

## **Discernment and critical thinking in the communication space. The case of the presidential elections in Romania, November 2024-March 2025**

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### **ABSTRACT**

November-December 2024 marked the Romanian public sphere with the surprising rise of Călin Georgescu to the top of the presidential candidate hierarchy. His speech was considered "magical." His method of gaining votes was typical of the "deus ex machina" approach, descending from the TikTok streaming platform directly into the Romanian political reality. Călin Georgescu bewildered both left-wing and right-wing political consciousness, leading to the cancellation of the second round of the presidential election.

After a few moments of awakening to reality, the candidate's speech proved to be a mixture of fake news, public lies, and promises that were difficult to fulfill. This discursive amalgam contained numerous references to the anthropological structures of the imaginary and the powerful calls of Eastern Orthodoxy.

In our analysis, we aim to deconstruct every detail of this winning discourse. We will also demonstrate how this amalgam becomes "bullshit," in the sense described by Harry Frankfurt (2005):

"The bullshitter is neither on the side of the true or the side of the false. His eye is not on the facts at all. He does not reject the authority of the truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it. He pays no attention to it at all. By virtue of this, bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are."

The research methods were: interview, mainstream media monitoring, and monitoring of Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Tik Tok channels.

We will describe the way the candidate imposed himself through TikTok, his particularities, and his "commercial" method of presentation. The video effects of TikTok and the candidate's public presentation style will be analyzed. We will also explore the economic and social contexts that led to the formation of Călin Georgescu's "bubble," which resulted in his electoral success.

We will question why such a story is appealing and why it resonates. What is the nature of this extremist, autarkic discourse, and how does it seduce? Umberto Eco shows that totalitarian discourse has an important characteristic: it does not offer a clear position that could give rise to an external contradictory discourse. Totalitarian discourse, with its fascist or communist variations (since extremes meet), already proposes internal contradiction. Georgescu's bullshit can support one thing and its opposite simultaneously. In the same interview, the candidate declares that he has never supported and will never support the Legionary Movement, only to three minutes later say that it is the only deeply and legitimately Romanian movement. Georgescu is both against NATO and with NATO. Against the EU but with the EU. He is at once Christian and pagan, messianic and druidic. Only when it comes to Russia is he no longer ambivalent, positioning it under the sign of peace and "understanding with neighbors."

We aim to not only catalog the fake news, public lies, and elements of the imaginary but also investigate the reasons behind his public success.

**Keywords:** public space, communication, fake news