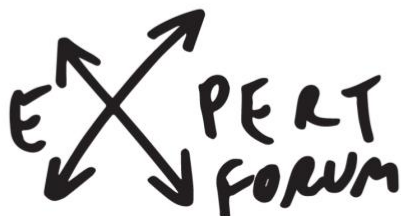




Elections

What happened online, and how can similar disruptions be prevented in the future?



Elections: What happened online, and how can similar disruptions be prevented in the future?

One of the critical questions surrounding Romania's political, social, and democratic crisis is: what happened on TikTok? Why is it impossible to conduct thorough research, and how we could use the [retention order issued by the European Commission](#) requiring TikTok to preserve data related to the Romanian elections?

To address this, we must consider multiple perspectives, beginning with the current challenges researchers face in accessing social media data and the role of regulators, such as the European Commission and national Digital Services Coordinators (DSCs), in enforcing the Digital Services Act (DSA). This section is an attempt to shed some light into this complicated situation. In brief, this is what we advocate for and why:

- Enhanced transparency in data access: platforms must provide comprehensive access to data through APIs and other tools. Scrapeable information should be made systematically available to researchers.
- Transparent political content moderation: TikTok's lack of transparency is particularly concerning. Its Ad Library is dysfunctional, with no clear verification of advertiser identities or spending. This opacity undermines accountability.
- Independent advisory boards for DSCs: national DSCs tasked with implementing the DSA should include advisory boards comprising civil society organizations (CSOs) and private sector experts. These boards would regularly engage with authorities to build capacity in digital regulation, disinformation monitoring, and related fields.
- Public access to retained data: [TikTok must make publicly available the data retained under the EU Commission's order](#). This should cover not only the post-election period but ideally all of November 2024, if not the entire year.
- Exploratory research beyond APIs: while APIs provide valuable data, they are insufficient for understanding how algorithms influence user experiences and amplify content. Exploratory research into recommender systems, such as [TikTok's "heating system,"](#) where employees manually boost content virality, is crucial for identifying potential manipulation and the mechanisms driving engagement.

1.1. What is the future of platforms providing public data access for monitoring and researching information threats?

Romania stands at a critical juncture, grappling with one of the most challenging moments in its recent history. The annulment of the November 2024 elections, following allegations of Russian interference through massive campaign manipulation, has underscored the urgent need to understand, map, and collect evidence of systemic risks that threaten our democracy. This crisis has exposed the vulnerabilities of our electoral

processes and highlighted the critical role of social media platforms in shaping public discourse and political outcomes.

In this context, access to data for researchers is paramount. Civil society has been the sole provider at this point to evidence and investigations into the Romanian situations, yet access is very much under threat. [Article 40 of the Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#) requires VLOPs/VLOSEs to provide academic and civil society researchers with data; the Delegated Act will establish a framework hopefully in mid-2025 for researchers to gain access to platform data to study systemic risks in the European Union.

However, the current approach is slow and inadequate for the urgent needs of countries like Romania, which are facing immediate threats to democratic integrity. **The process of granting researchers – both academic and civil society – access to social media data to investigate and mitigate systemic risks, particularly in light of the November 2024 crisis, should be accelerated.**

In addition, all data currently available through scraping should also be accessible to researchers via dedicated tools provided by platforms, such as Meta's Content Library. Experience has shown that APIs offered by platforms often provide significantly less data than what can be obtained through public scraping. This creates unnecessary barriers to understanding and mitigating risks. Platforms like Meta (Facebook, Instagram, Threads) and TikTok, which play the most significant role in Romania's information ecosystem, must do more to ensure that researchers have meaningful access to the data they need to investigate manipulation, disinformation, and influence operations.

Article 40.12 of DSA requires platforms to provide researchers with access to data that is publicly available through their interfaces, while Article 39 mandates the maintenance of a public repository of advertisements. Yet, platforms have been slow to comply fully with these provisions. The [forthcoming Delegated Act](#), expected to be adopted in mid-2025, aims to regulate access to non-public data for vetted researchers across the EU. However, **Romania's situation necessitates a more rapid response**, particularly regarding access to public data.

Current APIs fall short of addressing the scale and complexity of systemic risks. They offer a limited range of variables and lack comprehensive metadata, posing significant challenges for researchers. Platforms must ensure that all data accessible through scraping is equally available via APIs and that data schemas, as well as content removal processes, are thoroughly documented. Furthermore, the Delegated Act should explicitly clarify that scraping public data is compliant with Article 40.12, resolving legal ambiguities around this vital research practice.

More than that, Romania's experience underscores the need for experimentation and innovation in data access particularly in how we audit recommender systems like TikTok's. Platforms should provide both regular and stream APIs, support data donations, and allow exploratory research. Automated user accounts and sandboxes for

studying algorithms, must also be facilitated.

1.2. Vetting Researchers: A Proposal for Independent Advisory Boards to the DSCs

The collaboration with civil society must also be strengthened. We propose the establishment of an independent advisory mechanism for the Romanian DSC and others across the EU. This body would facilitate the development of common vetting standards, support Digital Services Coordinators (DSCs) in vetting processes and serve as a forum for exchange. Additionally, member states must equip their DSCs with robust research and data science capabilities to conduct analyses and support researchers.

Romanian elections will be preceded by federal elections in Germany in February and followed by the presidential elections in Poland (May 2025) and the parliamentary elections in Republic of Moldova (probably September 2025). All these events have the potential to fuel and amplify anti-EU and anti-NATO disinformation, which could also influence elections in Romania. Moreover, in the case of Moldova, this disinformation may target the Romanian-speaking public and Romanian citizens with the right to vote in the diaspora.

In the short term, the Romanian presidential elections in 2025 will be a test major test for managing the challenges of digital information. We can expect similar or amplified phenomena compared to electoral cycles previous electoral cycles, due to the rapid evolution of digital technologies and strategies information manipulation strategies. In this respect, it is essential to:

- speed up the evaluation process for researchers;
- accelerate the designation of accredited researchers by large platforms;
- ensure that a significant number are operational before elections.

Access to meaningful quantitative and qualitative data remains a significant vulnerability. A clear example is the current situation with TikTok, which fails to provide researchers with relevant and accessible data through its available API. This lack of adequate access undermines the ability to analyze systemic risks, such as the spread of disinformation or the manipulation of public discourse, and highlights the urgent need for improved transparency and data-sharing mechanisms.

An Advisory Board is needed for the implementation of DSA in Romania. The operationalization of an advisory board composed of independent experts from the media, the market, and relevant civil society organizations. The Advisory Council is not designed as a representative or political body, unlike, for example, the media councils of the media authorities regional media councils (which function as an honorary control body and should represent society at large), or the existing advisory council of the ANCOM. The tasks of the Advisory Council should be around advising the DSC in the implementation, proposing recommendations for "effective and coherent implementation"

of DSA, raise digital issues with the DSC and other authorities, including forwarding them in a coordinated way to the board.

The Romanian crisis highlights the dangers of delayed action. TikTok and Meta, as the two most influential platforms in our case, must prioritize transparency and compliance with data access requirements. For instance, TikTok must preserve internal documents and information about its recommender systems and coordinate manipulation risks, as ordered by the European Commission. Such measures are crucial for understanding how platforms may have facilitated or failed to address election interference.

We call for an expedited process to grant vetted researchers access to both public and non-public data from social media platforms. The stakes are too high, and the consequences of inaction are too severe. By leveraging the tools provided by the DSA and ensuring swift implementation, we can safeguard democracy and mitigate systemic risks in Romania and beyond.

1.3. Meta and TikTok are the most important operators in Romania. What do they offer?

While Article 40 of the Digital Services Act (DSA) outlines provisions for data access, very large online platforms (VLOPs) have found ways to slow or even reverse progress toward greater transparency. A striking example is the closure of CrowdTangle, a tool instrumental in investigating disinformation trends. Its successor, the Meta Content Library, provides an alternative, but with notable limitations. Far fewer researchers have been vetted and granted access to the new tool, though it is important to note that the implementation process is still in its early stages. For additional context, we joined others in signing an [open letter by the Mozilla Foundation](#) advocating for continued support of CrowdTangle.

The Meta Content Library, offered voluntarily as part of VLOPs' compliance efforts, is intended to enhance researchers' capacity to investigate systemic risks. However, this framework has introduced significant barriers and inequities in access. The lack of clear criteria for approving or rejecting applications raises concerns about the potential for arbitrary decision-making, further undermining the transparency goals of the DSA.

Comparison: Meta Content Library vs CrowdTangle

| Feature/Aspect | Meta Content Library | CrowdTangle |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Access Approval Process | Opaque criteria; limited number of vetted researchers | Open and consistent approval process for vetted researchers until they stopped the onboarding process completely |
| Data Download Limitations | Limitations on data that can be downloaded daily. Still, researchers can request larger data quotes | No significant limitations on data downloads per day |
| Real-Time Trends | Lacks real-time trend-tracking functionality | Provides real-time tracking of trends and engagement and comparison |
| API Accessibility | It is an additional application for API access, and inconsistent quality of data. | API access was straightforward and user-friendly granted once you had CT access. |
| Interface Usability | Includes features like saved searches, producer lists with up to 1000 groups, and public profiles or pages. Dashboards allow researchers to track and monitor content in near real-time. New search functions like text-in-image search unlock multimedia content on the interface | Intuitive and easy-to-use interface for researchers, had a lot more functions like country page admin, BOOLEAN search, Reports section - where you could compare the evolution of accounts, spikes and type of content that was mostly used. This feature is NOT included in Meta Content Library |
| Transparency in Access | Unequal access; application approvals lack transparency. Unclear access for journalists | More people onboarded, yet Meta Content Library is quite new |
| Scope of Functionality | Limited features initially, enhanced with dashboards and new search capabilities, but still behind what CT was. | Comprehensive tool for analyzing disinformation trends |
| Renewal Process | Requires annual renewal with unclear guidelines | No complex renewal process; continued access once approved |

Application Process for the Meta Content Library via SOMAR

The application process for the Meta Content Library is managed through [the SOMAR platform](#). EFOR submitted its application in **July 2024** following the replacement of CrowdTangle, and it was approved. However, as of **January 2025**, the application cycle has been paused for review, causing delays for researchers seeking access.

The application file is accessible at all times through your researcher account on the SOMAR website, allowing you to review and update it as needed. Completing the application typically takes between **30 minutes to 1 hour**, depending on the level of detail provided. Once access is granted, it must be renewed annually, although the renewal process remains unclear at this time.

Applicants can select their desired level of access, either to the **Meta Content Library User Interface only** or to both the **User Interface and the API** for more advanced functionality. Before starting the application process, it is essential to familiarize yourself with the defined **roles and agents involved**, as these provide important context for navigating the system effectively.

Application Process Table: Meta Content Library

| Section | Field/Question | Example/Response |
|---------------------|---|------------------|
| Applicant Details | First Name of Applicant | |
| | Last Name of Applicant | |
| | Institutional email of applicant | |
| Lead Researcher | First Name of Lead Researcher | |
| | Preferred First Name | |
| | Last Name of Lead Researcher | |
| | Institutional email of Lead Researcher | |
| | Primary discipline or professional area | |
| | Organizational or work profile URL | |
| Institution Details | Facebook profile URL | |
| | Institution name | |
| | Country of institution (ISO Code) | |
| | State/Province | |
| | City | |
| | Department name | |
| | Institute/center/lab | |

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| | | |
|----------------------|---|------------------|
| | name | |
| | Role at institution | |
| | Lead Researcher | |
| | Highest degree earned | |
| Collaborator Details | Are there collaborators? | Yes |
| | Upload collaborator details | |
| | Upload collaborator CVs | |
| Research Agenda | | |
| | Contributes to EU systemic risks? | Yes |
| | Research agenda summary | (250-word limit) |
| | Keywords | |
| Funding | Sources | |
| Contracts | Require Information Sharing Agreement? | No |
| Acknowledgment | Consent to share information with Meta? | Yes |
| Supporting Documents | Upload any additional documentation | PDF file |

Application roles and definitions

This application requires information about the applicant, lead researcher, research collaborators (optional), and institutional signatory (for MCL API access). These roles are defined as follows:

1. **Applicant:** Individual filling out the application who will serve as the main point of contact for the lead researcher and/or research team and manage this application. The applicant can be the same person as the Lead Researcher, an administrator, or a member of the research team.
2. **Lead Researcher:** Individual leading the proposed research project or larger research agenda/initiative that requires access to Meta Content Library UI and/or API. If the research project or research agenda is team-based, the Lead Researcher will be the Principal Investigator, Lead Investigator, or Research Lead, or equivalent in your organization (e.g. Social Media Monitor). In some instances, the applicant and the Lead Researcher will be the same individual.
3. **Institutional signatory:** Individuals at the Lead Researcher's affiliated institution who holds the authority to enter into legal agreements and sign contracts on the institution's behalf. Signatories typically work in a department such as the Contracts Office, Office of Sponsored Research, Research Contracts Management office, etc. The institutional signatory will have to sign the restricted data agreement(s) associated with this application. The institutional signatory will only be required if you are applying for access to the API or if the individual clickthrough agreement for Content Library UI access is not appropriate for your institution.
4. **Collaborators:** Anyone other than the Lead Researcher who has access to the data or handles the data in any capacity. If any computing staff, data librarian, research assistants (including students), or general staff will be handling the data, they must be included in this application as collaborators. Depending on institutional requirements, collaborators may be required to be officially affiliated with the Lead Researcher's institution. Please reach out to somar-help@umich.edu for any questions.

Source somar.infoready4.com

Application Process: TikTok Data Access

The process for accessing TikTok data involves a three-stage application, which typically takes between 1.5 to 2 hours to complete. TikTok allows researchers to request access for a minimum duration of 2 months and a maximum of 2 years. However, it remains unclear whether there is a formal renewal process after the specified period or if researchers need to reapply entirely.

The response time for applications is generally 3 to 4 weeks. Up to this point, we cannot provide an overview of the data available through the API because Expert Forum has not yet been approved for research access through the researcher API. We filled out an application on December 19th, the typical response time should have been until January 19th, but we will likely see a response in the coming weeks.

The importance of TikTok worldwide 1,9 billion users globally, and approximately 9 million users in Romania (closely second to Facebook) makes it a crucial social media tool for informing, entertaining and educating the audience. Regardless of how much the platform is keen to maintain that it's main purpose is entertaining, recent events in Romania show how it has multiple functions, such as Facebook does.

1. We believe it is the duty of TikTok to **provide data access to researchers in a timely manner, having a transparent approval or rejection process.** Delaying access to data its a way of postponing relevant investigations into systemic risks and discouraging researchers from analyzing this space. This becomes a crucial systemic risk as we've seen in Romania, when not only the platform itself doesn't monitor the space, but also creates an environment that discourages researchers from looking into TikTok.

Further compounding these issues are TikTok's Terms of Service, which have historically discouraged research by imposing unreasonable provisions. While the prior requirement to submit research to TikTok 30 days in advance has been revised to a more reasonable 7 days, researchers remain concerned about the platform's ability to intervene in their work under ambiguous terms such as "private personal data." The API itself provides less data than what is publicly available, raising questions about this stipulation's intent. Additionally, clauses permitting TikTok to license research for marketing purposes related to the API and associated services remain overly opaque. These provisions have deterred many NGOs from utilizing the API due to fears of potential misuse, such as preemptive campaigns to discredit research critical of the platform.

may create content, conduct research, develop data not specifically and directly made available through the TikTok Research Tools. You may not publish your research outputs if your outputs violate these Research Terms. You and your partners must provide attribution to TikTok in your research outputs and publications that use data derived from your use of the TikTok Research Tools. You agree to provide TikTok with a copy of any publications pertaining to or containing the results and findings of the Research outputs, and any supporting information, at least seven (7) days before publication primarily to identify any user private Personal Data that may need to be removed prior to publication or disclosure. g. **No Endorsement.** You

Source - <https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/global/terms-of-service-research-api/en>

For example, in a worst-case scenario, if Expert Forum had used TikTok's API to expose the coordinated accounts supporting Calin Georgescu's campaign in Romania – a revelation that caused a major reputational scandal for TikTok – our findings could have

been compromised. Under the API's Terms and Conditions, TikTok could have required advance access to the research, intervened in its final version, and preemptively prepared a campaign to discredit it. They might have also restricted future data access, sued us, or forced us to take down our research. While this scenario may seem extreme, the Terms and Conditions provide a legal framework for such actions, leaving researchers vulnerable to interference. The research community cannot ignore these risks, especially when TikTok's policies allow for worst-case scenarios that threaten transparency and accountability.

In contrast, Meta does not include such provisions in its policies (see below). Instead, it frames this aspect as a recommendation, emphasizing the importance of making your research accessible to others.

c. **Publication.** You may publish Your Research Outputs, which may include making available information to support such results, to other scholars, researchers, and research organizations for purposes of verifying and reproducing those results, subject to the obligations and restrictions set forth herein. For clarity, You may not disclose any Confidential Information or any Personal Data. For publications based solely on Meta Data, Meta asks that You make efforts to provide notice to Meta upon publishing any Publications. Submission of drafts for review and notice of publication should be made by emailing research_publications@meta.com. You acknowledge and agree to comply with any attribution or other publication requirements or guidelines that Meta may make available from time to time. Unless otherwise notified in writing, You shall include the following attribution format of any and all publications and derivative works: "Meta Platforms, Inc., (Month Accessed, Year Accessed). Product Name and Version. Digital Object Identifier." Except for the foregoing attribution, these Product Terms grant You no right to use the Meta name, trademarks, or other logos or make any statement or act in any manner to imply that Meta endorses, advocates, recommends, or supports any publications.

d. You will make efforts to ensure that any published results and findings from Research are published in Open Access journals or publications consistent with the principles of "Open Science."

Source - <https://transparency.meta.com/researchtools/product-terms-meta-research>

Another example is YouTube, which clarifies the purpose of the advance notice and does not interfere in any part of the research.

d. **Advanced Notice Before Publication.** You agree to use reasonable efforts to provide YouTube with a copy of each Researcher Publication at least seven (7) days before its publication. This is meant solely as a courtesy notice to YouTube. YouTube will not have editorial discretion or input in any Researcher Publication. In addition, YouTube will not have any intellectual property rights in or to or be affiliated with any Program Derived Research or Researcher Publication including, without limitation, any recommendations or conclusions included therein.

Source - <https://research.youtube/policies/terms/>

- 2. TikTok needs to enhance the data available through its API to the data that is publicly available through scraping.** We can look at other experiences like the "Response to the European Commission's call for

evidence on a planned Delegated Regulation on data access provided for in the Digital Services Act (DSA)” uploaded by Stiftung Neue Verantwortung (SNV), a not-for-profit think tank on May 2023. According to the investigation, for videos for example, TikTok offers an API that returns 14 data points containing the most relevant information, including the date the video was created, how often it was watched, liked, or shared, the hashtags, and, if available, the transcribed audio. However, scraping the web application of TikTok returns 118 data points including effects used, flagging advertising, video comments can also be scraped with public tools, effects used. We mention that on the TikTok website, the CodeBook mentions that they make available a lot more data. How much the data access improved is yet to be tested since we haven’t received any answer from the platform regarding API access for Romanian researchers.

Another researcher’s findings, featured in an article by [Philipp Darius in Tech Policy Press \(September 2024\)](#) about the European elections, highlight similar issues with TikTok’s API for researchers. Their study observed several shortcomings, including errors in account names, difficulties in collecting follower data beyond 3,000 accounts, and discrepancies in share and view counts. Specifically, the API underreported these metrics compared to what was publicly visible on the website and application. These findings underscore significant limitations in TikTok’s API, raising concerns about its reliability and utility for research.

3. TikTok needs to develop a user-friendly interface for monitoring trends, following the model of tools like CrowdTangle or the Meta Content Library. This should become a best-practice approach for VLOPs, especially when they serve as primary or secondary communication channels in a country. Such an interface is essential for enhancing data accessibility, particularly for journalists and fact-checkers who may lack the technical skills required to work with APIs.

Providing a user-friendly tool would not only enable broader access but also foster complementary efforts in trend monitoring, communication campaigns, and quality journalism. Currently, monitoring TikTok trends in a user-friendly way is only possible through private tools, which are often prohibitively expensive and thus inaccessible to many journalists and researchers. This lack of affordable, accessible tools creates significant barriers to local monitoring efforts, as we have seen and felt in Romania.

Application Process Table: TikTok Researcher API

Stage 1. Research Tools Application Table

| Section | Field/Question | Example/Response |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Principal Researcher Information | Your name as shown on your professional profile | 0 / 50 |
| | Are you affiliated with an | Academic institution / Not- |

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| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | academic institution or a not-for-profit body, organisation or association whose principal aim is to conduct research on a not-for-profit basis pursuant to a public-interest mission? | for-profit body (EU-based only) |
| | What is your role? | Faculty member / Postdoc / Research student / Non-academic researcher / Other |
| | Did you receive funding to conduct this research? | Yes / No |
| | What is your professional email address? | Professional email address associated with academic or not-for-profit organization |
| | Provide a link to your professional introduction page | LinkedIn profile or institutional introduction page (0 / 100) |

Stage 2: Research Tools Application Table

| Section | Field/Question | Example/Response |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Researcher's Academic Background | What is the name of your academic institution or not-for-profit organization? | 0 / 100 |
| | What is the address of your academic institution or not-for-profit organization? | 0 / 100 |
| | What is the link to your academic institution's or not-for-profit organization's website? | 0 / 100 |
| | What is the link to your academic institution's or not-for-profit organization's website related to your specific area of research? | 0 / 100 |
| | Where applicable, please provide your academic institution's or | N/A or provide the registration number |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | not-for-profit organization's registration number | |
| | What is your area of expertise? | 0 / 50 |
| | Provide the name of your research team | Lab name or your name followed by the research topic (0 / 50) |
| | Do you work with a research team that may also need to access the TikTok Research Tools' datasets? | Yes / No |
| | Provide links to your past publications or attended conferences | 0 / 1000 |

Stage 3: Research Tools Application Table

| Section | Field/Question | Example/Response |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Research Proposal | Which research topic category/categories does/do your proposal fall under? | Consumer trends, behavioral science, community and culture, education, radicalization, misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, violent extremism, influence operations, human rights, civic engagement and activism, algorithm, mental health, safety & well-being, other (please specify) |
| | Provide a summary of your project | Outline the research project, including context, importance, and potential findings (0 / 1000) |
| | Please provide a description of your research design. | 0 / 1000 |
| | State your access request start date | MM/DD/YY |
| | State your access request end date | MM/DD/YY (Maximum 2 years) |
| | Explain why this time period for access is necessary. | 0 / 1000 |
| | Do you have plans to | Yes / No |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | share the datasets from the TikTok Research Tools with third parties? | |
| | Describe your data protection plans by providing the terms of your research data and privacy governance. | Include technical and organisational security measures (0 / 1000) |
| | What are your research hypotheses or research questions? | Explain hypothesis and provide context from current literature (0 / 1000) |
| | What are the expected outputs of your project? | Describe intended outputs such as blog posts, academic articles, books, or conference presentations (0 / 1000) |
| | Provide a summary of your literature review | 0 / 1500 |
| | Provide a list of your references or citations | 0 / 1000 |

1.4. Paid advertising monitoring: META and TikTok

When it comes to paid content on social media platforms, TikTok's transparency can only be described as severely lacking. On October 17, 2024, [Global Witness published an investigation into YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok](#) to determine their ability to detect election disinformation ads. The investigation revealed stark differences in performance across platforms. TikTok performed the worst, **approving 50% of ads containing false election information despite its explicit ban on political ads**. Facebook demonstrated notable improvement, approving only one of eight submitted ads, while YouTube performed the best by approving 50% but requiring further identification, such as a passport or driver's license, before publication. **Ironically, TikTok is the only platform among the three that claims to prohibit political ads entirely, seemingly to avoid obligations for additional moderation and transparency.**

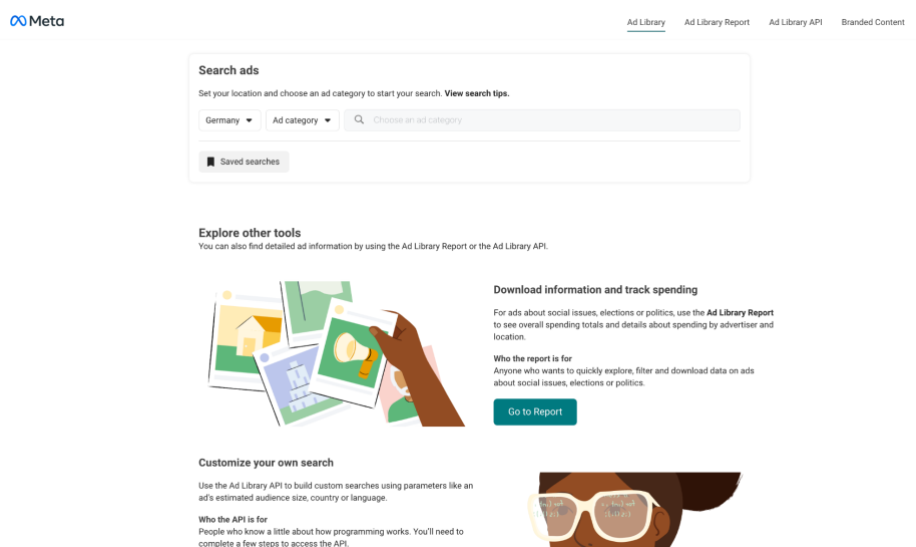
TikTok's approach of pretending to ban political ads is harmful. Content on the platform inevitably reflects audience interests, including political topics, regardless of the platform's claims. However, overregulation is not the solution either. Regulators must clarify guidelines and work collaboratively with platforms to develop practical systems for implementation. The EU's **Transparency in Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA)** regulation, set to take effect in October 2024, addresses some of these concerns. For instance, Google considered a best-practice leader in regulation, [is expected to opt out of political advertising](#) entirely due to uncertainty about implementing the new requirements without risking fines.

In Romania, researchers have identified disinformation practices and faulty content moderation practices on both Facebook and TikTok, but the approach to addressing

these issues should differ. Facebook has improved its political content moderation standards, with increased transparency that allows researchers to access and analyze data from its ad space. TikTok, in contrast, lags far behind in both transparency and functionality.

Meta Ad Library: Interface and API

The Meta Ad Library offers a user-friendly interface with tools for researchers and journalists. Features include a spending tracker, regularly downloadable political reports, and a robust search option. This search functionality allows users to search by advertiser or keyword, filter by country and ad category, and access historical data dating back to 2018. **However, in our experience the interface shows fewer results than the API.**



Source - <https://www.facebook.com/ads/library>

In addition to the interface, the Meta Ad Library API is accessible without requiring an application process. The API supports customized searches for ads on social issues, elections, or politics that were delivered globally over the past seven years, or for all types of ads delivered in the European Union during the past year. Data available through the API includes:

- Ad details: Library ID, content of the ad creative (subject to Terms of Service), associated page name and ID, and ad delivery dates.
- Platform information: Where the ad appeared (e.g., Facebook, Instagram).
- Social and political ads: Total amount spent (range), total impressions received (range), and demographic breakdowns (age, gender, and location percentages).
- EU-Specific ads: Total impressions received in the EU (estimated), targeting and reach demographic information (estimated), and beneficiary and payer details.

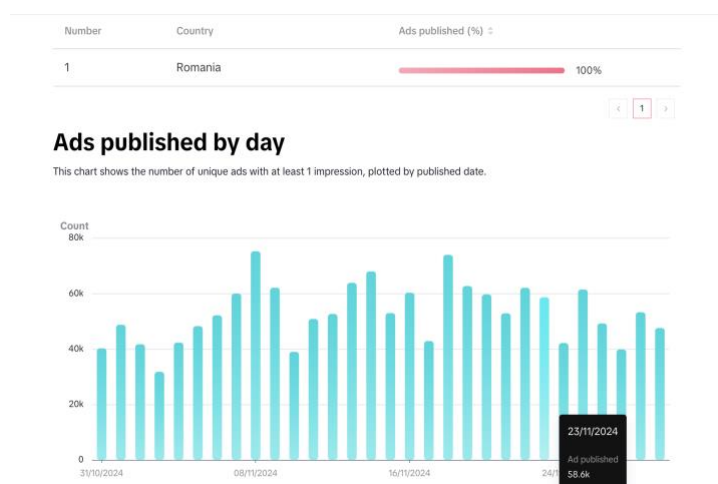
TikTok Ad Library

Since 2023, TikTok has theoretically offered an Ad Library interface. However, in practice, the tool is highly dysfunctional, with questionable accuracy. Expert Forum's

experience highlights significant flaws: **Romanian keywords or advertisers often retrieve irrelevant results, such as Chinese ads, or no results at all, even when the advertiser has active ads. Relevant information like the name of the company that is paying for ads or the amount of money spent like you do on Facebook cannot be found.**

The issue is even more serious with political ads, which TikTok claims do not exist due to its policy of not approving political content. However, in practice, political ads do appear, as seen in Romania during the first round of presidential elections. **Despite this, there is little transparency around TikTok's ad vetting and monitoring processes, leaving a significant gap in accountability.**

The TikTok Ad Library also includes a report section, but this provides limited information with little clarity about what the data actually represents. For instance, you can see how many ads were published in each country over a specific period. On November 23, 2024, the day before Romania's elections, the report showed 54,200 published or active ads. However, there is no way to identify the publishers, content, or other meaningful details. These reports are neither clickable nor downloadable, making them nearly useless for researchers.



Source <https://library.tiktok.com/ads/report>

When attempting to view ads through the main search interface, the results are similarly unhelpful. For example, searches for Romanian-specific keywords, such as "Calin Georgescu," return irrelevant results, including Asian product ads and game reviews, with no correlation to the search terms.

The Crisis of the Romanian State

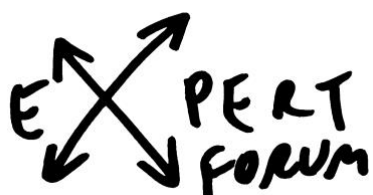
Ad target country: Romania | Ad type: All ad types | Ad published date: 01/11/2024—30/11/2024 | Advertiser name or keyword: Calin Georgescu | Search

| Ad ID | Ad Name | First shown | Last shown | Unique users seen | Thumbnail Description |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|---|
| Ad ZRZUTKA PL SP Z O O | ZRZUTKA PL SP Z O O | 01/11/2024 | 22/01/2025 | 10K-100K | On 4fund.com, you can start raising funds |
| Ad Galaxy Navatra Invest... | Galaxy Navatra Invest... | 01/11/2024 | 22/01/2025 | 0-1K | Woman in black dress |
| Ad Galaxy Navatra Invest... | Galaxy Navatra Invest... | 01/11/2024 | 22/01/2025 | 0-1K | Group of people in suits |
| Ad Galaxy Navatra Invest... | Galaxy Navatra Invest... | 01/11/2024 | 22/01/2025 | 0-1K | Man in hoodie with ESSENTIALS logo |

Source - <https://library.tiktok.com/ad>

1.5. The retention order imposed by the European Commission

Data preserved under the retention order issued to TikTok by the European Commission must be made publicly accessible for researchers. Relying solely on opaque internal investigations conducted by TikTok is not only dysfunctional but undermines the principles of transparency and accountability, particularly during critical periods such as elections. Also, exploratory research must be conducted to examine TikTok's recommender system, including practices such as [the "heating system,"](#) where employees manually amplify the virality of content. These practices, which are currently shrouded in secrecy, need to be publicly clarified and scrutinized. Without this transparency, the potential for manipulation and systemic risks will persist unchecked, creating vulnerabilities in civic discourse and electoral processes.



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