



Centrul pentru Jurnalism Independent

MONITORING REPORT

Activity of media outlets and journalists on the social network Facebook during the campaign for the presidential election on November 1, 2020

October 29 – November 4, 2020



Embassy of the United States of America

This report has been produced as part of the “Monitoring Social Networks in Elections” project, implemented by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) and funded by the United States Department of State. The views, findings, and conclusions set forth here are the responsibility of the IJC and do not necessarily reflect the vision of the United States Department of State.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This report analyzes the activity of 5 media outlets and 15 journalists on Facebook, the most popular social network in Moldova, between October 29 and November 4, 2020 during the campaign for the presidential election on November 1, 2020.

The study was conceptualized theoretically and tested empirically in the following context:

- ⇒ In the digital age, social networks are indispensable tools for journalists and media outlets to access and to communicate information.
- ⇒ The online social platform Facebook is an important channel for the consumption and circulation of information for about one million Moldovans (Gramatic 2019); during electoral campaigns, journalists pay special attention to political discourse and to candidates.
- ⇒ As a platform for free expression and social and political participation, the role of Facebook is more prominent during electoral campaigns.
- ⇒ Activity on social networks is protected by the right to freedom of expression (guaranteed by the Constitution), but due to their affiliation with the journalistic community and the media outlets they work for, journalists are perceived as public persons invested with social responsibility whenever they disseminate public messages.
- ⇒ The experience of previous elections in Moldova shows that social networks are often used as tools for disinformation and political propaganda.

There were two rounds of the 2020 presidential election in the Republic of Moldova: the first took place on November 1 and the second on November 15. Since none of the 8 candidates for President received at least half the votes cast during the first round, the second round was held for the two candidates who had the most votes in the first round (Article 120, Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova): Maia Sandu (36.16%) and Igor Dodon (32.61%). In the second round, victory went to Maia Sandu.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to analyze the content of posts on Facebook by the journalists and media outlets monitored to determine how they covered the presidential election and to evaluate how the general provisions of the Journalist's Code of Ethics were observed, particularly Article 1.6 which condemns political partisanship, political and ideological propaganda, and electoral campaigning.

The objectives were as follow:

[1] To assess how journalists and the media used the social platform Facebook to inform the public about the political and electoral discourse of candidates by systemically collecting open data published on their Facebook profiles and pages.

[2] To assess how the posts of the media outlets and journalists monitored complied with the Journalist's Code of Ethics.

It should again be noted that the general provisions of the Journalist's Code of Ethics, specifically Article 1.6, condemn:

- ⇒ Any attempt to involve journalists in political partisanship or ideological or mercenary activities, propaganda or information warfare, including trolling;
- ⇒ Dissemination of messages prohibited by law (hate speech, homophobia, anti-Semitism, discrimination, etc.), as well as political and religious propaganda and electoral campaigning.

The attitude towards a candidate in a presidential election expressed in posts on Facebook can indicate an affiliation of journalists and media outlets with certain parties or politicians. With that in mind, this indicator was used to assess the accuracy and fairness of journalists in their coverage of the candidates.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a methodology adapted to digital media that consists of a set of mixed digital methods through which data were collected, sorted, and analyzed in terms of quality and quantity. The methodology was tested in March 2020 to monitor 5 media outlets and 15 journalists during the parliamentary election in Hincesti and during the presidential campaign and has been deemed effective for this type of monitoring. The methodology was subsequently readjusted to the needs and scope of electoral events for the 2020 presidential election.

The official Facebook pages and personal profiles of journalists working in the media outlets selected were monitored to collect their public posts about the organization of the election, the polls, and the politicians and to evaluate them in relation to the total volume of posts published between October 29 and November 4, 2020. Although not of an explicitly electoral nature, posts promoting the initiatives, projects, and achievements of politicians and their parties are also a central element in an electoral campaign as they contribute to building positive images for the candidates and to their visibility, so those posts were also collected.

The criteria for selecting outlets and journalists is in Table 1, and the outlets monitored are in Table 2.

TABLE 1. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF MEDIA OUTLETS, JOURNALISTS, AND IDENTIFICATION OF POSTS RELATED TO ELECTIONS


5 official Facebook pages of media outlets	15 personal Facebook profiles of journalists*	969 posts related to elections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Area of coverage nationally - Language diversity - Audience and popularity - Number of followers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Renown and influence in the public space - Experience in journalism - Audience and popularity - Number of friends, followers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Electoral nature - Public status - Information's importance for the public - Interactions in timeline - Potential to influence public opinion regarding candidates

* The names of journalists were anonymized.

TABLE 2. MEDIA OUTLETS MONITORED

Name of outlet	Description of and details about the transparency of the Facebook page	No. of followers
Agora.md	<p><i>The economic news portal Agora.md focuses on providing daily information to the public about current economic events and topics, both in the country and abroad.</i></p> <p>Page created: February 17, 2017. The page is managed by 31 accounts located in Moldova and has a Verified** badge from Facebook. At the time of monitoring, the page hosted paid Facebook advertising about social issues, elections, and politics.</p>	77,063
Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove	<p><i>The official page of the Russian-language newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove.</i></p> <p>Page created: September 19, 2013. It is managed by 14 accounts, including 10 located in Moldova, 3 in Russia, and 1 in the USA. The page does not have a Verified badge from Facebook.</p>	51,199

<p><u>Primele Stiri</u></p>	<p><i>The main newscast of television station Prime which summarizes events occurring in Moldova during the day.</i> Page created: November 17, 2011. It is managed by 7 accounts located in Moldova and an account with a primary location in Romania. The page does not have a Verified badge from Facebook.</p>	<p>162,964</p>
<p><u>Ziarul de Gardă</u></p>	<p><i>Ziarul de Gardă is the first independent weekly investigative newspaper in Moldova.</i> Page created: November 3, 2009. It is managed by 22 accounts in Moldova and one located in the UK. The page has a Verified badge from Facebook.</p>	<p>127,768</p>
<p><u>Primul în Moldova</u></p>	<p><i>Primul în Moldova is in everyone's homes today! We are waiting for you daily with four newscasts to show you what is happening in the country and in the world. We want to convince you that we deserve your attention.</i> Page created: November 3, 2019. It is managed by 14 accounts in Moldova. The page does not have a Verified badge from Facebook. The Facebook page of the TV station Primul în Moldova was also monitored before the first round.</p>	<p>Round I 20,051 Round II 23,666</p>

** The Verified badge  appears next to a Facebook page or next to the account in search and profile as confirmation from Facebook that this account is authentic and represents a public figure, a celebrity, or a global brand.

In order to avoid controversy and ethical violations, only data with public status from the POSTS category (timeline) were collected (Screenshot 1). That information is addressed to the general public and is published on social networks without restrictions on use and without privacy filters. From a technical point of view, such posts can reach a larger group of people, and their authors usually want to influence public opinion in one way or another.

Screenshot 1. Symbols marking public posts and posts with confidentiality settings



Data were collected from the activity stream the day after a post was made; if other posts, videos, or images were added, they were not encoded. The quantitative content analysis method was then applied. In addition, case studies were conducted to analyze prominent

trends from a qualitative perspective. We analyzed posts visible in the timeline before readers were redirected to a platform other than Facebook (without accessing links). Also, any video programs posted were encoded separately without viewing.

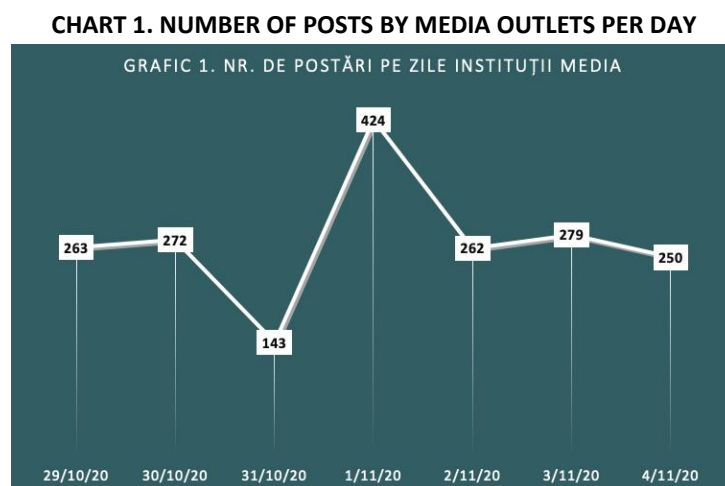
The study was conducted in full awareness that posts shared on Facebook do not fully represent the content produced by media outlets, both during the monitoring period and in general.

MAIN TRENDS

The first round of the presidential election was widely covered on social networks between October 29 and November 4 both by media outlets and their journalists in posts about the organization and conduct of the election; messages from the campaigns; political statements by the 8 presidential candidates; voter expectations and turnout in the country and abroad; the day of silence; attempted fraud and violations on the day of the election; and preliminary and final results of the first round. Some Facebook pages also featured political and electoral memes that characterized this election.

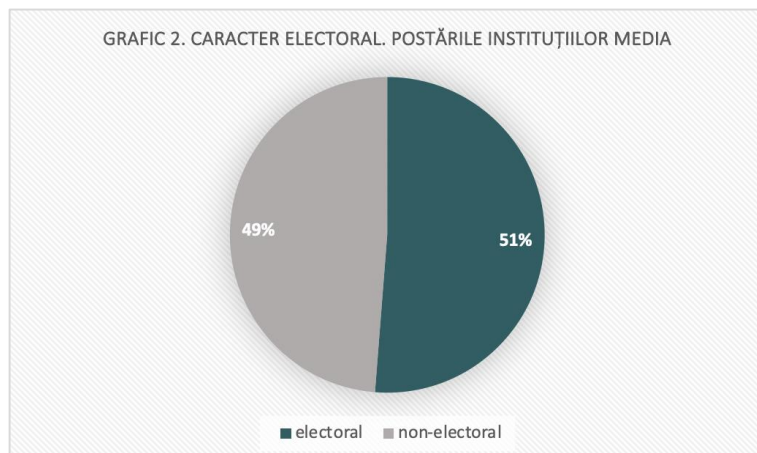
ACTIVITIES OF MEDIA OUTLETS ON FACEBOOK

A total of 1,893 posts on the 5 Facebook pages of the media outlets monitored were collected and coded. The most posts (N = 424) appeared on November 1, 2020 (election day), and the fewest (N = 143) on October 31, the day of silence.



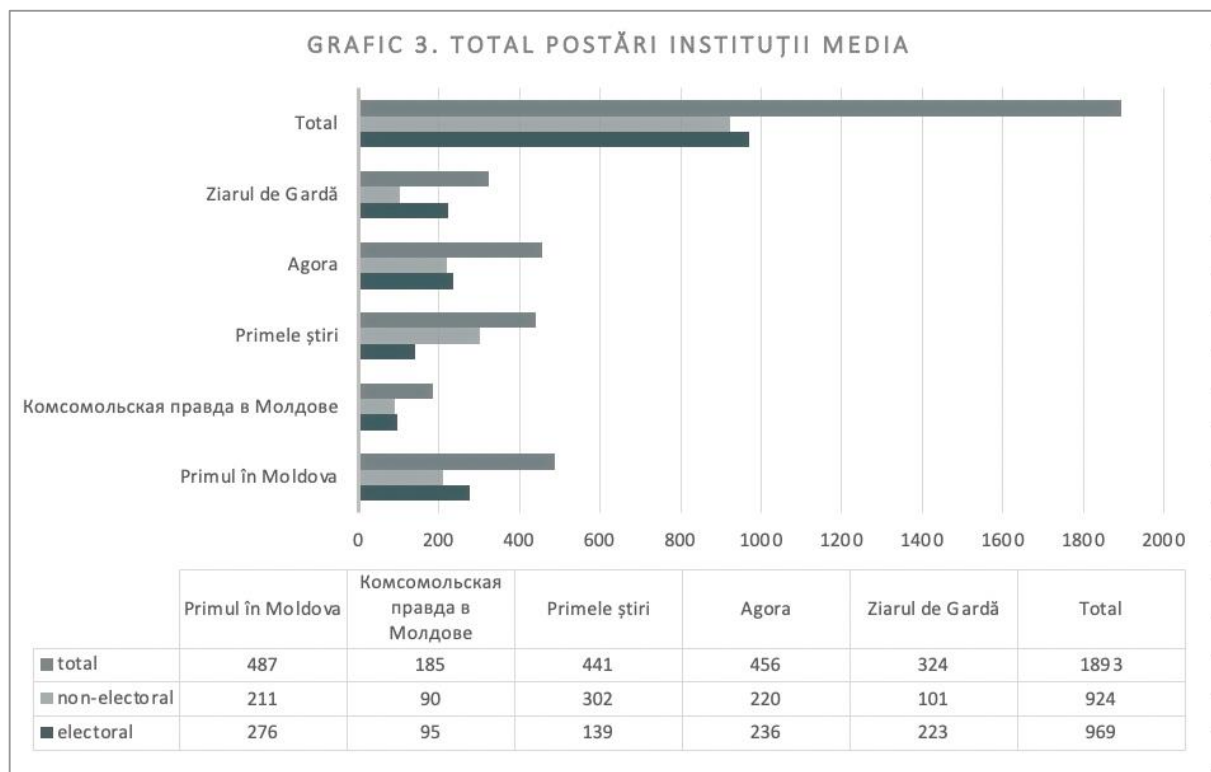
On other days, the media outlets published 260 to 290 posts. In all, 51% of the posts (N=969) were deemed relevant to the election.

CHART 2. ELECTORAL NATURE. POSTS BY MEDIA OUTLETS



Television station **Primul în Moldova** published the most posts (N=487) followed by **Agora.md** (N=456), **Primele Știri** (N=441), **Ziarul de Gardă** (N=324), and **Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove** (N=185).

CHART 3. TOTAL POSTS BY MEDIA OUTLETS



Primul în Moldova and **Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove** characterized the election as efficiently organized by the government and public authorities. Both outlets highlighted the competition between Dodon and Sandu and outlined different scenarios for the future of the country depending on who won. Igor Dodon was widely promoted as the “president for all”

who would (i) maintain diplomatic relations with both Eastern and Western partners; (ii) ensure stability and economic development; (iii) provide higher pensions and salaries; (iv) not enforce a quarantine during the pandemic; (v) relaunch the reform of the justice system; and (vi) champion the traditional family. In contrast, Maia Sandu was presented as a candidate who (i) lacks human values; (ii) is against the celebration of Victory Day on May 9; (iii) is against the church; (iv) would close schools and mayors' offices in small localities; (v) had facilitated organizing transportation for the diaspora to polling stations in European countries on election day; (vi) supports the LGBT community and participates in the marches it organizes; (vii) was implicated in the "theft of the billion" case; and (viii) would divide the country and cause public unrest. *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove* also promoted the Russian anti-USA narrative pointing out US interests in progressive forces winning in Moldova in order to more easily control the situation in the country. This narrative has persisted since the beginning of the electoral campaign and was used specifically to attack Maia Sandu.

Agora.md (456 total posts, 236 relevant) and **Ziarul de Gardă** (324 total posts, 223 relevant) both showed an openness to citizen journalism by urging readers to send photos from polling stations in the country and abroad on election day. The content they posted was diverse, interactive, and representative of current reality. A common component was the situation in the diaspora including methods for organizing and mobilizing it and the atmosphere at overseas polling stations. Both media outlets offered space to all presidential candidates while presenting Maia Sandu in a neutral to positive tone and Igor Dodon in a neutral to negative one. They also shared informative and educational posts on the electoral process and urged people to vote.

The Facebook page of **Primele Știri** had the fewest relevant posts (N=139) and the most on other topics (N=302) due to the large number of teleshopping and entertainment posts on this page. Like *Agora.md* and *Ziarul de Gardă*, *Primele Știri* offered space to all candidates, though Maia Sandu and Igor Dodon got more in equal proportions.

Primul în Moldova and *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove* violated Article 1.6 of the Journalist's Code of Ethics in their posts on Facebook with political partisanship and propaganda for Igor Dodon. Moreover, a significant number of posts not directly related to the election also promoted Dodon by praising how the Party of Socialists that supported him performed in the Chicu Government and the Chisinau Mayor's Office. *Primul în Moldova* also posted propaganda for Dodon during the previous presidential election study.¹

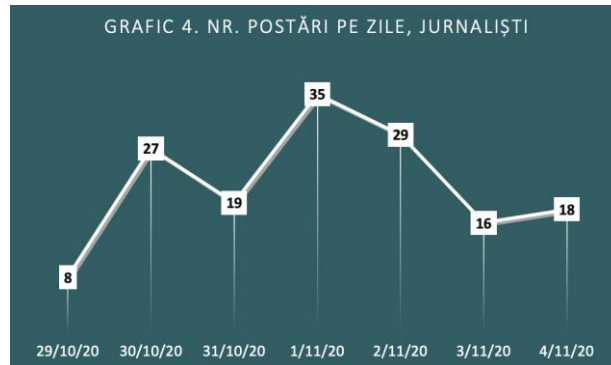
¹ <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/raport-cji-re%C8%9Beaua-social%C4%83-facebook-folosit%C4%83-intens-de-unle-institu%C8%9Bii-media-%C3%AEn-preajma>

On the *Agora.md* and *Ziarul de Gardă* pages we identified a slight bias in favor of Maia Sandu although both generally maintained a neutral tone in their posts. Article 1.6 of the Code of Ethics was largely respected on the Facebook page of Primele Știri.

THE ACTIVITIES OF JOURNALISTS ON FACEBOOK

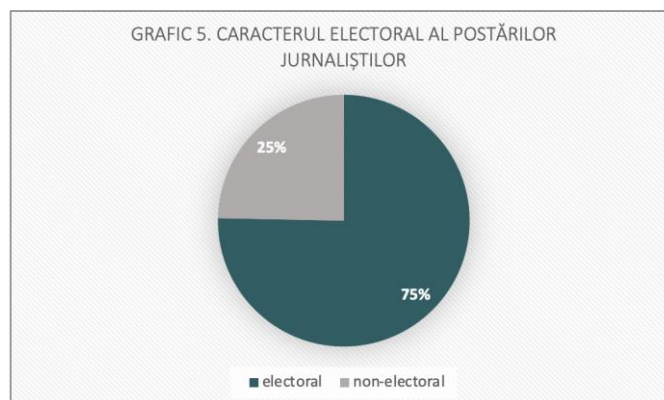
Journalists from the 5 media outlets published 152 posts during the study period (Chart 4). Like their media outlets, the journalists posted the most on election day (N=35).

CHART 4. NUMBER OF POSTS PER DAY, JOURNALISTS



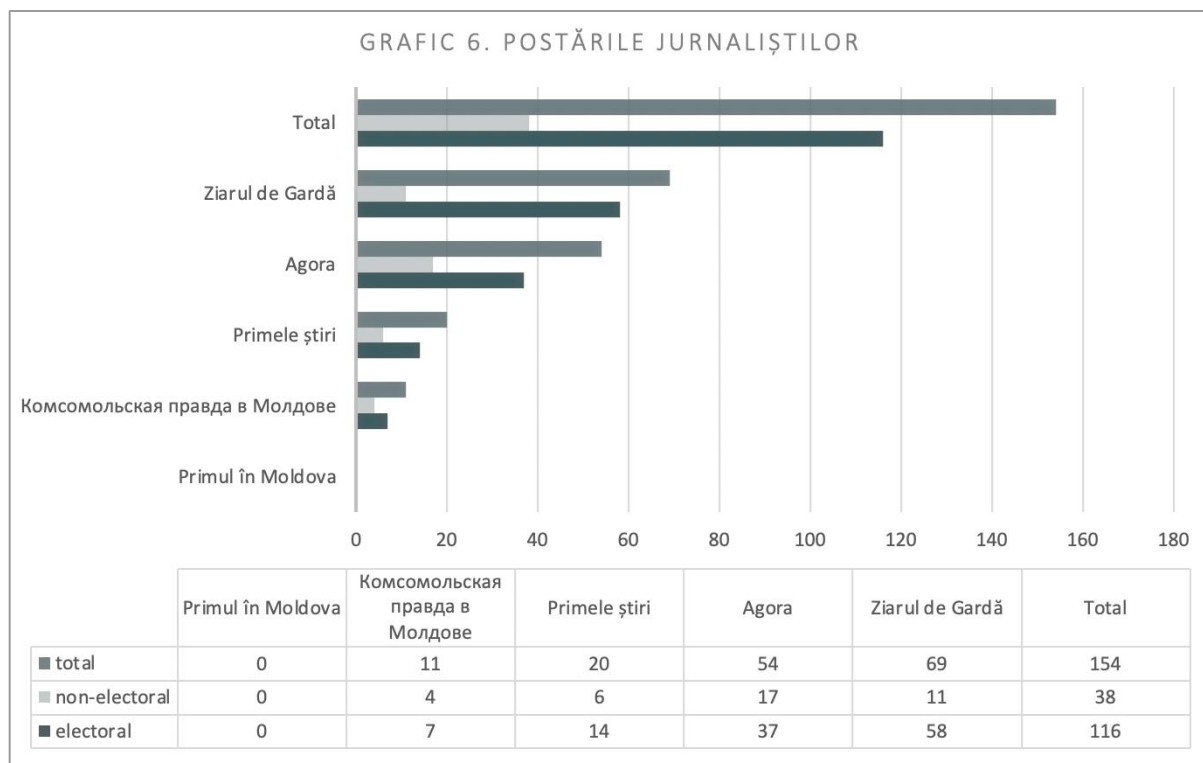
Of the total number of posts, 116 (75%) were of an electoral nature and therefore relevant.

CHART 5. ELECTORAL NATURE OF JOURNALISTS' POSTS



The most active journalists were those from *Ziarul de Gardă* (N=69) followed by *Agora.md* (N=54), *Primele Știri* (N=20) and *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldova* (N=11). Journalists from *Primul în Moldova* did not post anything relevant during first round of the presidential election.

CHART 6. POSTS BY JOURNALISTS



On their personal Facebook pages, journalists from *Agora.md* and *Ziarul de Gardă* shared (i) mostly relevant articles from the official pages of their media outlets; (ii) their personal opinions about the candidates (generally negative about Dodon and neutral to positive about Sandu); (iii) admiration for the Moldovan diaspora’s voter turnout noting that the diaspora had made history; and (iv) information about the preliminary results of the first round. Journalists from both media outlets urged people to vote without directly stating their electoral preferences. The information they posted indicates that they use their Facebook pages to promote their professional work.

By number of posts, journalists from *Primele Știri* ranked third with 20. They covered the work behind the scenes, the election results, and the voting process on election day along with voting options and voters’ expectations.

Journalists from *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldova* published the fewest posts at 11 in which they criticized Maia Sandu, said they had exercised their rights to vote, and discussed the Komsomol (Communist Youth League). They also shared articles containing conspiracy theories related to coronavirus.

In short, journalists from four of the five media outlets used Facebook to cover electoral events, to urge citizens to vote, and to express their views on candidates largely by sharing material produced by their media outlets. None of the journalists urged citizens to vote for a particular candidate.

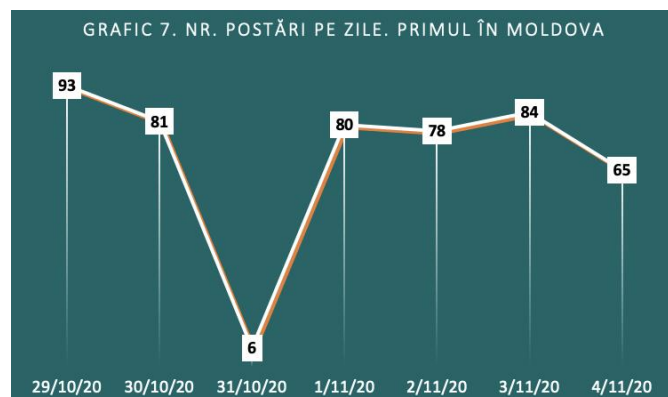
A distinct category of posts for this election was political memes with negative connotations mostly aimed at Igor Dodon. Posts containing hashtags and graphic elements referred to some popular memes during the electoral campaign, e.g., the pigeon and the magpie, telling fortunes in eggs, “the bag,” and the parallel electorate. All were information capsules inspired by the speeches of the independent candidate supported by the Party of Socialists (Dodon) that later went viral on the Internet amplified by media outlets and their journalists. This form of presenting information and the relevance of memes in the flow of information and disinformation are worth discussing in a separate study.

The coronavirus has been a hot topic for all media outlets, but compared with the previous monitoring study, there was less emphasis on how the virus could influence the election, and the volume of posts about its impact on society was not significant. In total, the posts related to the presidential election outnumbered those on the pandemic on Facebook during this monitoring period.

DATA INTERPRETATION. PRIMUL ÎN MOLDOVA

In all, 487 posts were published on the Facebook page of television station [Primul în Moldova](#) between October 29 and November 4, almost 100 more than during the first monitoring from September 21 to 27. The average daily number of likes, comments, and shares with these posts was 887. The outlet posts in Romanian with translations in Russian. Chart 7 shows that the most posts were on October 29, and the fewest were on October 31, the day of silence.

CHART 7. NUMBER OF POSTS PER DAY. PRIMUL IN MOLDOVA



A total of 276 (57%) were of an electoral nature and favored Igor Dodon, 129 (26%) were of a non-electoral nature but also presented Dodon in positive light, and the remaining 82 posts (17%) were not relevant.

CHART 8. ELECTORAL NATURE. POSTS BY PRIMUL IN MOLDOVA (487)

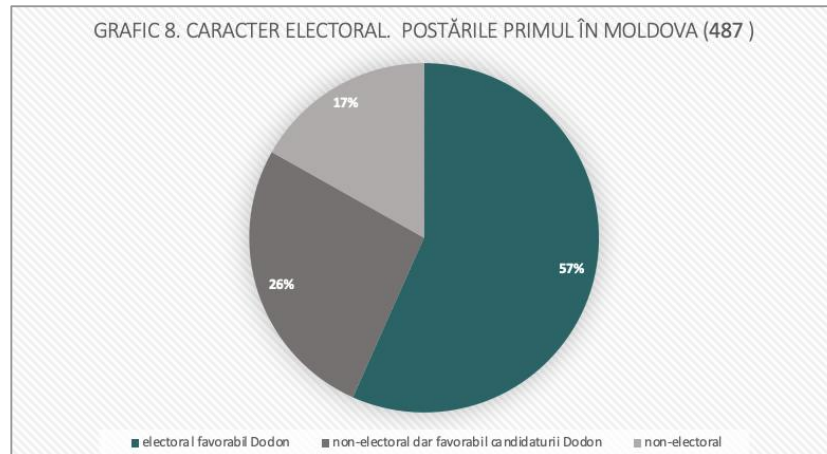


Chart 9 indicates that Dodon’s message for stability² (N=114) was the most frequent topic followed by posts on the electoral process (N=95), namely the efficient organization of the election and compliance with anti-coronavirus rules³ as well as the fact that the election was organized transparently according to observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States.⁴ Primul în Moldova also heavily promoted the performance of the Socialist Chicu Government (N=68 posts) and Chisinau Mayor’s Office (N=61 posts). Although not specifically of an electoral nature, these two categories of posts indirectly supported the positive image of Igor Dodon as the Socialists supported his candidacy. In all, 47 posts were attacks on Maia Sandu, mostly by Igor Dodon. To a lesser extent, the television station shared posts with the following messages:

- The destabilization of public order in Varnita caused by the PAS party might generate division in the country⁵ (N=5 posts).
- Opposition candidates do not deserve citizens’ votes for president (N=2 posts).
- The diaspora is a parallel electorate that does not represent the country’s realities (N=4 posts).

² <https://www.facebook.com/113247366781343/posts/374925130613564>

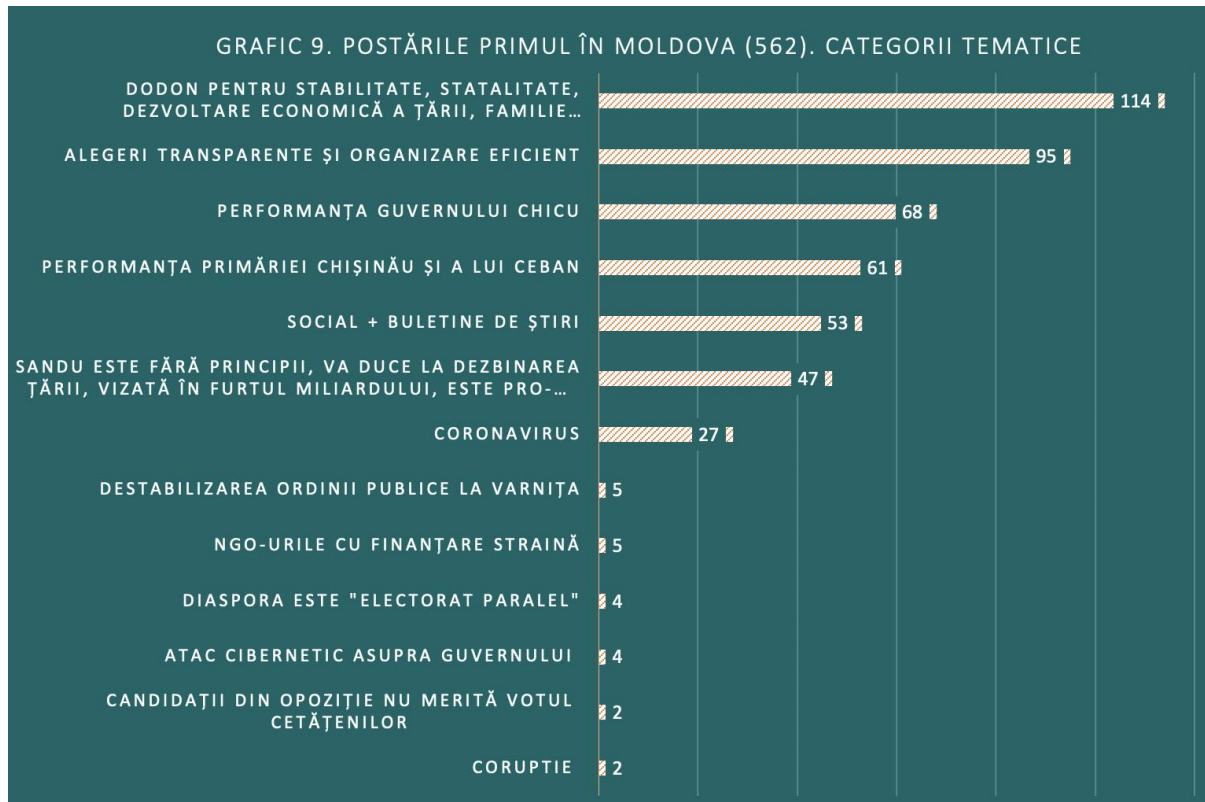
³ <https://www.facebook.com/113247366781343/posts/377889043650506>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/113247366781343/posts/377893056983438>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/113247366781343/posts/377886386984105>

- Nongovernment organizations with foreign funding want to destabilize the country⁶ (N=5 posts).
- The government is under cyberattack from outside the country aiming to block the work of institutions⁷ (N= 4 posts).

CHART 9. POSTS BY PRIMUL IN MOLDOVA (562). THEMATIC CATEGORIES



Our analysis of the thematic categories of public posts by this television station as well as the frequency of their publication shows that Primul în Moldova used its Facebook page as a propaganda tool for Igor Dodon and against Maia Sandu. Charts 10 and 11 present the messages in the positive campaign for Dodon and the attacks on Sandu, respectively.

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/113247366781343/posts/374813227291421>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/113247366781343/posts/377924790313598>

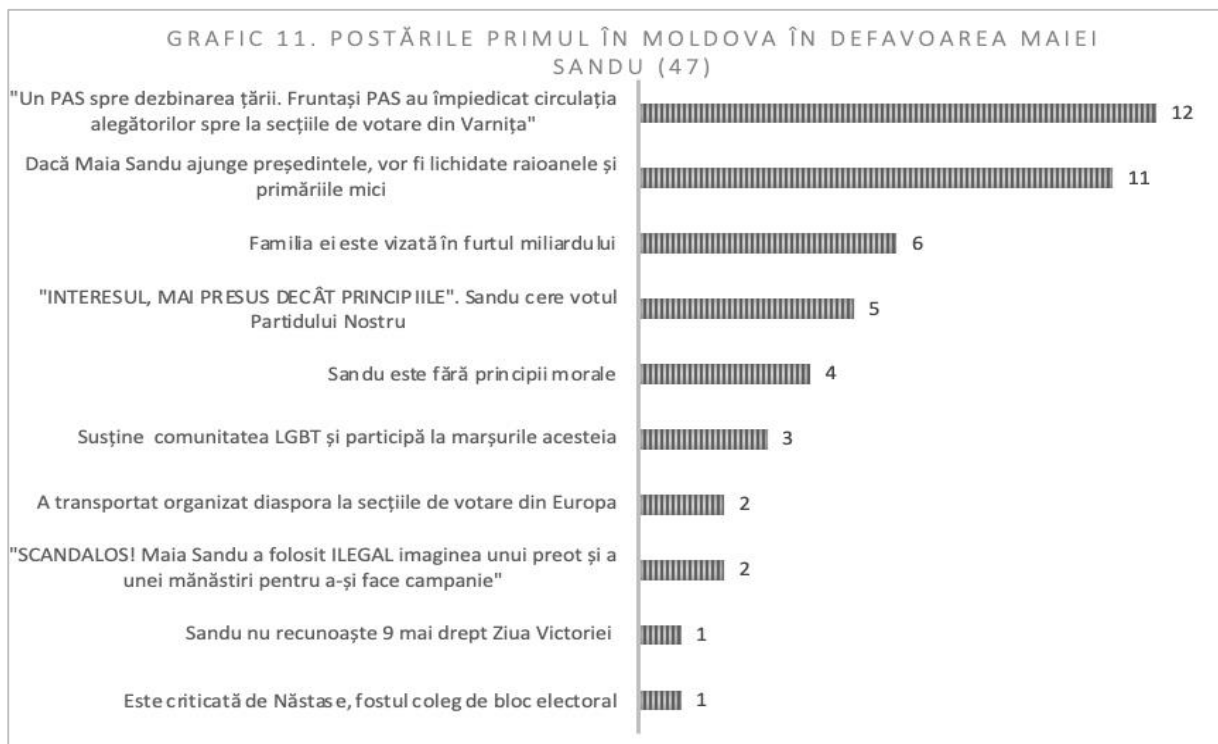
CHART 10. POSTS BY PRIMUL IN MOLDOVA WITH MESSAGES IN FAVOR OF IGOR DODON (114)

GRAFIC 10. POSTĂRILE PRIMUL ÎN MOLDOVA CU MESAJE ÎN FAVOAREA LUI IGOR DODON (114)



CHART 11. POSTS BY PRIMUL IN MOLDOVA AGAINST MAIA SANDU (47)

GRAFIC 11. POSTĂRILE PRIMUL ÎN MOLDOVA ÎN DEFAVOAREA MAIEI SANDU (47)



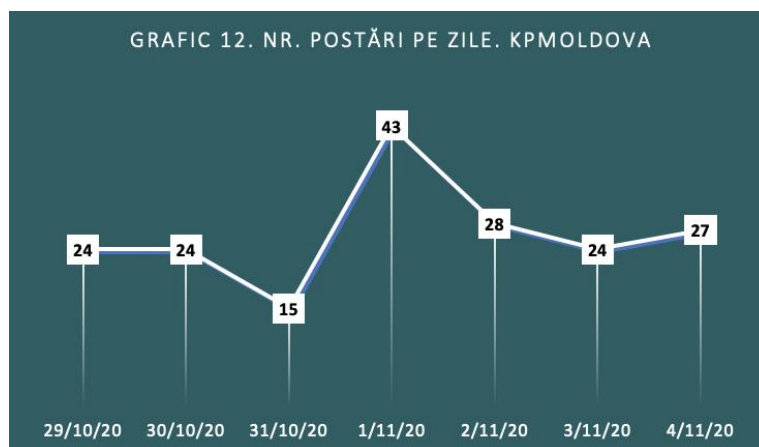
JOURNALISTS FROM PRIMUL ÎN MOLDOVA

As Chart 6 shows, journalists from **Primul în Moldova** did not post anything relevant during first round of the presidential election.

DATA INTERPRETATION. *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldova*

The newspaper published 185 posts on its Facebook page between October 29 and November 4, the fewest of the 5 outlets monitored. The daily average of likes, comments, and shares with these posts was 1,479. The outlet posts in Russian. According to Chart 12, the largest number of posts was on November 1—election day—and the smallest was on October 31, the day of silence.

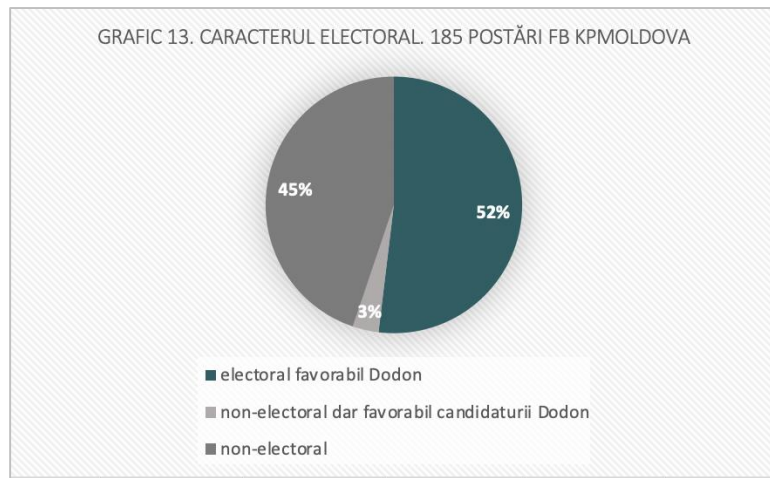
CHART 12. NUMBER OF POSTS PER DAY. KP MOLDOVA



The behavior of *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldova* on Facebook was similar to that of Primul în Moldova. Over half of all posts (52%) were of an electoral nature and favored Igor Dodon,

3% were of a non-electoral nature but also favored Dodon, and the remaining 45% were not relevant.

CHART 13. ELECTORAL NATURE. 185 POSTS BY KP MOLDOVA



Most posts referred to the candidates, mainly Dodon and Sandu, as well as representatives from the Chisinau Mayor's Office and the government (N=49 posts) followed by the organization of the election and the preliminary results (N=46).

CHART 14. POSTS BY KP MOLDOVA (185). THEMATIC CATEGORIES

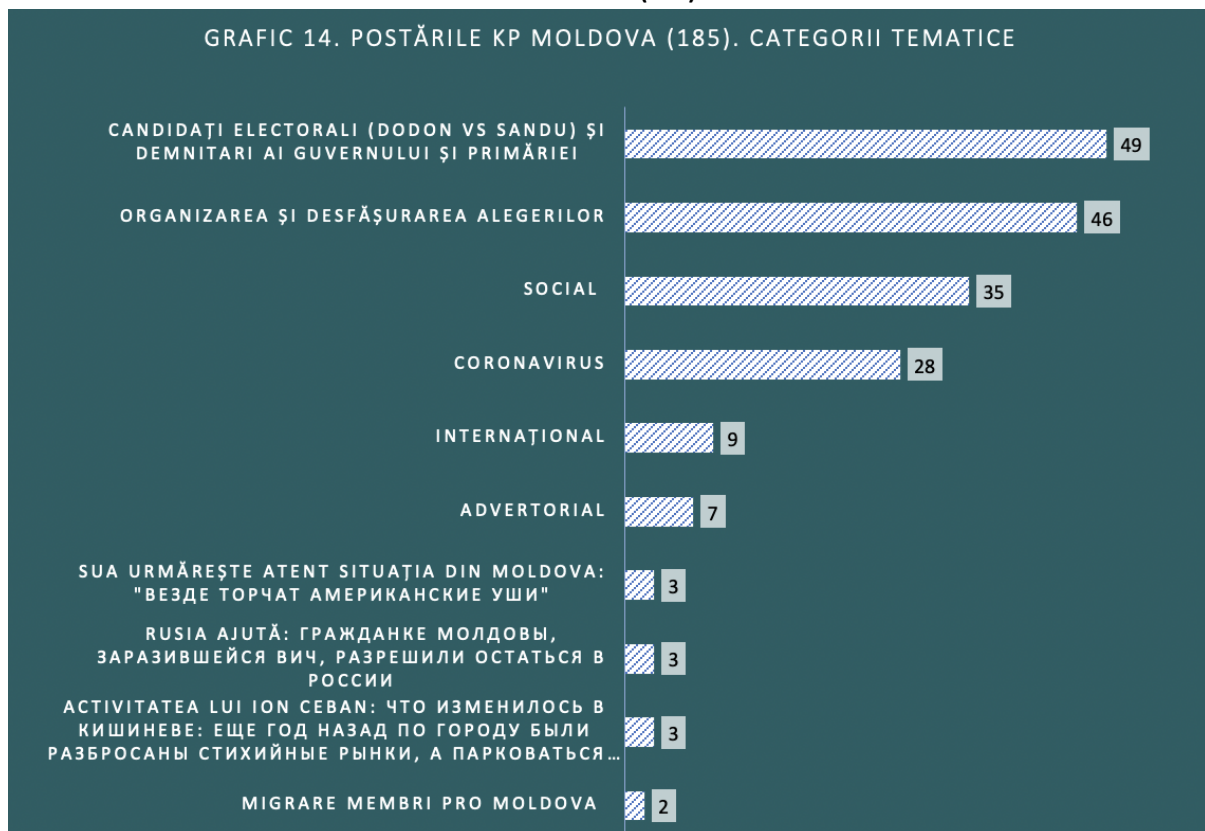
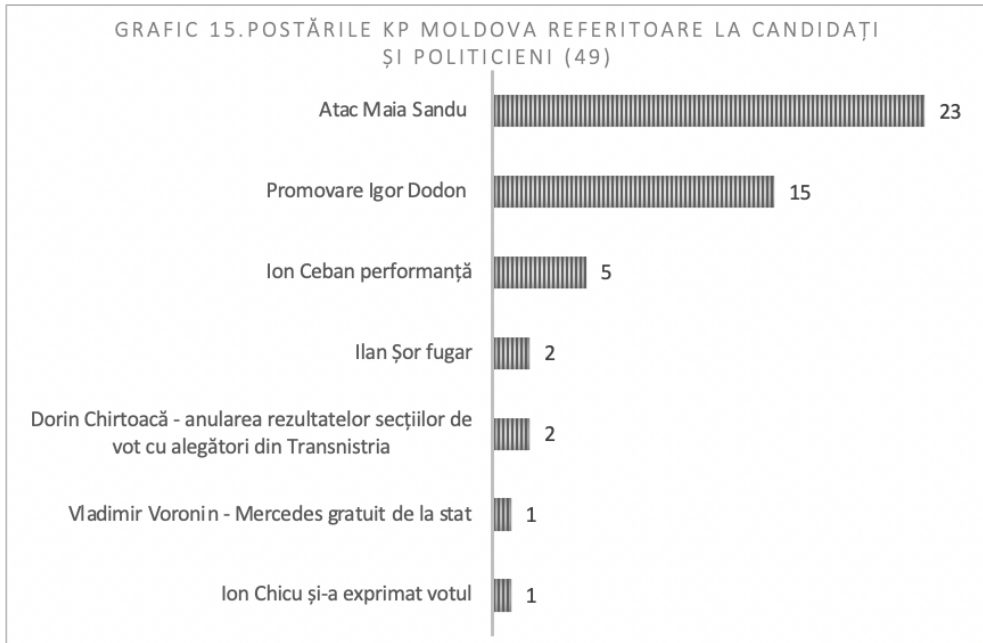
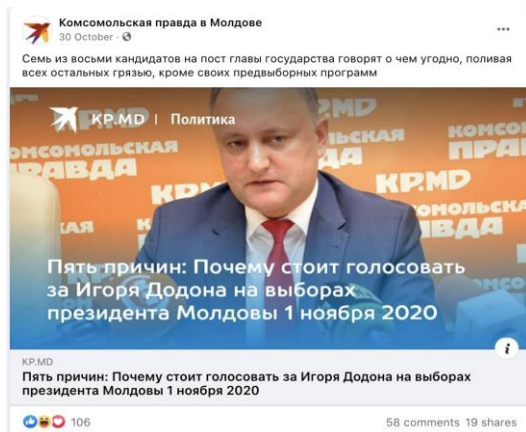


Chart 15 breaks the posts in Chart 14 into sub-categories.

CHART 15. KP MOLDOVA POSTS REFERRING TO CANDIDATES AND POLITICIANS (49)



Attacks against Maia Sandu (N=23) were more frequent than posts promoting Igor Dodon (N=15). *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldova* further highlighted the reasons people should vote for Dodon, stating that the other competitors do not talk about their electoral programs but only throw dirt at each other (Screenshot 2).

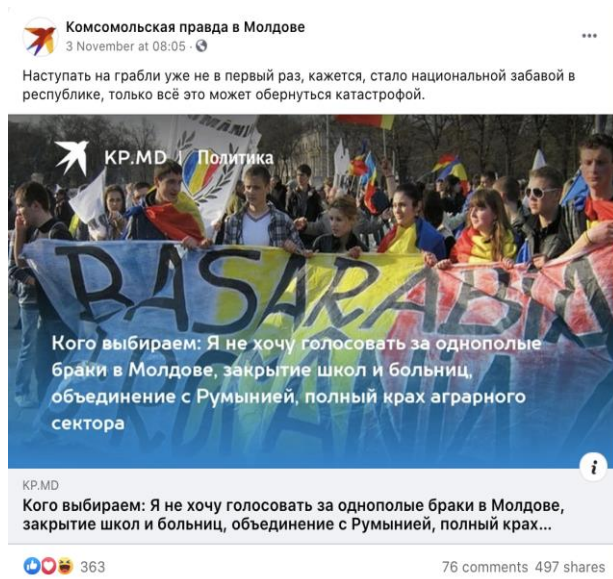


Screenshot 2. KP.MD post

Seven out of the eight presidential candidates are talking about anything except their electoral programs and are just throwing dirt at everyone else. Five reasons why it is worth voting for Igor Dodon in the presidential election in Moldova on November 1, 2020

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/kpmoldova/posts/5386927518085786>

The outlet also published posts suggesting that if Maia Sandu won in the second round, the situation in the country would be a disaster (Screenshot 3).



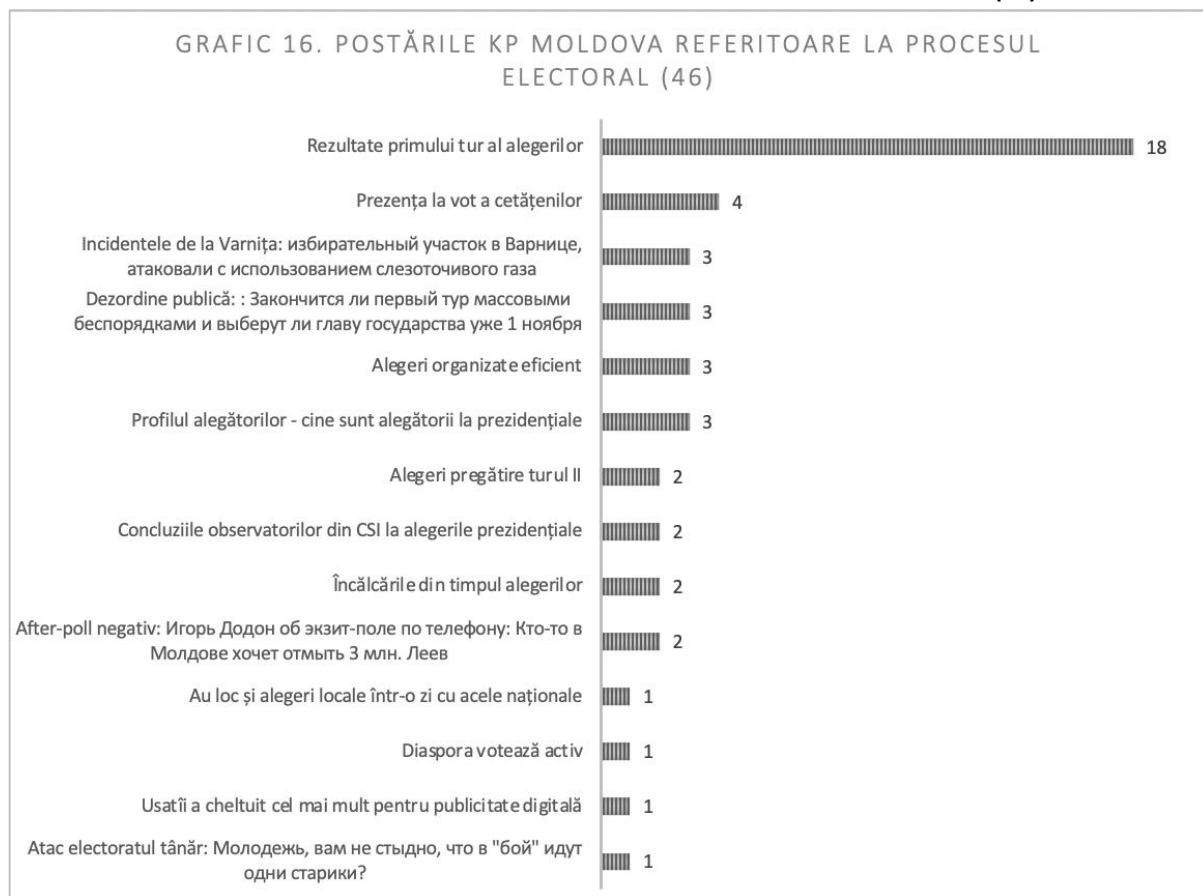
Screenshot 3. KP.MD post

Stepping on a rake yet again seems to have become a national pastime in the country, only now it can turn into a disaster. Whom to choose: I don't want to vote for same-sex marriage in Moldova, closure of schools and hospitals, unification with Romania, complete collapse of agriculture.

Source:
<https://www.facebook.com/kpmoldova/posts/5397694240342447>

Chart 16 breaks down the posts on the electoral process which was the second most frequent thematic category at 46. Most of those referred to the presentation of election results (N=18).

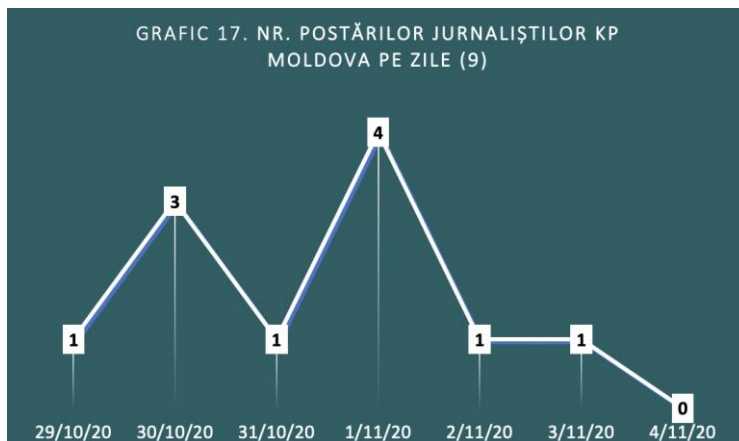
CHART 16. KP MOLDOVA POSTS REFERRING TO THE ELECTORAL PROCESS (46)



JOURNALISTS FROM KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA V MOLDOVE

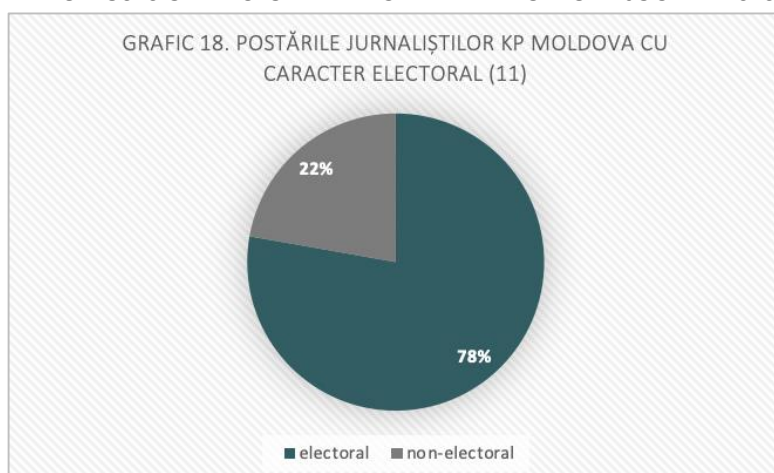
All the journalists monitored from this media outlet were active during the study period.

CHART 17. NUMBER OF POSTS BY KP MOLDOVA JOURNALISTS PER DAY (9)



Of the 11 public posts, 7 were relevant (78%) and 4 were not.

CHART 18. POSTS OF ELECTORAL NATURE BY KP MOLDOVA JOURNALISTS (11)

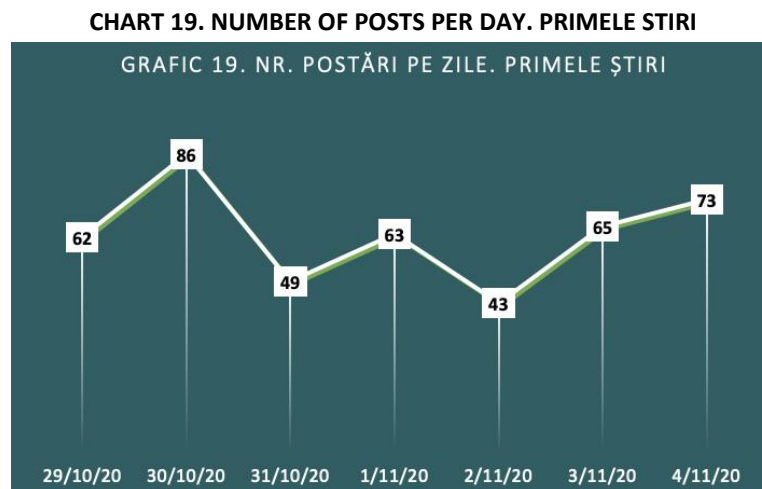


In their posts, journalists said they had voted and indirectly urged people to do the same and also talked about the crisis in the country before the elections and sanctions against media outlets. Posts also included political memes; critical messages targeting Sandu and Shor; the Komsomol; and conspiracy theories about the coronavirus.

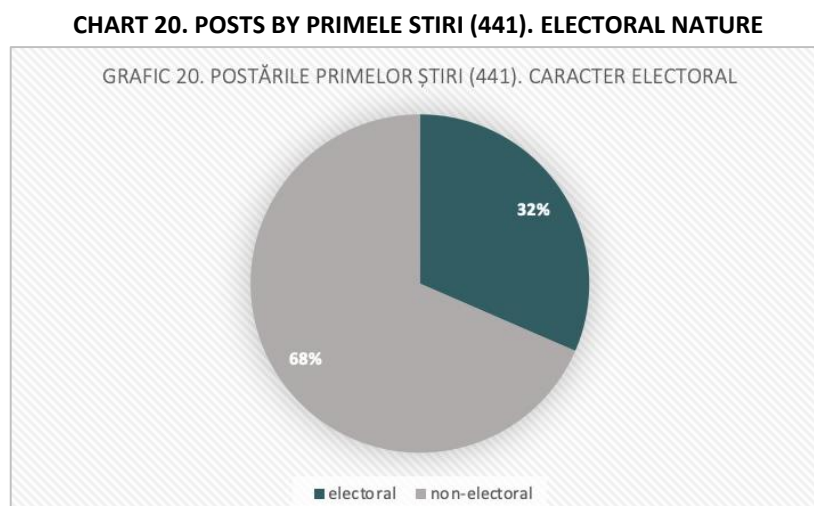
DATA INTERPRETATION. PRIMELE ȘTIRI

At 441, [Primele Stiri](#) ranked third in terms of the number of posts on Facebook between October 29 and November 4. The average daily number of likes, comments, and shares with

these posts was 307. The outlet posts in Romanian. Most were made on October 30, and the fewest were on the day after the election.

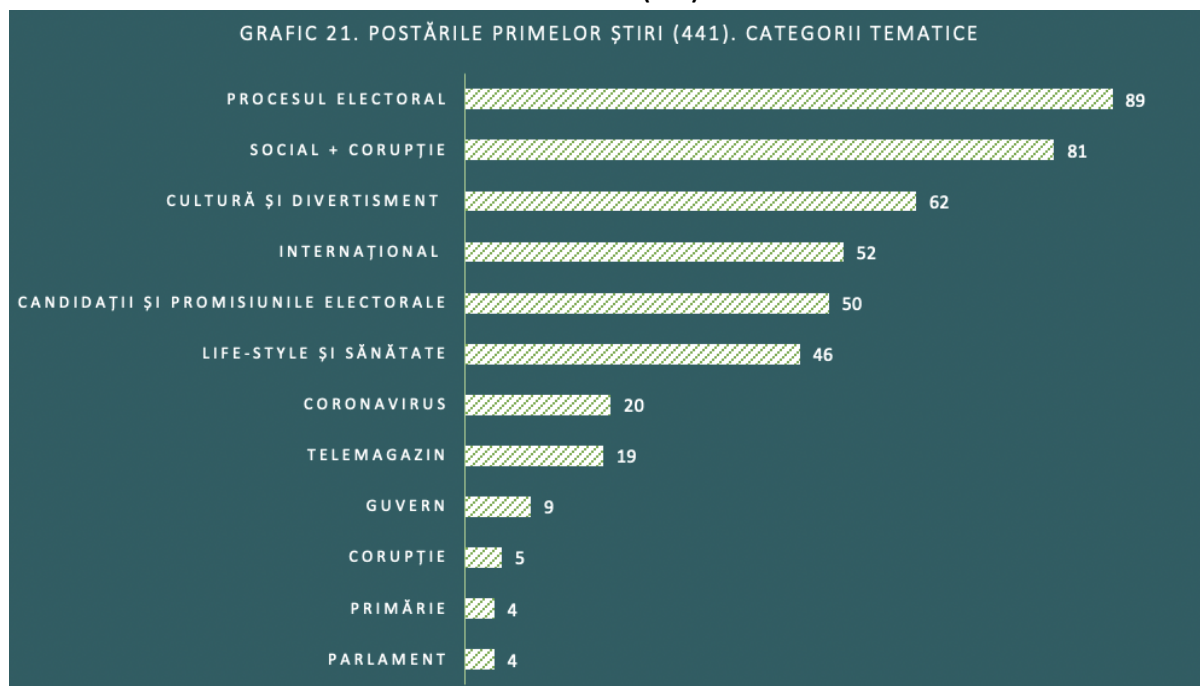


The Facebook page of Primele Știri had the fewest relevant posts of the 5 outlets monitored at 32%.



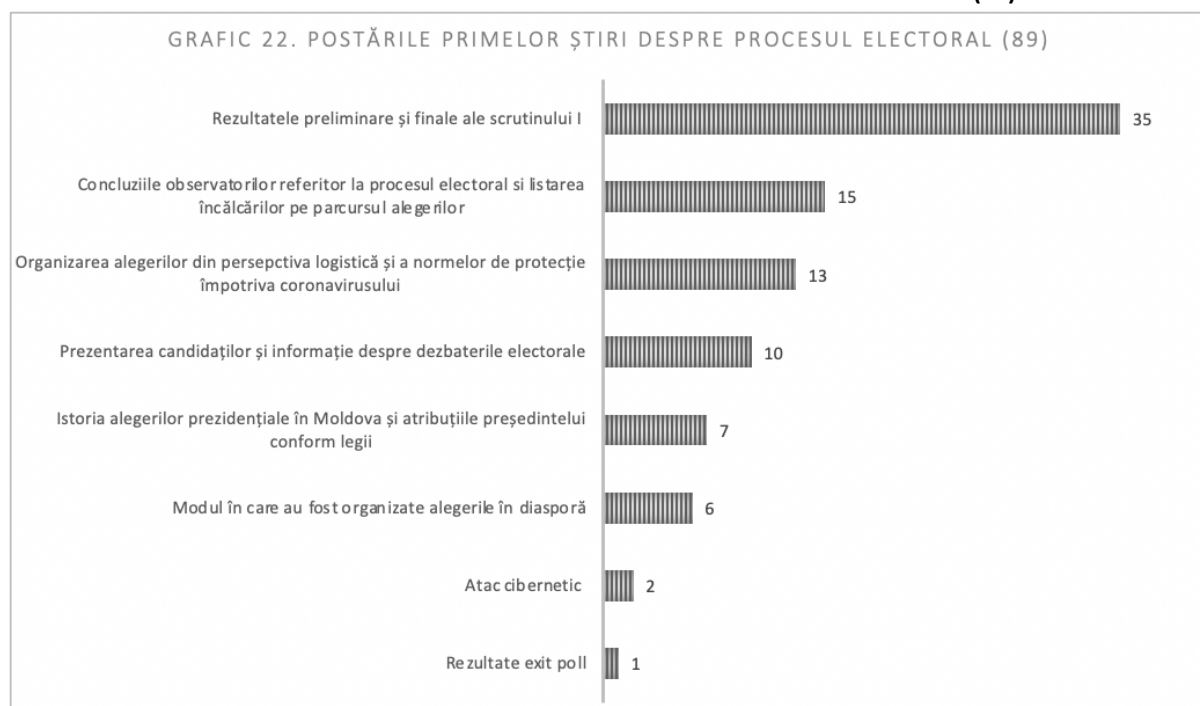
Primele Știri addressed a large variety of topics in its posts (Chart 21) and covered the elections in a neutral and fair manner.

CHART 21. POSTS BY PRIMELE ȘTIRI (441). THEMATIC CATEGORIES



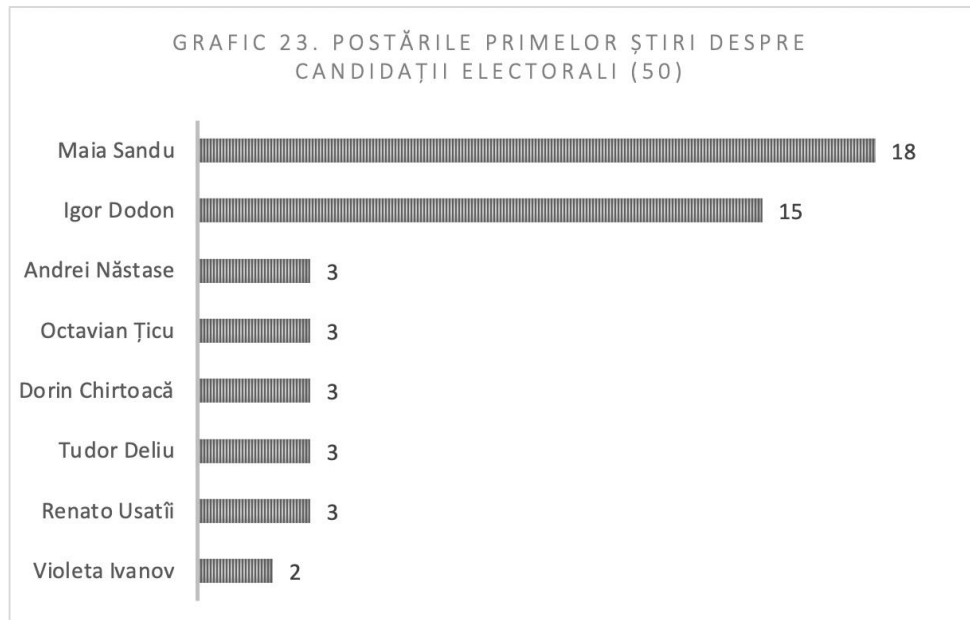
At 89 posts, the electoral process was the largest thematic category; it is broken into sub-categories in Chart 22 which shows that 35 of the 89 posts were about the preliminary and final election results.

CHART 22. POSTS BY PRIMELE ȘTIRI ABOUT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS (89)



Space allotted to candidates and their electoral platforms depended on their chances of winning according to opinion polls. Maia Sandu was the subject of three more posts than Igor Dodon, but both were presented in a neutral manner.

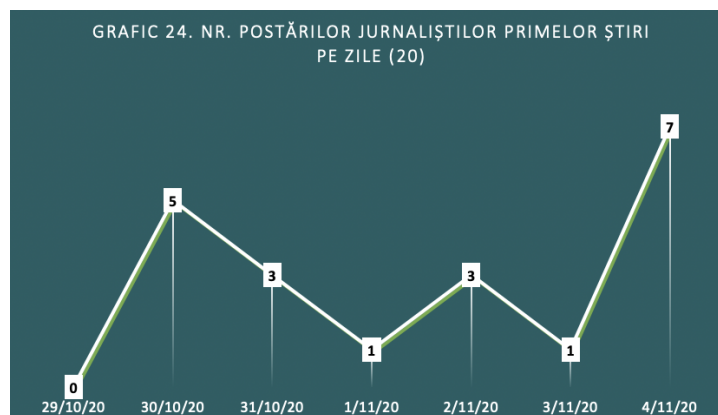
CHART 23. POSTS BY PRIMELE ȘTIRI ABOUT ELECTORAL CANDIDATES (50)



JOURNALISTS FROM PRIMELE ȘTIRI

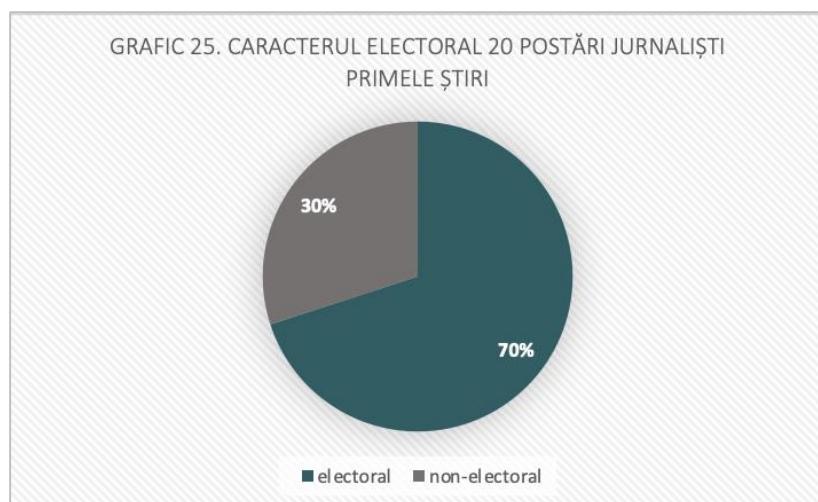
Members of the Primele Știri editorial team were professionally active on Facebook with a total of 20 posts during the monitoring period. The most appeared after the election on November 11; the fewest were on October 29.

CHART 24. NUMBER OF POSTS BY PRIMELE ȘTIRI JOURNALISTS PER DAY (20)



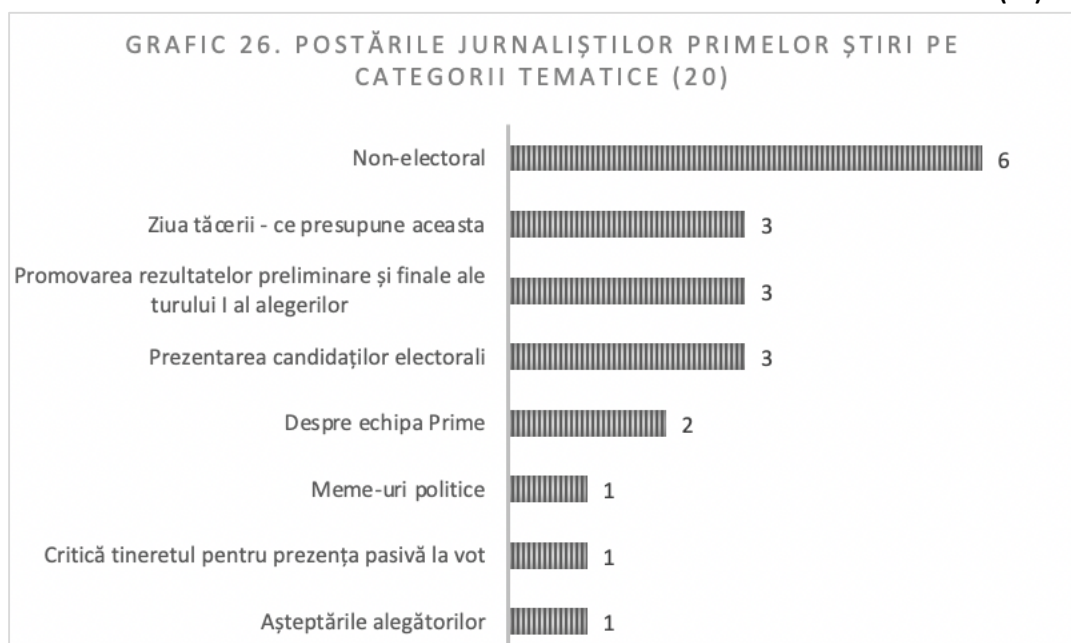
In all, 70% (N=14) were relevant.

CHART 25. ELECTORAL NATURE IN 20 POSTS BY JOURNALISTS FROM PRIMELE ȘTIRI



The thematic categories of posts by Primele Știri journalists varied but were somewhat similar to the media outlet’s broadcast schedule (Chart 26). None of the journalists promoted a specific candidate.

CHART 26. POSTS BY JOURNALISTS FROM PRIMELE ȘTIRI PER THEMATIC CATEGORIES (20)

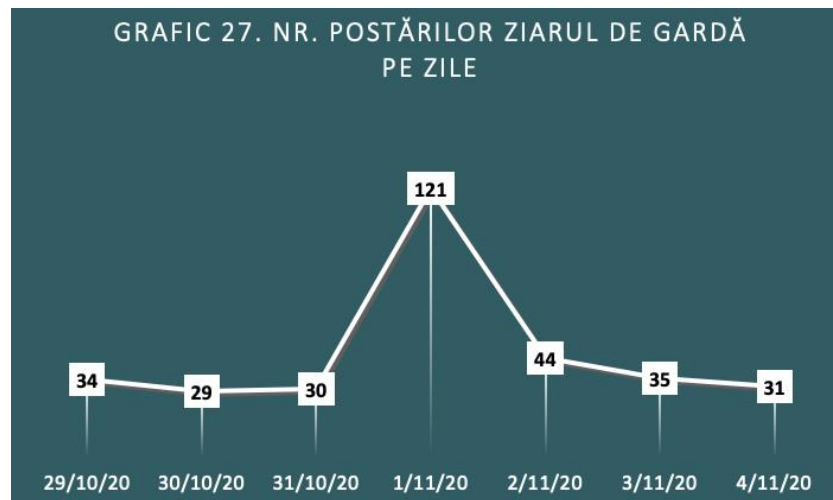


DATA INTERPRETATION. ZIARUL DE GARDĂ

[Ziarul de Gardă](#) disseminated 324 posts between October 29 and November 4 making it fourth in terms of the number on Facebook. The daily average of likes, comments, and shares

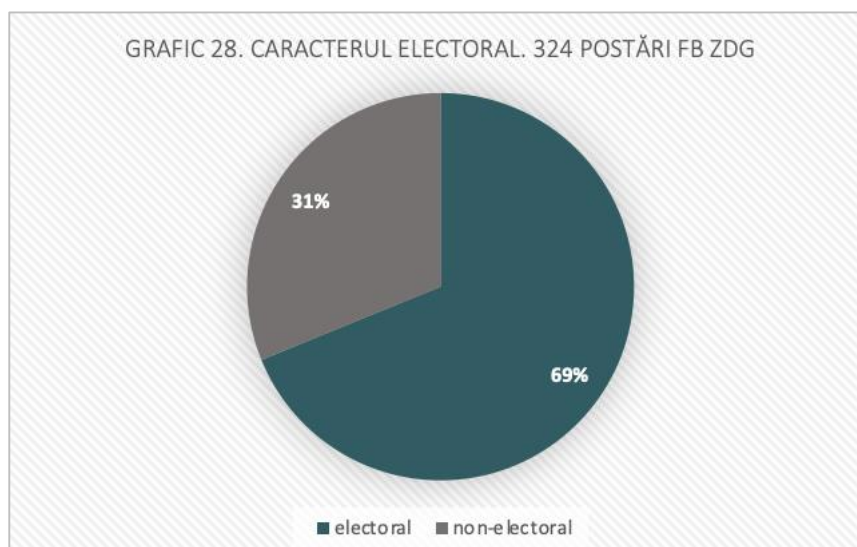
with these posts was 17,036. The outlet posts in Romanian. According to Chart 27, the largest number appeared on election day; posts on other days varied from 30 to 44.

CHART 27. NUMBER OF POSTS BY ZIARUL DE GARDA PER DAY



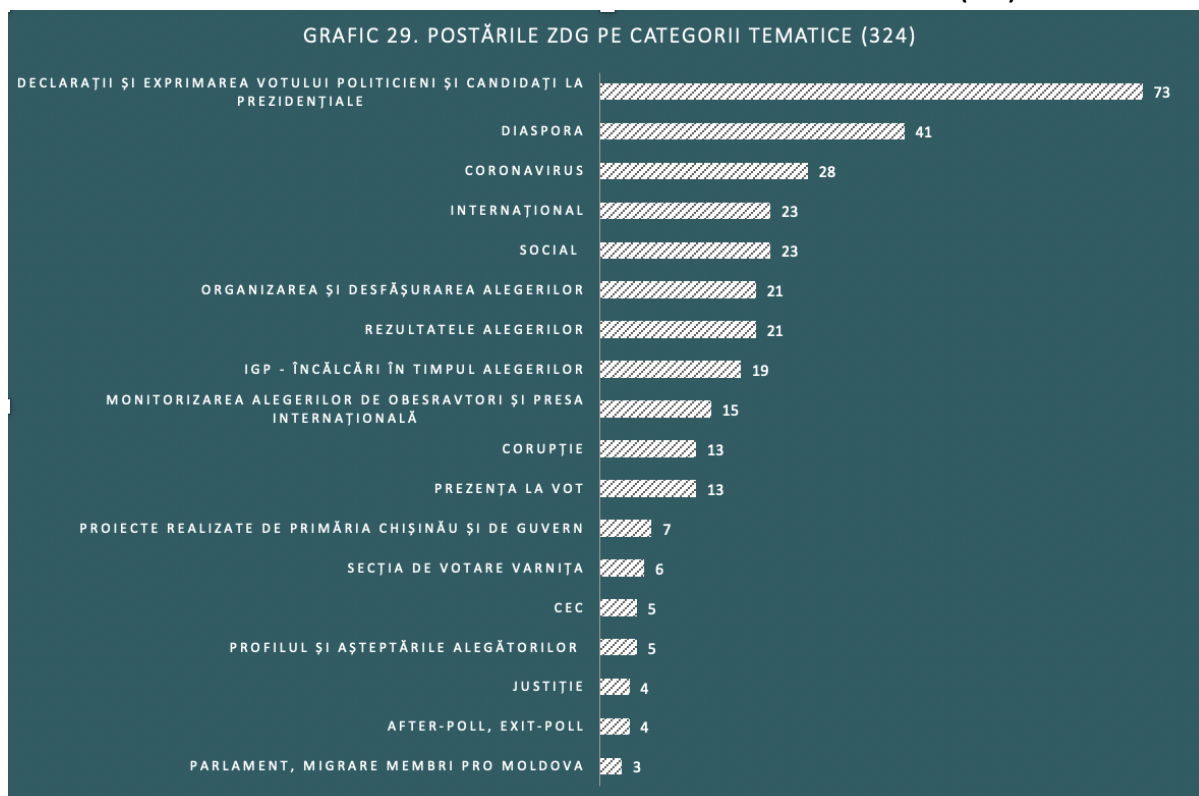
Of the 324, 69% were relevant.

CHART 28. ELECTORAL NATURE. 324 POSTS BY ZIARUL DE GARDA



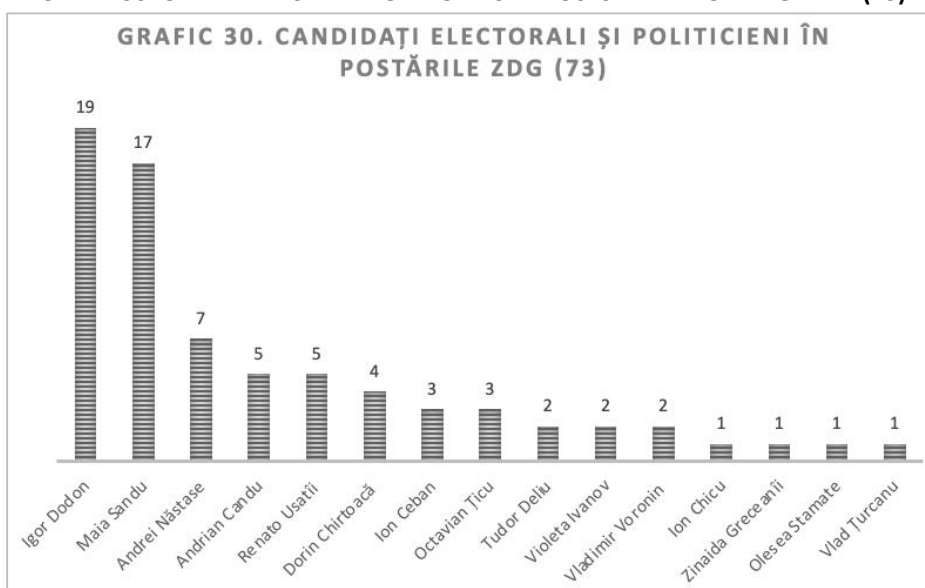
Ziarul de Gardă addressed various topics related to the November 1 election (Chart 29). Most posts referred to statements and promises of presidential candidates and to their participation in the vote (N=73).

CHART 29. POSTS BY ZIARUL DE GARDA PER THEMATIC CATEGORIES (324)



As shown in Chart 30, *Ziarul de Gardă* offered space for all candidates but gave priority to those with the best chances of winning. Igor Dodon was mentioned in 19 posts in a mainly negative way while Maia Sandu was mostly presented in a positive light in 17 posts.

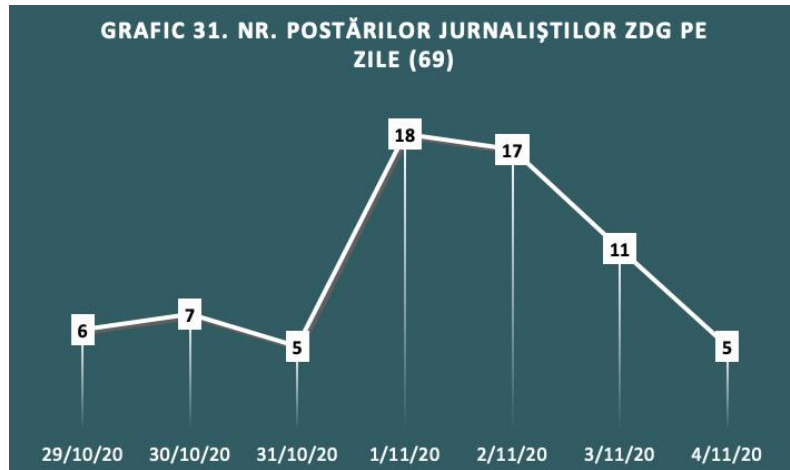
CHART 30. CANDIDATES AND POLITICIANS IN POSTS BY ZIARUL DE GARDA (73)



JOURNALISTS FROM ZIARUL DE GARDĂ

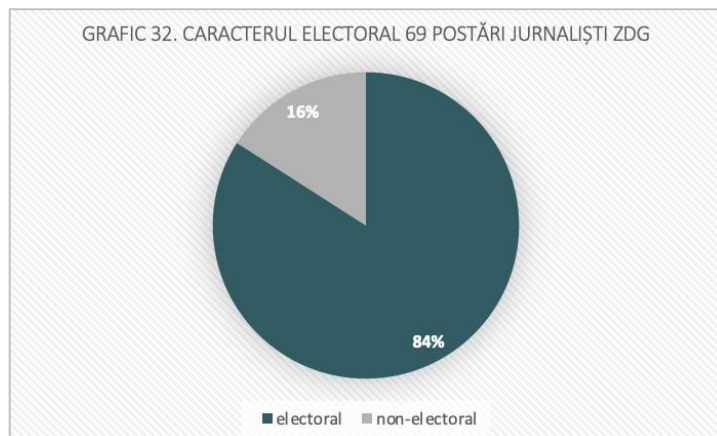
The editorial staff of *Ziarul de Gardă* uses this social network extensively for professional purposes, and around the election its journalists showed increased activity. They made the largest number of posts on election day.

CHART 31. NUMBER OF POSTS BY JOURNALISTS FROM ZIARUL DE GARDA PER DAY (69)



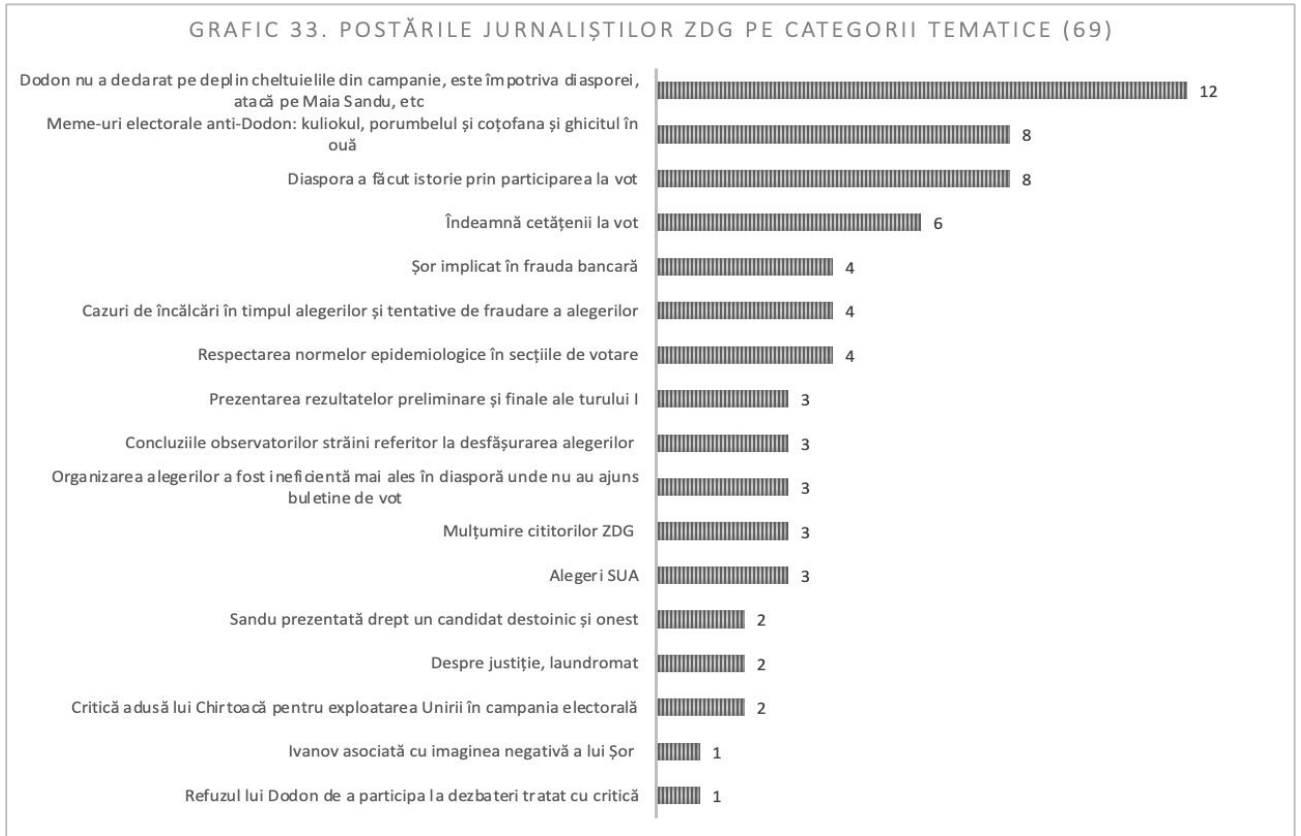
In all, 84% (N=58) of all posts were relevant.

CHART 32. ELECTORAL NATURE IN 69 POSTS BY JOURNALISTS FROM ZIARUL DE GARDA



Journalists from *Ziarul de Gardă* were the most active of all media representatives during the reporting period. The largest number of posts negatively presented statements by candidate Dodon, and anti-Dodon electoral memes (N=8 posts) complemented them (Chart 33). Journalists mostly shared material from the page of their outlet, thus promoting its general vision regarding the November 1 election.

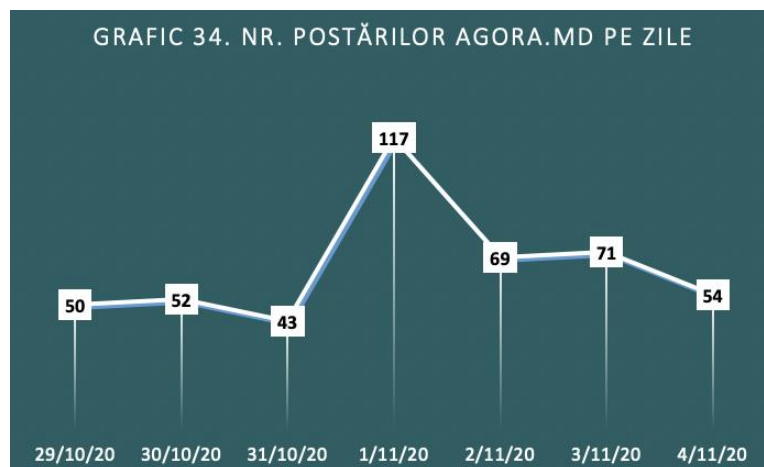
CHART 33. POSTS BY JOURNALISTS FROM ZIARUL DE GARDA PER THEMATIC CATEGORIES (69)



DATA INTERPRETATION. AGORA.MD

[Agora.md published](#) 456 posts on Facebook between October 29 and November 4 ranking it second in terms of number. The daily average of likes, comments, and shares of the posts was 3,457. The outlet posts in Romanian. According to Chart 34, most posts were on election day (N=117); on other days they ranged between 49 and 71.

CHART 34. NUMBER OF POSTS BY AGORA.MD PER DAY



In all, 236 posts (52%) were relevant.

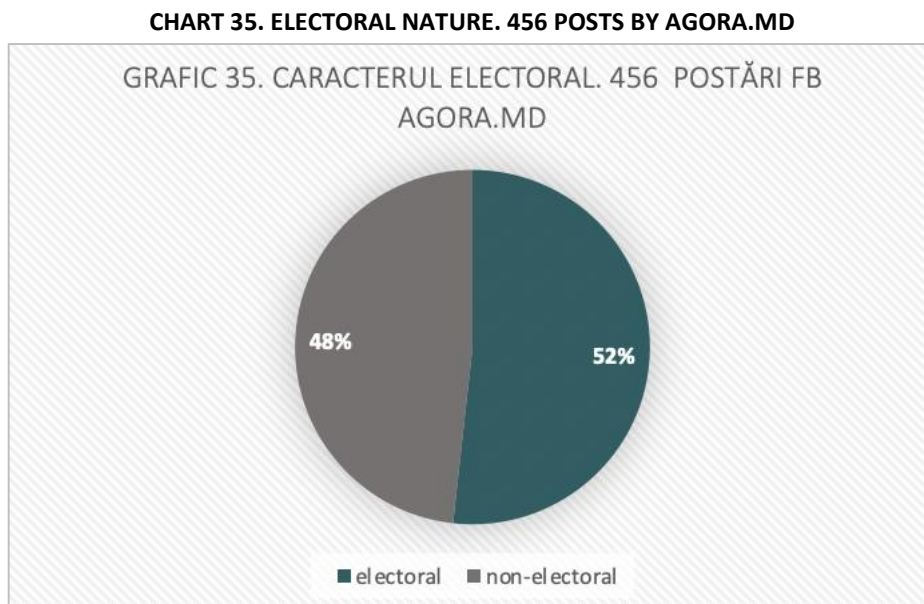


Chart 36 shows the variety of topics on the Agora.md page, the largest of which concerned the electoral process, in particular the organization and conduct of the election (N=156).

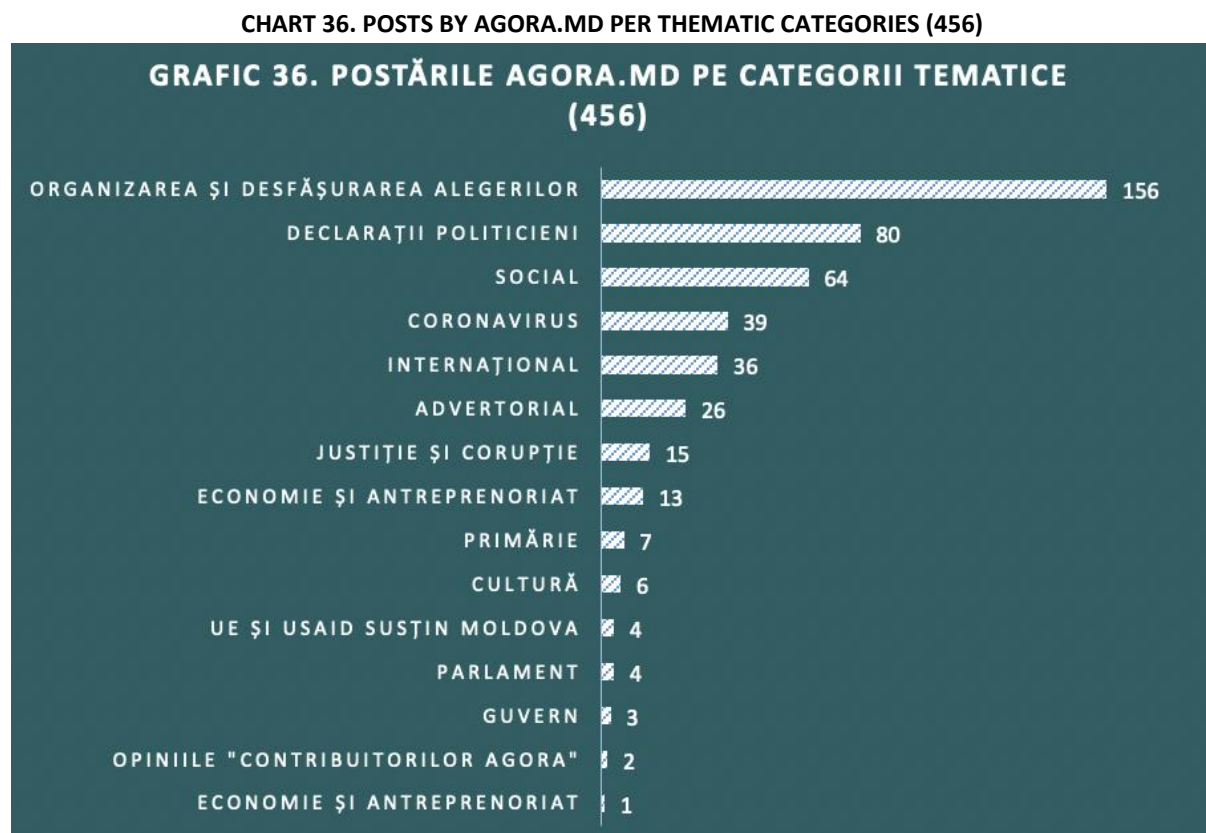
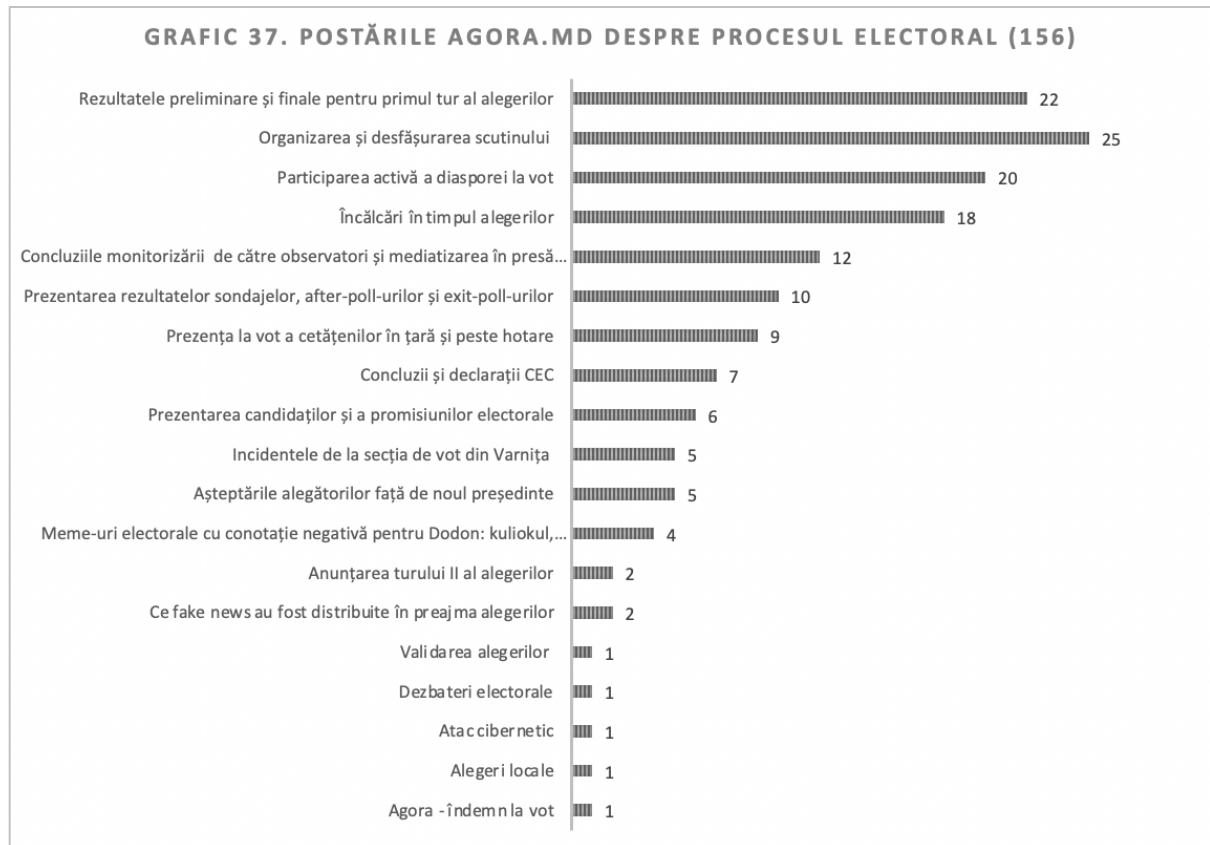


Chart 37 breaks relevant posts into sub-categories. The presentation of the preliminary and final results of the first round (N=22) and coverage of the electoral process (N=22) had the most posts followed by the participation of the diaspora (N=20).

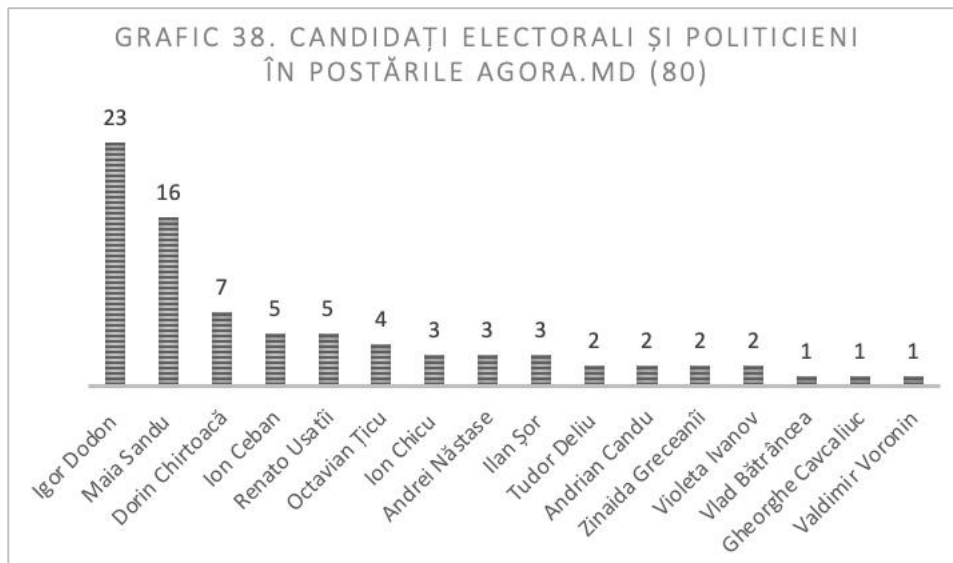
CHART 37. POSTS BY AGORA.MD ABOUT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS (156)



A distinct category of posts is advertorials and promotions for readers' subscriptions to support the news portal as part of the outlet's business model.

Agora.md offered space to each candidate giving priority to those with the greatest chances of winning (Chart 38). Igor Dodon was mentioned in 23 posts in a mainly negative light while Maia Sandu was targeted mainly in a positive light in 16 posts.

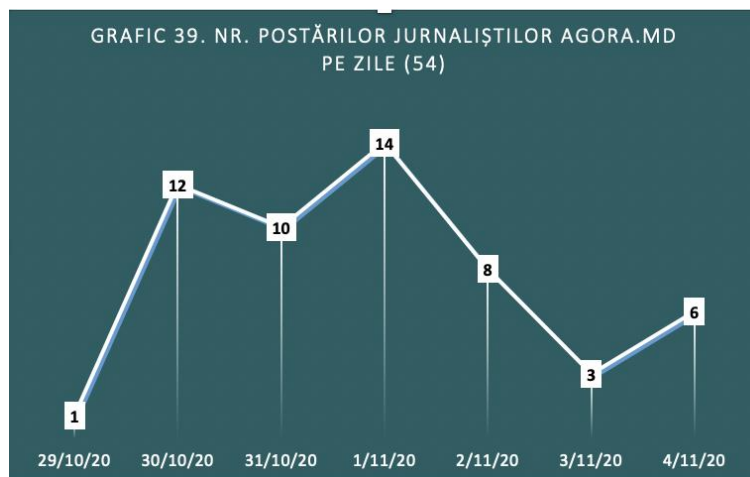
CHART 38. CANDIDATES AND POLITICIANS IN POSTS BY AGORA.MD (80)



JOURNALISTS FROM AGORA.MD

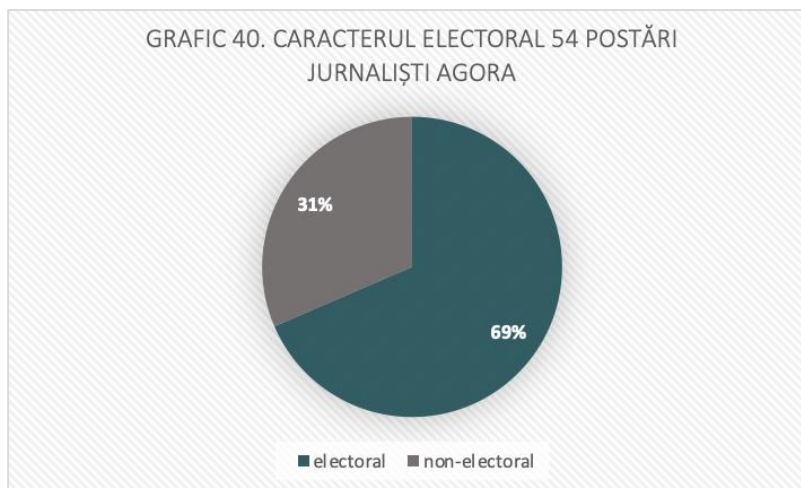
The staff of Agora.md extensively used this social network for professional purposes, particularly around election time. The largest number of posts appeared on election day (N=14).

CHART 39. NUMBER OF POSTS BY JOURNALISTS FROM AGORA.MD PER DAY (54)



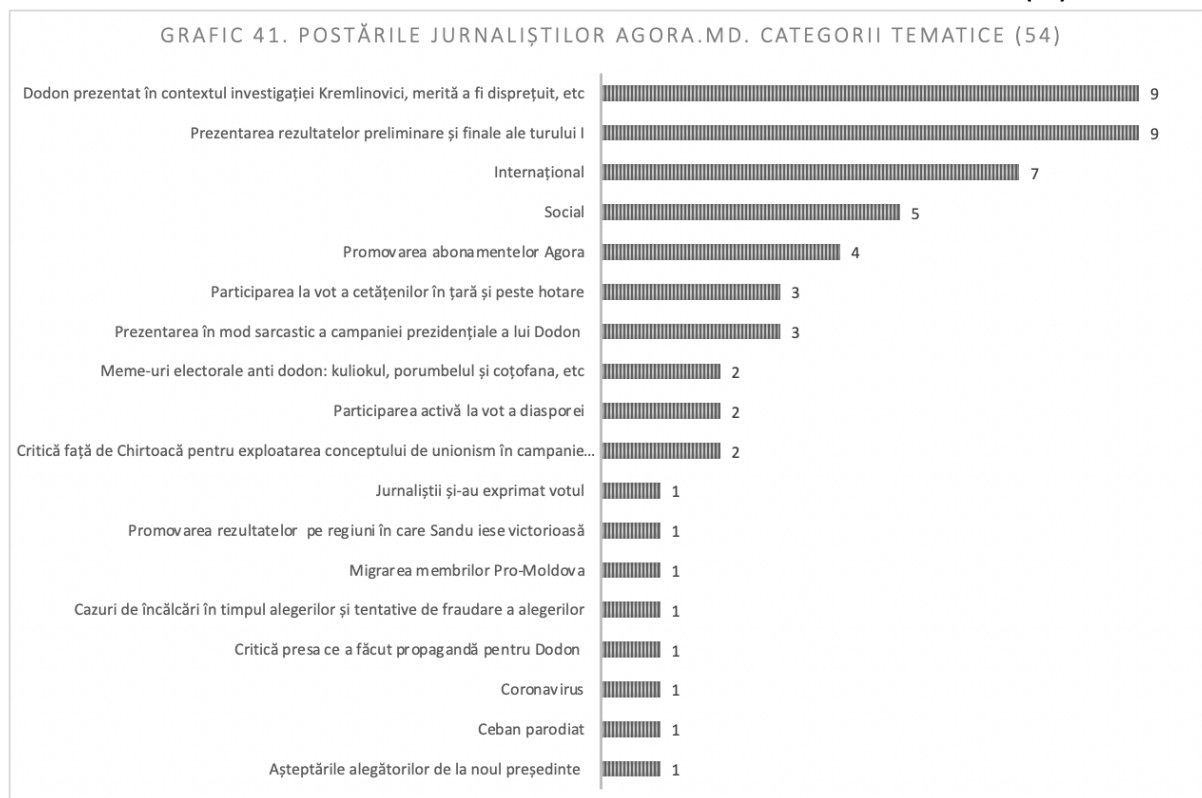
Of the 54 posts by journalists, 69% were relevant.

CHART 40. ELECTORAL NATURE IN 54 POSTS BY JOURNALISTS FROM AGORA



Agora journalists published posts on a large variety of topics (Chart 41); Igor Dodon was the subject of 9 mostly negative posts while Maia Sandu was targeted in 1 neutral one.

CHART 41. POSTS BY JOURNALISTS FROM AGORA.MD. THEMATIC CATEGORIES (54)



None of the Agora journalists monitored in this study urged citizens to vote for a specific presidential candidate; however, a negative attitude towards Igor Dodon could be perceived in some posts, namely in the sarcasm and irony in the political memes shared on their personal pages. Likewise, the promotion of results in which Maia Sandu won in certain regions of the country is indicative of the political preferences of some Agora journalists.

CONCLUSIONS

In the run-up to the election, non-compliance with Article 1.6 regarding political partisanship and propaganda for a candidate was a widespread practice on Facebook for media outlets that favored Igor Dodon. The large number of posts favorable to his candidacy and to the members of the Party of Socialists is the key indicator of a campaign to form a positive image of the candidate and to manipulate public opinion with the intention of attracting voters. This method was also used to denigrate and attack other electoral competitors.

Monitoring the social network pages of media outlets and journalists is useful for detecting political affiliations and electoral preferences as well as for observing the general trends and goals of the outlets around elections. Social networks are additional tools for amplifying messages that in most cases do not differ from those transmitted through other channels of communication with the public.

As there is currently no detailed guide in Moldova on the use of social networks by media professionals in the Journalist's Code of Ethics, phenomena such as archiving or deleting posts from the pages of media outlets will continue to make monitoring difficult.

In view of the above, the IJC recommends the following:

⇒ Make media outlets and journalists comply with ethical standards in the coverage of elections on social networks (Facebook), paying special attention to the provisions of the Moldovan Journalist's Code of Ethics.

⇒ Incorporate the use of social networks into the Journalist's Code of Ethics, taking into account the opportunities and dangers of the online environment.

⇒ Develop critical thinking among information consumers on social networks so they can distinguish manipulation and disinformation, including trolling.

⇒ Monitor the Facebook pages of media outlets and journalists in the context of events of major importance for the country's democratic process.