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Artificial Intelligence, Disinformation and Trust in Military Institutional Communication

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Abstract
The development of artificial intelligence has changed the way information is produced, distributed, and perceived in the public sphere. For public institutions, this transformation has presented a clear challenge: maintaining credibility in an environment where false content can be easily generated and disseminated. In this regard, this paper analyzes how Romania's Ministry of National Defense (MApN) addresses the topic of artificial intelligence in its discourse, from the perspective of managing credibility and institutional perception in a changing information environment. The study is based on a mix of qualitative methods, using both content analysis (to identify themes and communication patterns) and discourse analysis (to interpret how artificial intelligence is constructed and positioned in institutional discourse). The corpus consists of posts published by the Romanian Ministry of National Defense on Facebook and Instagram between May 2025 and May 2026. The results suggest that references to AI in the Ministry's communication appear within a predominantly defensive framework, with the institution using these references primarily to flag false content, but also to intervene in clarifying information in the public sphere.

Keywords: AI, institutional communication, military communication, social media

Introduction

In the age of digital communication, the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed the way information is generated, distributed, and consumed. This new technology has enabled the creation of a massive volume of content at an unprecedented speed, but it has also brought major challenges related to the phenomenon of deepfakes, which facilitate the spread of misinformation and make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between authentic and manipulated information. In a digital ecosystem marked by constant *information chaos*, institutional credibility and public trust are no longer merely matters of image, but important strategic resources in the communication process.

For military organizations, this new context has redefined the role of strategic communication. Thus, beyond the traditional function of informing, military institutions now also communicate to counter false narratives and strengthen society's resilience in the face of information threats. At the same time, artificial intelligence is not views solely as a source of risk, but also as a technology linked to institutional adaptation, innovation, and modernization. Consequently, military organizations must operate in a complex environment, where AI can be both an operational opportunity and an informational vulnerability.

The Ministry of National Defense (MApN), the institution responsible for coordinating Romania's national defense, must manage two simultaneous realities in this context: on the one hand, the risks that emerging technologies pose to the information environment, and, on the other hand, the increasingly rapid expansion of digital technologies as a means of modernizing the organization. Incorporating the topics into institutional communication thus plays a role in shaping the public's perception not only of artificial intelligence, but also of the extent to which the institution can adapt to changes in the technological and information spheres.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how the Romanian Ministry of National Defense incorporates topics related to artificial intelligence, disinformation, and synthetic content into its institutional discourse, as well as how these topics are connected to information security, institutional modernization, credibility, and public trust. More specifically, the study examines the communication patterns and dominant frames through which AI is presented in the Ministry's social media communication.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research question: *How is artificial intelligence represented in the institutional discourse of the Romanian Ministry of National Defense?* By addressing this question, the

analysis focuses on the meanings, roles, and communication functions attributed to AI within the Ministry's social media discourse.

The following sections first outline the study's theoretical framework, focusing on the impact of artificial intelligence on the information environment, synthetic disinformation and information disorder, institutional credibility and transparency in the digital age, and strategic communication in a military context. The paper then presents the methodological approach used to analyze the Romanian Ministry of National Defense's Facebook and Instagram communication. The results identify the main themes, patterns, and frames emerging from the corpus, while the discussion interprets these findings in relation to institutional communication, credibility, and the changing information environment.

Literature Review

The impact of Artificial Intelligence on the information environment

Artificial intelligence has emerged as a disruptive force in today's information ecosystem, enabling the production and distribution of vast amounts of content (Floridi, 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023). The ability to create, access, and verify information on a large scale has transformed the way information is produced and processed, with the digital environment evolving at a pace that exceeds human and institutional capacities for processing, verifying, and filtering.

Floridi (2013, 2014, 2023) offers an ethical and philosophical perspective on this transformation, exploring in his works the ethics of information, the infosphere, and artificial agency. From this perspective, AI can no longer be considered merely a technical tool, but rather part of the transformation of the information environment in which individuals and institutions operate. Applying this framework to the context of contemporary communication highlights the need to develop new standards of accountability, transparency, and verification, given that automation can amplify the speed and volume of information distribution.

A central component of this transformation is generative artificial intelligence. Dwivedi et al. (2023) explore the implications of generative conversational models (such as ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini) for research, practice, and public policy. The authors identify opportunities related to efficiency, accessibility, and the automation of communication, but they also note risks related to the accuracy of results, bias, transparency, misinformation, and the responsible use of automatically generated content. Given their potential to rapidly produce very large amounts of content at low cost, these risks can reach a systemic scale and make it difficult to distinguish authentic information from synthetic information.

To understand the systemic components of this phenomenon, it is important to consider perspectives that go beyond the technical realm. In this regard, Harari (2023, 2024) argues that artificial intelligence differs from previous information technologies in that it is capable of creating content, participating in decision-making, and influencing the networks through which societies generate and distribute information. The author uses the metaphor of language as civilization's operating system and argues that systems capable of generating and manipulating language can also shape culture, social relations, and the functioning of institutions. The role that artificial intelligence plays in the production of narratives can affect the mechanisms through which public trust and social consensus are built.

Furthermore, Bostrom (2014) explores the systemic risks of developing advanced artificial intelligence, as well as the ability of institutions to control systems that exceed human capabilities. His scenarios regarding the rapid evolution of such systems suggest that current governance and coordination mechanisms may become insufficient. Similarly, Miotti and Wasil (2024) emphasize that the rapid deployment of generative AI outpaces traditional regulatory frameworks across the technological supply chain, while Byman et al. (2023) observe that the accelerating sophistication and accessibility of synthetic media continuously outstrip existing state oversight mechanisms. From this perspective, the rapid development of artificial intelligence systems may create a gap between the capabilities of AI systems and the ability of institutions to regulate and control them.

From Steger's (2023) perspective, which emphasizes that globalization actually refers to the increase in transnational interconnections and flows, artificial intelligence can be interpreted as a multiplier of information circulation. Digital content can cross national borders almost instantly, and manipulative narratives can be easily adapted and distributed to different audiences. Under these circumstances, we are now facing disinformation as a cross-border problem that can no longer be managed through national mechanisms.

In military institutional communication, the impact of artificial intelligence on the information environment has multiple implications. On the one hand, the distribution of synthetic content and deepfakes amplifies information chaos and undermines public trust in democracy and national security (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Chesney & Citron, 2019). Defense institutions are thus constantly faced with the obligation to verify information, but above all, to combat manipulative narratives. On the other hand, from the perspective of strategic communication, military institutions deliberately use communication to build legitimacy and influence public

perception (Hallahan et al., 2007; Farwell, 2012). Applied to the current context, this framework allows for the interpretation of communication regarding AI as a means of projecting competence, modernization, and organizational adaptation to the present. However, the concrete link between the use of artificial intelligence, institutional modernization, and alignment with NATO standards must be demonstrated through an analysis of official communications from defense institutions or through NATO materials dedicated to digital transformation. The information environment transformed by artificial intelligence thus becomes, for military institutions, not only a arena for confronting manipulation and synthetic content, but also a space in which they can demonstrate their adaptability, professionalism, and capacity for innovation.

Synthetic disinformation and the phenomenon of information disorder

Technological advances have led to a transition from traditional forms of public opinion manipulation to complex forms of synthetic disinformation, produced or amplified using artificial intelligence systems. The ability of these systems to generate text, images, audio, and video with a high degree of realism opens up new opportunities for the production and distribution of manipulated content. While communication and media paradigms have historically adapted to successive technological waves (Jin, 2025), this phenomenon can no longer be viewed merely as a communication issue, nor is it limited to a specific communication problem; rather, it undermines public trust, the strength of institutions, and the functioning of democratic processes.

Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) provide a fundamental framework for analyzing this issue, using the concept of *informational disorder* to describe the complexity of pollution in the information ecosystem. The authors distinguish three main categories of information: disinformation, which is false information intentionally generated and published to cause harm; misinformation, which is false information distributed without the intent to cause harm; and malinformation, which is information based on reality but deliberately used to cause harm. In the context of generative artificial intelligence, such categories can be more difficult to define in practice because the same content can be produced, modified, repurposed, and reinterpreted by different actors for different purposes.

A central element of this ecosystem is the proliferation of synthetic content and deepfakes. Chesney and Citron (2019) discuss the dangers that manipulated audio and video materials pose to privacy, democracy, and national security. In their view, deepfakes can undermine trust in audiovisual evidence and manipulate public debates, electoral processes,

and international relations. At the same time, they define the phenomenon of the *liar's dividend,* whereby a person can dismiss an authentic recording as fake, taking advantage of the uncertainty created by the existence of deepfake technology. Thus, the danger arises not only when fakes are accepted as real, but also when authentic evidence is dismissed as fabricated.

To understand the epistemic dimension of this crisis, McIntyre (2018) makes a significant contribution regarding the phenomenon of post-truth. The author shows that post-truth does not imply the absence of truth, but rather the erosion of objective facts in public opinion, in a context where emotions, group identity, and ideological orientation come to carry more weight than plausible, verifiable evidence. In such a climate, disinformation not only affects the perception of events but also undermines the public's confidence in the possibility of a shared reality.

A complementary perspective is offered by Schick (2020), who uses the term *infocalypse* to describe the crisis of authenticity caused by the proliferation of false and manipulated content. In this situation, the public can no longer distinguish between what is real and what is fake, and this distrust extends even to genuine information. Synthetic content not only gives rise to fake news but also creates a general atmosphere of informational uncertainty.

From the perspective of network dynamics, Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) observed that false information analyzed on Twitter spread more rapidly and more widely than true information. The authors attributed this difference to the novelty of the false information and the emotional reactions it elicits. The results indicate that the spread of false information is not driven exclusively by automation or bot activity, but also reflects user behavior, as users tend to share information they find surprising or unusual. Aral (2020) uses these mechanisms as part of a broader picture of digital platforms and algorithmic systems that shape the visibility and distribution of information.

Paris and Donovan (2019) discuss deepfakes and simple audiovisual manipulation, which they call *cheap fakes*, from the perspectives of power, technology, and the status of evidence. The authors show that audio and video manipulations can blur the line between expression and evidence and can be used to undermine the credibility of individuals, events, or institutions. The problem, in this case, is no longer represented exclusively by technological sophistication, since even simple techniques of editing, recontextualizing, or slowing down images can produce significant political and social effects.

Finally, Castells's (2009) perspective on the power of communication provides a framework for understanding the institutional impact of synthetic disinformation. In a networked society, power is generated by actors who create meaning, construct interpretive frameworks, and shape the way people perceive reality. For today's information ecosystem, this perspective suggests that there is a need for the ongoing development of institutional mechanisms for resilience, authentication, and rapid response.

Institutional credibility and transparency in the digital age

In an information environment where we are witnessing the proliferation of synthetic content and the challenge of verifying the authenticity of information, credibility and public trust are essential. For public organizations, discursive authority is based on the ability to communicate accurate, coherent, and verifiable information, and to demonstrate that all actions are grounded in competence, integrity, and accountability. Transparency is key to this process, but it does not come automatically; the quality of information and the way it is perceived and evaluated by the public have an impact on it.

Rawlins (2008) provides an important theoretical framework regarding the relationship between transparency and trust. She defines transparency as a characteristic of organizations viewed from the perspective of stakeholders and associates it with the provision of substantive information, stakeholder participation, and the organization's assumption of responsibility. In this sense, transparency is no longer merely the formal publication of data or compliance with legal standards, but rather involves a relational process through which stakeholders can obtain information, ask questions, and assess the organization's behavior. In the digital environment, such an approach becomes imperative, as the mere availability of information does not guarantee public understanding or trust. Published data must be relevant, verifiable, and clear enough to allow for the evaluation of institutional decisions and actions. Transparency can also be a way to build credibility through consistent methods of information sharing, engagement, and accountability - not just through occasional communications or the publication of large amounts of data.

The relationship between transparency and the perception of government institutions was analyzed by Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2014), who studied how transparency affects the credibility of a public entity and showed that this relationship is neither linear nor universally positive. They argue that how citizens evaluate an institution is influenced by their general trust in the government and their prior understanding of the issue being communicated. Transparency can improve perceptions of

the institution, but it can also confirm or amplify negative perceptions when the information presented indicates poor performance. This finding suggests that institutional transparency should not be based on the idea of building artificial trust but, rather, on creating the conditions under which the public can make informed assessments. Justified trust does not result from the quantity of information published, but from its quality, the consistency of institutional behavior, and the ability to verify official statements.

Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) adopt this perspective and define organizational transparency through three dimensions: information disclosure, clarity, and accuracy. Disclosure refers to the availability of information relevant to stakeholders, the clarity, intelligibility, and accessibility of messages, while accuracy pertains to the correctness and reliability of the information shared. Together, these dimensions support the perception that the organization is transparent and can be seen as a mechanism for building trust between the public and the institution. The sociological dimension of trust is highlighted by Fukuyama (1995), who describes it as consistent, honest, and cooperative behavior based on shared norms. Trust fosters social capital and collaboration among people toward a common cause. With regard to the relationship between citizens and institutions, this perspective suggests that low levels of trust can hinder cooperation and the acceptance of collective actions, particularly in situations characterized by risk and uncertainty.

O'Neill (2002) articulates a key distinction between trust and trustworthiness. The author emphasizes that the primary goal of institutions should not be to earn the public's trust but, rather, to demonstrate that they deserve that trust. At the same time, simply increasing the volume of information and transparency mechanisms does not guarantee a strengthening of trust. When there is too much information, too little context, or no way to locate and evaluate the source, it is harder to distinguish between authentic statements and misleading messages.

From this perspective, transparency must provide the public with the means to evaluate the content of the communication and the competence, integrity, and accountability of those who communicate. A trustworthy institution is not one that publishes any information, but one that communicates relevant and verifiable data, explains limitations and uncertainties, and allows for a critical evaluation of its own actions.

The literature on organizational legitimacy provides a complementary framework. Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that an entity's actions are desirable, correct, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms,

values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Thus, legitimacy refers not only to an organization's objective performance but also to the extent to which its behavior aligns with the public's expectations regarding the social environment in which it operates. In the context of digital transformation, Suchman's theory allows for the interpretation of communication regarding the adoption of emerging technologies as a potential strategy for legitimization. Demonstrating technological competence may indicate that the institution is prepared to adapt, address new risks, and operate in accordance with current professional standards. However, the symbolic promotion of innovation is not enough. Modern technology must be supported by results, ethical guidelines, accountability, and verifiable practices to build legitimacy within the industry.

Institutional credibility in the digital age is therefore no longer built solely by conveying persuasive messages or publishing a large volume of information. The alignment between discourse and conduct, the quality and verifiability of information, and the acknowledgment of limitations must be balanced by the institution to demonstrate that it uses new technologies in a competent and responsible manner. Transparency is no longer merely an administrative procedure, but a mechanism through which the public can gauge the institution's resilience, integrity, and trustworthiness.

Strategic Communication in a Military Context

In the field of defense, communication can no longer be treated solely as an administrative function or a public relations activity. It is a key element of how the military carries out its missions, makes decisions, lends legitimacy to the information it conveys, and shapes the information it provides. From a sociological perspective, the evolution of strategic communication responds to the dynamics of late modernity, a period marked by rapid transformation, social complexity, and systemic risk (Ihlen et al., 2026). Within these unpredictable conditions, strategic communication serves as an institutional framework designed to mitigate uncertainty, establish legitimacy, and sustain public confidence, a capability that becomes critical in the context of hybrid conflicts and the ongoing competition to shape perceptions.

Hallahan et al. (2007) define strategic communication as "an organization's intentional use of communication to fulfill its mission" (Hallahan, 2007, p. 3), playing a critical role through the planning and adaptation of messages to the context and needs of the audience. The authors offer an integrative approach that incorporates management, public relations, marketing, political communication, and informational campaigns. From this perspective, the strategic nature of communication

stems not only from the planned transmission of messages but also from the integration of communication into the processes through which the organization pursues its objectives. This approach is applicable to the military domain and involves coordinating the actions of institutions, as well as the messages and images presented to the target audience. According to the NATO framework, strategic communication involves activities and capabilities that are synchronized and implemented in accordance with the Alliance's policies, operations, and objectives. In Allied military doctrine, actions, images, and words are coordinated to construct a coherent narrative and produce the desired effect in the cognitive aspect of the operational environment.

The link between persuasion and power is analyzed by Farwell (2012), who defines strategic communication as "the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to influence the attitudes and opinions of the target audience, with a view to shaping its behavior, in order to promote certain interests or policies or to achieve certain objectives" (Farwell, 2012, pp. xvii–xix). The author provides numerous examples of conflicts, political events, and diplomatic incidents to illustrate the role of communication in shaping interpretations and guiding behavior. Applied to the military context, this view of communication can be understood as a means by which institutions seek to influence perceptions of threats, operations, values, and their own objectives.

However, strategic communication cannot be reduced to persuasion or the production of favorable messages. Credibility is based on consistency between words and actions, on the institution's actual behavior, and on its ability to provide verifiable information. A narrative that is not supported by conduct, results, and evidence can have the opposite effect of what is intended, undermining the organization's trust and legitimacy.

To understand non-coercive influence, it is important to consider the concept of *soft power* developed by Nye (2004). This refers to the ability of certain actors to achieve results through attraction and persuasion, rather than through coercion or payment. Soft power is based on the values, culture, and policies that we all perceive as legitimate and credible. Although Nye's theory is formulated primarily at the level of states and international relations, it can also be applied to institutional communication in the defense sector. From this perspective, legitimacy, shared values, professionalism, and the credibility of behavior can contribute to public support for military institutions and to the strengthening of relations with external partners. However, in today networked information environment, traditional soft power is increasingly transformed info narrative power, where non-coercive influence relies on active strategic communication

rather than passive value projection (Saliu, 2025). Non-coercive influence does not stem solely from promoting a positive image, but rather from the alignment between the messages communicated and the organization's actual practices. Communication can highlight these sources of legitimacy, but it cannot replace them.

A classic perspective on the role of communication is offered by Lasswell (1948), who identifies the monitoring of the environment, the coordination of societal components in response to environmental changes, and the transmission of social heritage. In the context of contemporary military communication, this framework allows us to explore how institutions monitor the information environment, interpret threats, and convey to the public the information relevant to understanding and managing them. In the current security context, this function can be associated with the development of societal resilience. Bourbeau (2013) presents a framework for understanding resilience as a means of managing and adapting to threats and securitization processes. In the information age, resilience can represent the capacity of institutions and society itself to detect, assess, and limit the impact of manipulation and disinformation. However, this application goes beyond Bourbeau's original framework and must be supplemented with contemporary scholarship on informational resilience and NATO policies on disinformation.

Institutional communication can contribute to resilience by providing immediate and verified information, explaining the context, correcting false claims, and helping the public develop the ability to evaluate sources. The goal is not to completely control the public's interpretation, but to reduce informational vulnerabilities and enable evaluation based on verifiable information. In this regard, the agenda-setting theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), is also relevant. The authors show that the media visibility of certain topics has an impact on the importance people attribute to them. When applied to institutional communication, the theory suggests that promoting topics such as military preparedness, technological advancement, international cooperation, or resilience could help increase the visibility of these topics in public debate.

However, institutions do not directly control the public agenda. The effects of communication depend on how messages are taken up, reinterpreted, and redistributed by the media, digital platforms, opinion leaders, and the public. Active communication can fill the information gaps that fuel speculation and manipulation, but simply publishing institutional messages does not eliminate hostile narratives.

Based on these perspectives, we can evaluate strategic military communication through two complementary functions. The first is the

defensive function, which aims to protect the information environment by identifying and countering manipulative narratives and providing verified information that also supports public resilience. The second function is the projection of legitimacy, through which the institution communicates its professionalism, adaptability, values, and adherence to established standards. In the case of the second function, communication about innovation and technological competence can contribute to the perception of the institution as modern and prepared to face today's threats. However, this projection can be legitimate only if it is based on actual capabilities, responsible practices, and verifiable results. Alignment with NATO standards must be demonstrated through official documents, policies, exercises, and concrete institutional practices, not merely through general statements about modernization.

In an environment marked by the development of artificial intelligence, synthetic content, and information chaos, the effectiveness of military communication is reflected precisely in the integration of these elements into the strategic process, in the coherence between discourse and action, and in the maintenance of institutional credibility. Trust and transparency alone do not guarantee the success of military communication, but they can be important prerequisites for legitimacy, public cooperation, and informational resilience.

Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how the Romanian Ministry of National Defense (MApN) incorporates topics related to artificial intelligence, disinformation, and synthetic content into its discourse, as well as how these are linked to information security, institutional modernization, credibility, and public trust. In particular, the analysis seeks to determine whether AI is predominantly portrayed as an information risk (associated with disinformation, deepfakes, and manipulative content) or as an opportunity for modernization, innovation, and the development of institutional capabilities.

The research corpus comprises 2,160 posts published on the official accounts of the Ministry of National Defense, of which 1,639 came from Facebook and 467 from Instagram. The data were collected using the Socialinsider platform and covered the period from April 2025 to April 2026.

The selection of posts relevant to the research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the corpus was automatically filtered using key terms in Romanian and English. Thus, posts containing words such as "AI", "IA", "artificial intelligence", "deepfake", "disinformation", "fake image", and

other semantically related terms were retained. In the second stage, the filtering results were manually verified. Each post was analyzed to determine whether artificial intelligence, disinformation, or synthetic content were the central themes of the message; the final corpus of the study included only those posts that explicitly addressed the use of AI, the risks associated with it, combating information manipulation, or the integration of emerging technologies into the institution's activities.

From a methodological standpoint, the study employs a qualitative approach based on content and discourse analysis. Content analysis was used to identify themes, communication patterns, and key functions attributed to artificial intelligence. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, allowed for an examination of how AI is symbolically constructed and integrated into institutional discourse on security, defense, modernization, and informational resilience. By integrating these two types of analysis, the research aimed not only to determine what the Ministry of National Defense communicates about artificial intelligence, but also how it constructs the meanings of its messages. In this way, the methodological design allowed for an examination of how the institution seeks to simultaneously manage the information risks generated by new technologies and the opportunities for modernization that they offer.

Results

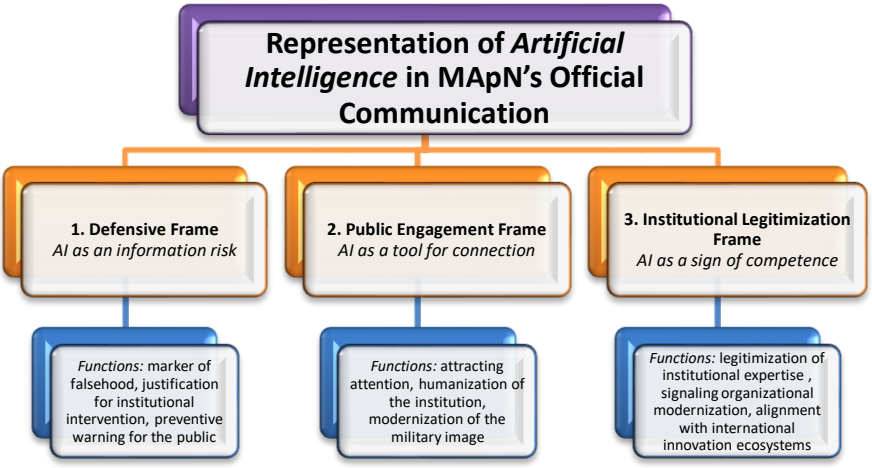


Fig. 1: Representation of Artificial Intelligence in MApN's Official Communication
Source: Author's own elaboration

Defensive Frame: AI as an information risk

The first framework (fig.1) identified in the Ministry of National Defense's communication is *the defensive framework*, where artificial intelligence is presented primarily as a risk to the integrity of the information environment. AI is associated with disinformation, image manipulation, and the production of synthetic content, which are specifically mentioned in posts aimed at debunking, clarifying, and issuing public warnings. This portrayal can be viewed through the lens of the *information disorder* phenomenon developed by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), which, even though it was developed before the emergence of generative AI, provides an important framework for understanding how information taken out of context affects the information environment. Synthetic content in the Ministry of National Defense's discourse is presented as a source of confusion and can affect public perception and trust in official information.

AI is used, first and foremost, as a marker of falsity (fig.2). AI, or digital manipulation, is used to explain the origin of questionable images and information, but also to distinguish authentic information from false information. Second, AI serves as a justification for institutional intervention. The existence of synthetic content provides the Ministry of National Defense (MApN) with the opportunity to assume the role of an authorized source for verifying and clarifying information about defense and security. Through these interventions, the institution aims to bridge the gap between official information and unverified content circulating in the digital environment. Last but not least, the IA serves a preventive function. The analyzed messages warn users about the dangers of manipulation and urge them to verify sources, avoid sharing unverified material, and consult official channels. The public is thus encouraged to actively participate in protecting the information space.



Fig. 2: Examples of AI as a Marker of Falsehood in MApN's Official Communication **Source:** MApN official Facebook page, accessed May 21, 2026.

This aspect is closely related to the risks analyzed by Chesney and Citron (2019), who show that deepfakes can undermine trust in audiovisual evidence. The threat stems not only from accepting a fake as true, but also from rejecting authentic material as false. In this context, the Ministry of National Defense positions itself as the guarantor of the authenticity of defense-related information.

From a strategic communication perspective, these posts can be viewed as intentional uses of communication to support the institution's mission and influence how the public perceives information (Hallahan et al., 2007; Farwell, 2012). Through clarifications and warnings, the Ministry of National Defense aims to limit the effects of manipulative narratives and strengthen its institutional credibility.

Public Engagement Frame: IA as a tool for connection

The second framework is that of *public engagement*, where AI and digital technologies are associated with modernizing communication and fostering a symbolic connection between the military institution and citizens. Unlike the defensive framework, technology is not presented here as a threat, but as a resource through which institutional messages become more appealing, more accessible, and more in line with the language of digital platforms.

In these posts, AI does not always appear explicitly but may be implied through references to drones, software, digital systems, simulations, and other advanced technologies. These elements are included to help create the image of a modern military, where military activity is associated with innovation, automation, and digital skills. However, it is important not to automatically confuse digital technology in the broad sense with AI, since not all drones, programs, or automated systems use AI.

The primary function of this framework is to attract attention. High-tech images and references to innovation are used to increase the visibility of posts and public interest. Especially on Facebook and Instagram, these images can transform institutional messages into more appealing and easily shareable content. The second function is to humanize the institution and make it more accessible (fig.3). Through interactive, less formal visuals and themes familiar to the digital audience, the Ministry of National Defense partially bridges the symbolic gap between citizens and the institution. Technology thus becomes a point of connection, especially with younger audiences, who are familiar with AI, drones, video games, and digital culture. Consequently, this function is particularly evident in recruitment-oriented posts, where the image of the military profession is expanded beyond traditional representations centered on discipline and physical training. The third function is to modernize the military's image. By

integrating technology into its communications, the Ministry of National Defense (MApN) positions itself as an institution adapted to contemporary changes and capable of responding to new threats. AI and digital technologies thus become symbols of professionalism, innovation, and organizational adaptability.



Fig. 3: Fig. 7 – Examples of AI-Inspired Recruitment Content in MApN's Official Communication
Source: MApN official Facebook page, accessed May 21, 2026.

Dwivedi et al. (2023) provide a general framework for understanding how generative AI is transforming communication practices and creating new forms of interaction. As applied to the Ministry of National Defense's posts, this perspective highlights the use of technology to increase visibility and public engagement.

Institutional Legitimacy Frame: IA as a sign of competence

The third framework identified in the Ministry of National Defense's communication is that of *institutional legitimacy*, in which artificial intelligence is presented as evidence of the organization's competence and modernization. In these posts, AI is associated with optimizing communication processes, supporting decision-making, and developing solutions for a modern defense.

The primary function of this framework is to legitimize institutional expertise. The Ministry of National Defense asserts that it has personnel and structures capable of understanding and utilizing new technologies. Technical competence thus becomes a source of authority and credibility. The second function is to signal organizational modernization. AI is used as a symbol of adaptation to new security conditions and of the transition toward a more efficient and technologically advanced institution. However, this image is valid only if the Ministry of National Defense delivers concrete

projects and results, since merely mentioning technology does not automatically demonstrate modernization. The third function is alignment with international innovation ecosystems. The Ministry of National Defense's participation in initiatives such as NATO DIANA establishes a connection with the Alliance's technological and strategic standards. This membership serves as a form of external validation and reinforces the institution's image as an actor connected to Western trends in defense modernization.

In this context, AI is not presented as a risk, but is viewed as a strategic resource and a symbol of professionalism. Communication about technology thus helps to portray a solid, modern institution that is prepared to respond to current security challenges.

Discussion

The analysis shows that the Ministry of National Defense frames the discourse on artificial intelligence (AI) around two main themes: on the one hand, as a source of risk to the information environment, and on the other hand, as a tool for institutional and military modernization. However, even though at first glance we might note a lack of coherence in the institution's communication, such a contradiction actually reflects the way in which military discourse adapts to a digital environment where technology can simultaneously generate vulnerabilities and opportunities. Communication regarding AI is thus part of a broader process aimed at protecting institutional credibility, maintaining public trust, and projecting an image of an organization capable of responding to technological changes.

The most obvious finding is the predominance of the defensive framework. In this type of discourse, AI is associated primarily with disinformation, digital manipulation, synthetic content, and deepfake materials. The observations of Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), as well as those of Chesney and Citron (2019), are thus confirmed: technologies that can produce images, audio, or video that are difficult to distinguish from authentic content amplify the phenomenon of information disorder, which can have direct consequences for public security and trust, especially when it comes to the military. When the institution detects images, videos, or messages that are manipulated through technology, it intervenes with debunking posts. The goal is not only to correct a specific piece of information but, above all, to reinforce the institution's position as an official and credible source of information. From this perspective, the results are consistent with the literature on strategic communication,

which emphasizes the role of institutional discourse in countering false narratives, protecting the public, and strengthening institutional resilience (Hallahan et al., 2007; Farwell, 2012).

However, the Ministry of National Defense's discourse on AI is not limited to the defensive aspect. The analysis also highlights a framework for public engagement, in which technology serves to make communication more appealing and more accessible to the public. To increase the visibility of messages and encourage user interaction, the communications on the two platforms analyzed incorporate images associated with drones, digital systems, software, automation, and other emerging technologies. This trend can be interpreted in light of the transformations that digitization is bringing to institutional communication. According to Floridi (2023) and Dwivedi et al. (2023), the development of AI is changing both how organizations interact with their audiences and how the content that reaches the public is produced. In the case of the Ministry of National Defense (MApN), the technological elements used in communication help shape a more dynamic image of the institution and facilitate a symbolic connection with certain audience segments (namely, young audiences and those interested in technology, military careers, or innovation).

Last but not least, the framework for institutional legitimacy constitutes a third important outcome. In messages in this category, AI no longer appears as a threat, but rather as a technology linked to operational efficiency, decision support, interoperability, and defense modernization. The Ministry of National Defense (MApN) presents itself as a technologically competent institution attuned to contemporary security and defense transformations; its communications include posts highlighting participation in technological projects, exercises, international initiatives, and innovation ecosystems. The academic literature on transparency and organizational trust offers a clear explanation for this dimension. Rawlins (2008), Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2014), along with Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016), show that perceptions of competence, transparency, and reliability strengthen trust in organizations. From this perspective, the presentation of emerging technologies and the Ministry of National Defense's participation in international initiatives (such as NATO DIANA) also serves a symbolic function: the public learns that the institution is keeping pace with technological developments and seeking to adapt to them. Technology thus acquires not only an operational role but also the status of a resource for institutional legitimacy.

Taken together, the three identified frameworks indicate the existence of a hybrid discursive strategy. AI is simultaneously constructed as a threat, a communication tool, and a resource for modernization. This ambivalence is relevant because it reflects the broader position of public institutions in a context marked by the rapid development of digital technologies and the difficulty of adapting traditional governance mechanisms to such transformations. Bostrom (2014), Harari (2024), and Steger (2023) highlight, from different perspectives, the pressure that technological development and progress place on society, institutions, and information management mechanisms. In the case of the Ministry of National Defense (MApN), these changes are addressed discursively without taking an exclusively favorable or critical stance toward AI. Rather, the institution adapts the meaning of the technology according to the context of communication. When AI is linked to the manipulation of information, the discourse becomes defensive and aims to protect credibility; when the technology is linked to digital communication and interaction with the public, it becomes a tool for engagement; and in the context of military modernization, AI is presented as evidence of institutional competence and adaptability.

Conclusions

This study highlights the complex and multidimensional nature of the representation of artificial intelligence in the institutional discourse of the Ministry of National Defense on the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. AI is integrated into a discourse that oscillates between the need to manage information risks and the projection of a modern, competent, and innovation-oriented institutional image.

The results indicate that AI is predominantly portrayed within a defensive framework, being associated with disinformation, synthetic content, and the manipulation of information. References to AI have become markers of information risks and justify the institution's intervention in the public sphere by clarifying disputed information, distinguishing authentic content from fabricated content, and reaffirming that the Ministry of National Defense is, in fact, the official source.

At the same time, the analysis highlights the existence of frameworks focused on public engagement and institutional legitimacy. AI and digital technologies are used as examples of professional competencies, organizational modernization, and connection to global innovation ecosystems, such as NATO. Technology is no longer viewed as a threat to the institution, but rather as a resource through which the institution updates

its image and seeks to establish a closer relationship with the younger audience.

Overall, the Ministry of National Defense's discourse constructs a dual representation of artificial intelligence. On the one hand, it is associated with the risk of information disorder and the need to strengthen public resilience, in line with the perspectives outlined by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017). On the other hand, however, AI is presented as a sign of competence and modernization, contributing to the projection of institutional credibility and legitimacy, in line with the perspectives on transparency and trust developed by Rawlins (2008) and Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016).

Limitations and future research directions

Despite the results obtained, this study has a number of limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the findings. A primary limitation relates to the selective nature of the corpus, as the research focused solely on Facebook and Instagram, without including other digital communication platforms where institutional discourse might exhibit different nuances. Furthermore, the process of identifying posts relied on keyword filtering, which may have omitted subtle or implicit references to AI technology that do not use the standard terminology identified.

Another significant limitation is the qualitative and interpretive nature of the analysis, which, while providing a systematic view of discursive patterns, involves a certain degree of subjectivity in the coding of themes. At the same time, the study does not include a systematic analysis of how the public perceives these messages, thus lacking concrete data on the actual impact of these strategies on citizens' level of trust.

Future research could address these gaps by integrating quantitative methods for analyzing user sentiment or by expanding the corpus to include video-based platforms (such as TikTok or YouTube), in order to capture the dynamic evolution of AI representations in digital military communication.

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