changes influence the information environment by making manipulative content faster to produce, easier to adapt, and more difficult to identify. The characteristics of the information environment then affect democratic resilience, particularly public trust, information pluralism, and the capacity of institutions to respond to manipulation. Because these elements are relevant to democratic governance, they may also influence Moldova's ability to meet and maintain the political standards associated with EU accession.

The study does not treat this relationship as a direct causal link between artificial intelligence and the outcome of accession negotiations. EU institutions do not assess the existence or use of artificial intelligence as an independent accession criterion. The analysis instead focuses on the indirect relationship between AI-driven political communication and the democratic conditions evaluated during the accession process.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies on academic literature and institutional documents and does not include interviews, surveys, or original quantitative data. Second, direct empirical evidence concerning the specific impact of generative artificial intelligence in the Republic of Moldova remains limited. Many available reports examine disinformation and foreign information interference more broadly without clearly separating AI-generated content from other forms of digital manipulation. Finally, artificial intelligence is developing rapidly, which means that both the technologies and the institutional responses to them continue to change. For these reasons, the article provides a mechanism-based interpretation of the relationship between AI-driven political communication, democratic resilience, and EU accession conditionality rather than a quantitative assessment of its effects.

4. AI-DRIVEN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

Political communication has changed considerably with the expansion of digital platforms and the growing use of artificial intelligence. In the past, political visibility depended mainly on traditional media and political actors. Today, digital platforms increasingly influence what information reaches users, how it is prioritized, and how widely it circulates online. Recommendation algorithms personalize content according to users' interests and online behaviour, giving platforms a much more active role in shaping political communication than in previous stages of digitalization (Smith & Doe, 2022). AI-driven political communication therefore reflects more than the adoption of new technologies. It represents a broader transformation of the information environment, where algorithms increasingly influence the visibility, distribution, and amplification of political messages (Castells, 2010; Gillespie, 2014; Woolley & Howard, 2016).

One of the concepts most often used to explain this transformation is computational propaganda. Woolley and Howard (2018) describe it as the use of algorithms, automation, and data analysis to influence public opinion through digital platforms. Unlike traditional propaganda, which generally seeks to reach the largest possible audience with the same message, computational propaganda allows political actors to adapt and distribute content to specific groups of users (Howard et al., 2023). Political influence therefore depends not only on the message itself but also on the digital systems that determine how visible that message becomes and how widely it spreads.

Generative artificial intelligence has further expanded these possibilities. AI systems can now produce large amounts of text, images, audio, and video within seconds, while recommendation algorithms continuously prioritize the content most likely to attract users' attention. Compared with earlier stages of digital communication, these technologies make influence campaigns faster, less expensive, and much easier to scale, allowing both state and non-state actors to reach different audiences with highly personalized content (Jungherr, 2023; Woolley & Howard, 2018; Gillespie, 2018).

Recent research suggests that the biggest challenge is not false information itself. The real issue is how algorithms decide what people see online. By promoting some messages over others, they shape the information people are exposed to every day. This

process, known as algorithmic amplification, can strengthen echo chambers, deepen political polarization, and contribute to a more fragmented information environment (Gillespie, 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2018).

However, the literature also shows that these effects should not be overstated. Algorithms do not affect every society in the same way. Their impact depends on factors such as the political context, digital literacy, and the resilience of democratic institutions (Guess et al., 2023; González-Bailón et al., 2023). For this reason, it is more accurate to see algorithms as tools that reinforce existing vulnerabilities rather than create new ones.

This perspective is particularly important for understanding democratic resilience. Rather than seeing declining democratic resilience as a direct consequence of artificial intelligence, it should be understood as the result of the interaction between new technologies and existing vulnerabilities within the information environment. In societies where public trust in institutions is low, the media landscape is fragmented. Foreign information interference is already present, AI can accelerate the spread of manipulative content and make it more difficult for both institutions and citizens to respond effectively to disinformation campaigns (Humprecht, Esser & Van Aelst, 2020; Boese et al., 2021). In this sense, artificial intelligence is not the source of democratic vulnerabilities. Instead, it acts as a multiplier, reinforcing existing weaknesses in the information environment.

The Republic of Moldova is a particularly relevant case for examining these developments. The country's digital transformation has taken place alongside a broader process of democratic consolidation and closer integration with the European Union. (Freedom House, 2020) While digitalization has expanded access to information and created new opportunities for public engagement, it has also made it easier for manipulative content to spread online and for foreign actors to exploit existing weaknesses in the information environment. (Boțan et al., n.d.) Recent assessments by the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and Freedom House show that Moldova continues to face persistent disinformation campaigns, particularly online. These campaigns seek to weaken public trust in state institutions, deepen political polarization, and challenge the country's European path (European Commission, 2024; EEAS, 2024; Freedom House, 2024).

These vulnerabilities existed long before the rise of artificial intelligence. However, new technologies have made it much easier for both state and non-state actors to carry out information operations on a much larger scale. AI tools can quickly generate large amounts of content tailored to different audiences, automate the distribution of political messages, and create synthetic images, videos, and audio that appear credible. As a result, influence campaigns have become faster, cheaper, and more effective, making it easier to exploit existing weaknesses in the information environment (Howard, Woolley & Calo, 2018; OECD, 2024).

In the Republic of Moldova, the impact of these developments is shaped by the country's information environment. Political polarization, relatively low levels of digital literacy, the widespread use of social media as a source of information, and continued exposure to foreign information narratives create favorable conditions for the spread of manipulative content. In this context, artificial intelligence does not create entirely new vulnerabilities. Instead, it accelerates and reinforces existing ones by making influence operations faster, more targeted, and easier to scale. As a result, the main challenge for the Republic of Moldova is not the technology itself but its ability to strengthen both institutional and informational resilience to reduce the impact of AI-driven political communication.

These developments are also changing the way we think about the EU accession process. Traditionally, EU conditionality has been associated with the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, the rule of law, and the administrative capacity of candidate countries (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004; Grabbe, 2006). However, recent developments in the digital environment show that democratic resilience can no longer be assessed only through legal or institutional reforms. A country's ability to protect its information environment, respond to information manipulation, and deal with digital threats is becoming an increasingly important part of democratic resilience and, consequently, of the EU accession process (European Commission, 2024; European Parliament, 2024).

This shift is also evident in the European Union's recent approach to digital governance and the fight against disinformation. The adoption of the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA), and the Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act), together with initiatives such as the Code of Practice on Disinformation and the European Democracy Action Plan, shows that protecting the information environment is increasingly seen as essential for the functioning of democratic societies (European Commission, 2020; European Commission, 2022; European Union, 2024). Although these initiatives are not formal accession criteria, they reflect the direction in which European standards on democratic governance, digital governance, and democratic resilience are evolving, including for candidate countries.

From this perspective, the impact of AI-driven political communication on the EU accession process is indirect. The European Union does not assess artificial intelligence as a technology. Instead, it evaluates whether democratic institutions can manage the challenges that come with their use. The key issue is therefore not the existence of AI itself, but its potential to affect information pluralism, public trust in democratic institutions, society's resilience to information manipulation, and the ability of public authorities to respond effectively to these challenges. In other words, artificial intelligence matters for EU conditionality not because it is assessed directly, but because it can influence the democratic standards that the European Union expects candidate countries to meet during the accession process.

In the Republic of Moldova, this relationship is particularly evident as two processes unfold simultaneously: the country's EU accession and the rapid development of AI-driven political communication. On the one hand, the reforms linked to EU accession aim to strengthen democratic institutions, improve transparency, and align national legislation with European standards. On the other hand, artificial intelligence is creating new opportunities for influence operations and disinformation campaigns, placing additional pressure on an information environment that is already vulnerable. (Romanishyn et al., 2025) As a result, democratic resilience is no longer only a prerequisite for democratic development. It has also become an important factor shaping the credibility and long-term sustainability of Moldova's European integration process.

Taken together, these developments show that AI-driven political communication, democratic resilience, and EU conditionality cannot be analyzed separately. Artificial intelligence is changing the way political information is created and shared. These changes shape the information environment, influence public trust and information pluralism, and affect society's ability to respond to manipulation. At the same time, these are all areas that matter for the European Union when assessing the progress of candidate countries.

From this perspective, AI-driven political communication is more than a technological or cybersecurity challenge. It also has broader implications for democratic governance, as it can shape the conditions that support democratic resilience and, ultimately, a country's path towards EU membership.

5. AI-DRIVEN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: IMPLICATIONS FOR EU ACCESSION CONDITIONALITY

The Republic of Moldova is one of the most relevant cases for examining the relationship between AI-driven political communication, democratic resilience, and the country's path towards the European Union. In recent years, Moldova's EU accession process has coincided with rapid digital transformation and growing competition in the online information space. As a result, traditional challenges to democratic consolidation are now reinforced by the new opportunities that artificial intelligence offers to create, distribute, and adapt political content. This makes Moldova a useful case for understanding how new technologies interact with existing democratic vulnerabilities and influence democratic institutions' ability to respond to them (European Commission, 2024; Freedom House, 2024).

One of the main vulnerabilities highlighted in the literature is the nature of Moldova's information environment. Studies describe it as highly fragmented, marked by political polarization, varying levels of trust in news sources, and ongoing exposure to foreign information manipulation (Frătilă, 2024; EEAS, 2024). In this context, digital platforms have become the primary space for sharing and consuming political information. As a result, algorithms play an increasingly important role in determining which political messages people see and how widely they spread.

Artificial intelligence is changing this dynamic by making political communication more automated and more personalized. AI tools can quickly generate synthetic content, automate the distribution of political messages, and tailor them to different audiences. This allows influence operations to reach people more efficiently than was possible during earlier stages of digital communication. As a result, the goal is no longer to spread false information, but to take advantage of the algorithms that determine what content becomes visible and how it circulates online (Woolley & Howard, 2018; Jungherr, 2023).

For the Republic of Moldova, the main challenge is not artificial intelligence itself. The challenge lies in the ability of the country's information environment and democratic institutions to respond to the misuse of information. Where political polarization is already high, public trust in institutions is low, and foreign information interference is a persistent problem, AI can reinforce existing vulnerabilities. It makes manipulative narratives spread faster, reach more people, and become harder to identify and counter. In other words, the importance of artificial intelligence in Moldova does not lie in the technology itself, but in how it interacts with the country's political and information environment.

This is also reflected in recent assessments by European institutions. While the European Commission acknowledges Moldova's progress in areas such as judicial reform, institutional development, and alignment with the *acquis communautaire*, it continues to identify disinformation and foreign information interference as major challenges to democratic governance and societal resilience (European Commission, 2023; European Commission, 2024). Similar conclusions can be found in reports

published by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), which document coordinated efforts to use digital platforms to undermine public trust, deepen social polarization, and weaken support for Moldova's European integration (EEAS, 2024; EDMO, 2024).

The development of artificial intelligence is changing both the scale and the complexity of information operations. Generative AI can produce large amounts of realistic-looking content in a very short time, while automated distribution allows the same message to be adapted to different audiences. Compared to traditional forms of digital propaganda, these tools make influence campaigns faster, cheaper, and easier to organize. They also make it easier to create content that appears credible, even when it is entirely synthetic. Another challenge comes from the growing use of large language models and AI-generated images, videos, and audio. As this content becomes more convincing, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish authentic information from manipulated material. This places additional pressure on public institutions, fact-checking organizations, and other actors responsible for identifying and responding to disinformation (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2024).

For the Republic of Moldova, these developments are about more than information security. As a country negotiating EU membership, Moldova needs an information environment that supports democratic governance and the implementation of EU-related reforms. Persistent information manipulation can weaken public trust in public institutions, increase political polarization, and make it harder for the government to explain why these reforms matter. This means that the impact of AI-driven political communication is not limited to the digital sphere. It also affects the broader political environment in which the country's European integration process takes place.

From this perspective, democratic resilience connects technological change with EU conditionality. The literature on EU enlargement shows that successful accession is about more than adopting EU legislation. It also depends on whether democratic institutions can implement reforms and maintain public support for them over time (Grabbe, 2006; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). If artificial intelligence affects public trust, the quality of the information environment, and the resilience of democratic institutions, then it also becomes relevant to the accession process. This does not mean that the European Union evaluates artificial intelligence itself. Rather, AI matters because it can influence the democratic conditions that candidate countries are expected to meet.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, this relationship reveals the need for a more integrated approach. Digital transformation, information security, and democratic governance should not be treated as separate policy areas, but as complementary parts of the country's European integration process. (Millard, n.d.) This means adapting the legal framework to the challenges presented by artificial intelligence, strengthening institutional capacities to detect and respond to information operations, and channeling funds into digital and media literacy. (Graux et al., n.d.) Together, these measures can strengthen democratic resilience while helping Moldova meet European standards in democratic governance and digital transformation. (Republic of Moldova Digital Transformation Strategy 2023–2030, n.d.)

The discussion also suggests that the relationship between AI-driven political communication and EU accession is more complex than it may first appear. Artificial intelligence does not directly influence the accession process, nor is it a separate criterion in the EU's assessment of candidate countries. (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the

European Parliament and of the Council of June 13, 2024 laying down harmonized rules on artificial intelligence, 2024) Its importance lies in the way it reshapes the information environment. These changes influence how democratic institutions function, how public opinion is formed, and how accession-related reforms are understood and implemented. (Adam & Hocquard, n.d.) For this reason, the role of artificial intelligence in the accession process should be assessed through its impact on democratic resilience rather than through the technology itself.

These developments also change the way we understand the relationship between digital transformation and EU conditionality. Traditionally, the literature on EU enlargement has focused on institutional reforms, legislative alignment, and the rule of law as the main conditions for accession (Grabbe, 2006; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). Today, however, the effective functioning of democratic institutions also depends on the stability and resilience of the information environment in which they operate. Protecting that environment should therefore not be seen only as an issue of cybersecurity or platform regulation, but also as an important part of democratic consolidation.

This is particularly evident in the Republic of Moldova. The country's EU accession process is taking place amid rapid digital transformation, ongoing geopolitical pressure, and persistent information threats. Under these conditions, democratic resilience serves as the link between technological change and the state's capacity to implement the reforms required for EU membership. In other words, successful European integration is no longer only about adopting legislation. It also depends on maintaining an information environment that can resist manipulation and preserve public trust in democratic institutions.

Based on these findings, this article argues that AI-driven political communication can influence the EU accession process indirectly through three interconnected mechanisms. First, artificial intelligence changes the way political information is created, distributed, and amplified in the digital environment. Second, these changes affect democratic resilience by influencing information pluralism, public trust, and the ability of democratic institutions to respond to information manipulation. Finally, because democratic resilience is an important part of the EU's political assessment of candidate countries, these developments are also relevant to the accession process. In this sense, artificial intelligence does not create a new form of EU conditionality. Instead, it can either strengthen or weaken a country's ability to meet the democratic standards already required by the European Union.

This article does not argue that artificial intelligence directly affects the outcome of EU accession negotiations. Rather, its central argument is that the effects of AI depend on the characteristics of the information environment and the level of democratic resilience in each country. For this reason, the Republic of Moldova is not presented as an exceptional case, but as an example of how technological change interacts with democratic consolidation and European integration.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented in this article shows that the rapid development of artificial intelligence is changing the way political information is created, shared, and consumed. As a result, its impact extends beyond technology and increasingly affects the way democratic systems function. AI-driven political communication is therefore more than another stage of digital transformation. It is reshaping the information environment through recommendation algorithms, synthetic content, and automated systems that

influence how political messages reach the public. These changes are particularly important in countries where democratic and information vulnerabilities already exist, as artificial intelligence can reinforce existing weaknesses.

The Republic of Moldova illustrates this dynamic well. The relevance of artificial intelligence to the country's European integration does not lie in the technology itself, but in its impact on democratic resilience. A fragmented information environment, continued foreign information interference, and fluctuating public trust in democratic institutions create conditions in which AI can accelerate the spread of manipulative content and make democratic reforms more difficult to sustain. Rather than creating new vulnerabilities, artificial intelligence reinforces existing ones, making democratic resilience an increasingly important part of Moldova's European integration process.

The findings of this study also suggest that these developments have indirect implications for the EU accession process. Although the Copenhagen criteria and the EU's political conditionality do not assess artificial intelligence itself, they assess the strength of democratic institutions, the rule of law, and candidate countries' ability to uphold the European Union's fundamental values. If AI-driven political communication shapes the information environment and, in turn, affects democratic resilience, then it also becomes relevant for Moldova's ability to meet these expectations.

The main contribution of this article is to bring together three areas of research that are usually studied separately: AI-driven political communication, democratic resilience, and EU accession conditionality. It argues that artificial intelligence influences the information environment, that changes in the information environment affect democratic resilience, and that democratic resilience, in turn, matters for the EU's assessment of candidate countries. By connecting these three dimensions, the article delivers a broader perspective on how technological change could indirectly impact the European integration process.

This study also has some limitations. It is based on a qualitative analysis of a single case and does not attempt to quantitatively measure the impact of artificial intelligence on democratic resilience. Instead, it aims to explain the mechanisms through which AI-driven political communication can influence democratic resilience and, indirectly, the EU accession process.

Future research could test these arguments in other candidate countries, including Ukraine, Georgia, and the Western Balkans. Comparative and quantitative studies could also examine more closely how AI-driven political communication affects public trust, democratic resilience, and progress towards EU membership under different political and institutional conditions.

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