Branding Romania in the Age of Disruption. Technology as a Soft Power Instrument

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Abstract. *In the age of disruption and in today's platform society (Van Dijck et al., 2019), communication between nation states is influenced by the development of technology. The nation state is responding to the new communication environment through "techplomacy" and through the use of Artificial Intelligence as a strategic asset in the global tech race. Artificial Intelligence (AI), including the strategies to come up with viable AI, has a big potential for nation branding, being also a competitive advantage for countries worldwide. In this context, the aim of our research is to investigate technology as a soft power (Nye, 2004) instrument for Romania and to analyze how the nation brand is constructed in relation to technology. In doing so, our research revolves around the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy for Romania, presented at the IT&C Summit on May 8, 2019, and 50 news articles, published in the quality press (Adevărul, Gândul, România Liberă) employing mixed methods such as framing analysis*

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(Entman, 1993) and critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993). The results show that there are four dominant media frames: (1) artificial intelligence, (2) the 5G technology, (3) education and (4) smart city, while both journalists and public actors have an active role in constructing technology as a public issue in Romania.

Keywords: Nation branding; Technology; Soft power; Artificial intelligence; Media.

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Introduction

In the age of "digital disinformation 2.0" (Bârgăoanu, 2018) and "digital deceit" (Ghosh & Scott, 2018), nation branding has become part of a new paradigm of strategic communication between states, trying to persuade various audiences. According to Korjus (2017), the next big industry to face digital disruption will be our nations. For instance, Estonia's brand image is based on the idea of a digital state, both for domestic and foreign audiences. In Denmark, Casper Klynge has become the first nation state ambassador to Silicon Valley, describing his job as "techplomacy" (Baugh, 2017).

The nation-state is responding to the new communications environment by reinventing itself in the current climate of intercultural dialogue for Europe. Many governments have concerns over digital misinformation campaigns (cyber and computational propaganda) and the emerging relationship between technology and digital security. Recent worldwide events (i.e., Brexit, the coronavirus pandemic, etc.) force us to rethink the basis of public diplomacy, and whether this impacts the individual and the society. Nation branding should also be understood in the contemporary *fake news* phenomenon and post-truth era, in which the digital content flows freely along the false/true continuum and is optimized based not primarily on its truth/ factual value, but on its potential to generate user engagement and, therefore, profit. We live in a post-truth era or in a "truth-decay" era, understood as a set of "increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data" (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018), declining trust in formerly respected sources of factual information. In this context, facts are secondary, and we experience the "democratization of truth", leading further to a semiotic war, with a potential struggle over meaning (Borțun in Olteanu *et al.*, 2018).

Products of nation branding campaigns are, in fact, *simulation nations*, understood as "contradictory compendiums of signs, flashing through global media circuits, and trying to seduce various audiences" (Kaneva, 2018, 10). The idea of the *simulacra* leads further to a situation of hyper-reality (Baudrillard, 2001), where

there is no clear distinction between reality and simulation, leading further to a crisis of power and representation. In Baudrillard's perspective, the *simulacrum* is a sign without a reference, a copy without an original, which "bears no relation to any reality whatsoever" (Baudrillard, 2001, 170). The loss of distinction between the real and the simulated impacts nation branding projects as well, taking into account the fact that "media contribute to the formation and/or maintenance of national communities of shared linguistic, cultural or political characteristics over space and in time" (Kaneva, 2008, 11). In fact, content generated on the Internet, especially on the digital platforms, shapes public perception, priming users towards division, an "Us vs. Them" (Bremmer, 2018) rhetoric.

An interesting case is to be found in contemporary Romania, ranked 46th in the world, in terms of digital competitiveness at a global level (IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking, 2019). The "Romania Tech Nation" project was launched in 2019 and it aims to boost Romania's transformation through technology, involving both the Government and the private sector. In the media, Romania is framed as a European destination for tech investors, an IT outsourcing destination with one of the best Broadband Internet speed, science-savvy workforce and women involved in scientific research. In this context, how does digital disruption change the goals, objectives, and purposes of diplomacy?

Overall, the aim of our research is to investigate technology as a *soft power* (Nye, 2004) instrument for Romania and to analyze how journalists and public actors construct the topic of new technology as a competitive advantage. In doing so, our research revolves around the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy for Romania, presented at the IT&C Summit on May 8, 2019, and 50 news articles, published in the quality press (*Adevărul*, *Gândul*, *România Liberă*) employing mixed methods such as framing analysis (Entman, 1993) and critical discourse analysis. The research questions underlying our study focus on two dimensions – the media representation of technology as a soft power instrument and the relationship between nation branding and technology:

1. How is the nation brand constructed in relation to technology?
2. How do the journalists frame the technological developments of Romania?

Our paper is structured in eight sections. It starts with an overview of the current literature on nation branding and the main fields of research. The section on technology as a soft power instrument focuses on the transition from public diplomacy to "networked diplomacy", "cyber diplomacy" and "data diplomacy". Next, the focus is on nation branding and "techplomacy", understood as a technology brand ambassadorship for a specific country. Furthermore, the section on Artificial Intelligence and the global tech race presents an overview of the Artificial Intelligence concept, in order to understand why and how AI has a big potential for governments. The methodology section presents the research questions, the methods and the corpus. The study is based on two dimensions: the relation between

nation branding and technology investigated through a qualitative analysis of Romania's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy, and the media framing of the technological developments of Romania, based on 50 news articles about technology and nation branding, published in Romanian newspapers such as *Adevărul*, *Gândul*, and *România Liberă,* collected during October 2018 – March 2020.

The results are presented in two separate sections, one dedicated to the analysis of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategy for Romania, and the other dedicated to the media framing of technology in the Romanian newspapers. The last section is dedicated to conclusions and future implications of nation branding in times of digital disruption.

Theoretical framework

Nation branding is a debated issue nowadays, in areas as varied as marketing, politics, media, diplomacy, geopolitics and international affairs. While nations have always been concerned with their international image, the term "nation branding" was first mentioned only in 1996, by the British brand practitioner Simon Anholt. For Anholt (2007, 3), nation branding is "the practice of building and communicating the country image to the rest of the world, through diplomacy, trading, export, and tourism".

Just like any other concept in social sciences, there is no agreement on the meaning of the term. Dinnie (2008) suggests alternative terms such as "reputation management", "competitive identity" or "public diplomacy", while Surowiec (2012) and Volcic (2012) prefer the more ideologically charged, critical terms, "neoliberal corpo-nationalism" or "commercial nationalism". More recently, Crilley and Manor (2020) have introduced the concept of 'un-nation branding', understood as the practice of promoting a nation-state with minimal or even no reference to the nation-state. This involves states symbolizing themselves as/through cities (or regions) to make themselves attractive to others. Furthermore, Bolin and Stahlberg (2020) discuss about the PowerPoint nation, understood as an imagined commodity, rather than an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991).

In a previous research, we have emphasized that there are no universal recipes to promote the nation as a brand (Cheregi, 2018b, 85). However, there is a growing consensus in the academic literature regarding the forms in which nation branding manifests itself: *country-of-origin-effect* (the "made in" products, commercialized on the global marketplace), and *destination branding* (the promotion of a country in order to attract international tourists). Firstly, the *country-of-origin effect* (COO) concept was introduced by Schooler in 1965, in a study about products and their country-of-origin. His conclusion was that the attitude of a given country is a factor in existing preconceptions regarding the products of that country (Schooler, 1965, 396). For Brijs *et al.* (2011, 1260), country image is a three-dimensional construct

composed of country-related cognitions (designated meaning), affect (comprehensive meaning), and conation (prescriptive meaning). The dimensions are connected to the meanings associated with a product, to the interpretations that one might associate with the country of origin.

At the same time, there is a need for an integrative approach on the country image. In this regard, Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015) propose a 4D Model of a country image, drawing on a multidisciplinary approach, coming from business studies, social psychology, political science, and communication science. The model has two dimensions: cognitive and affective. Country image and identity are based on perception, while country brand and reputation are based on representation (through public communication processes). One can notice that perception is a common concept in the studies related to the country image and *the country-of-origin effect* (COO).

Secondly, *destination branding* is connected to the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination (Crompton, 1979, 18). Thus, a clear distinction has to be made between *destination branding* and *country branding*. For Szondi (2007, 9), the objective of *destination branding* is to attract visitors and boost tourism, while *country branding* is connected to the promotion of economic, commercial and political interests. Branding has had an important role in generating a discussion about identities as well, so the citizens can become "brand ambassadors" (Szondi, 2007, 19), identifying themselves with the country they promote. In fact, nations are "emotionally constructs that shape and construct identity of places qualitatively differently than other places" (Mordhorst in Berger & Fetzer, 2019, 201).

As it was underlined in a previous article (Cheregi, 2018b, 85–87), nation branding has become an important yet contested topic in research in the last few decades, attracting an interdisciplinary interest, from areas such as marketing, politics, international public relations, and public diplomacy, but also from schools of thought such as cultural studies and social constructivism. For the purposes of our research, let us briefly underline the main tenets of these theoretical perspectives.

The marketing approach (Anholt, 2003; Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015; Fan, 2006; Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Marat, 2009; Olins, 2010; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002; Will & Porak, 2000) is functionalist and focuses the relation between nation branding and commercial practices (Anholt, 2005; Olins, 2010).

On the other hand, the international public relations approach (Aronczyk, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Dolea, 2015; Dolea & Țăruș, 2009; Jordan, 2014; Kunczik, 1997, 2002; Szondi, 2008; Volcic, 2008; Zhang, 2006) is based on the contribution of political, cultural and economic agents in the nation branding practices.

As for the public diplomacy perspective (Calabrese, 1996; Jansen, 2008; Gilboa, 2008; Mosco, 1996; Murdock & Golding, 1991; Schiller, 1976; Szondi, 2008; Van Ham, 2001; Zhang, 2006), the focus is on nation branding as a continuation of public diplomacy and a neoliberal project. The promotion of a nation is connected to

global capitalism, while public diplomacy is understood as the Government's use of *soft power* (Nye, 1990). In fact, public diplomacy contributes to a nation's power by generating credibility, fostering values such as the belief in democracy, changing behavior, and increasing goodwill through activities like broadcasting, cultural diplomacy and exchanges (Pamment, 2014, 53).

Furthermore, nation branding implies a shift in political paradigms, moving "from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence" (Van Ham, 2001, 3). In this context, the influence is given by soft power in the context of globalization and transnational interactions. Thus, the opposite of this trend is commercial nationalism, based on market relations in order to appeal to national identity (Jansen, 2008, 121). The power relations between states are connected to the need to articulate the aspirations for economic prosperity and enhanced media visibility.

Studies on nation branding also come from schools of thought, such as cultural studies or social constructivism. The cultural studies approach on nation branding (Aronczyk, 2007; Bârdan & Imre, 2012; Iordanova, 2007; Jansen, 2008, 2012; Kaneva, 2012, 2018; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, 2014; Kania-Lundholm, 2012; Surowiec, 2012; Volcic, 2008; Widler, 2007) insists on the discursive practices of nation branding, in relation with elements such as national identity, culture, and diplomacy (Cheregi, 2018b, 87). Furthermore, scholars from the cultural studies area are preoccupied with the relationship between nation branding and national identity (Aronczyk, 2007; Kaneva & Popescu, 2008; Volcic, 2008).

Recent research in nation branding concentrates on country of origin effect and media coverage of Chinese brands (Chen, Song & Yao, 2020), media technologies to encourage citizen participation (Pamment & Cassinger, 2018), the development of new technologies (Bolin & Miazhevich, 2018), user generated content and destination branding (Thelander & Cassinger, 2017), and discourses around language and national identity (Graan, 2016). For Kaneva (2018, 6), "nation branding is nothing more than a tool or a technology, which can be used by 'responsible governments' to ensure 'fair, true, powerful, attractive, genuinely useful' representations of their nations". The comparison with technology emphasizes the nation as a disruptive concept, that needs a continuous improvement in order to meet the audience needs (both internal and external).

In Romania, the majority of studies on nation branding focuses on analyzing promotion campaigns initiated by Government representatives or brand consultants, and the campaigns' impact on the audience, from an international public relations approach (Dolea & Țăruș, 2009; Dolea, 2015) or from a marketing perspective (Andrei, 2017; Popescu, 2007). The legitimation strategies of public actors are very important in this context, considering the role of the Romanian Government in (re) branding the country (Dolea, 2015). Conversely, recent research (Popescu, 2017) discusses about the fact that Romania does not have a country brand, so a possible

solution to this problem would be a paradigm shift from the nation brand to the successful example of the city brand of Sibiu as the European Capital of Culture. In Popescu's opinion (2017, 292), the responsibility for the country's branding strategy should be transferred to a local level, giving the example of Sibiu city.

Compared to previous research on nation branding, our study moves the angle from nation branding campaigns to technology as a soft power instrument that contributes to the articulation of the nation brand. A special attention is given to the relationship between technology and public diplomacy, in order to understand how new technologies are shaping the communication between nation states.

Technology as a soft power instrument

In the age of "dataism" (Harari, 2018), communication between nation states is affected by the development of technology. The Internet has changed the context in which international relations play out, while new actors have been empowered by the new information communication technologies as well. The emerging challenge is that "we are grappling with the consequences of code through the many boundary cases of human experience and cultural work that trouble contemporary algorithmic culture" (Finn, 2018, 192). In small states, soft power is considered a "handy tool, especially in the cultural, political, economic, and social sphere" (Peterkova, 2020, 2). Technology has always been a source of economic wealth. Therefore, the ability to innovate, to come up first with technological breakthroughs and to exploit them for commercial purposes are significant sources of power, both hard and soft. An asset developed by countries is also the National Strategies on Artificial Intelligence, highlighting their vision and policy measures designed to offer a competitive advantage in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Artificial intelligence is expected to be one of the most disruptive emerging technologies (Van de Gevel & Noussair, 2013). There is an Artificial Intelligence race between countries, as well as between high-tech giants such as Facebook, Google, Amazon, Alibaba and Tencent, which is also underwritten by the corresponding states (US or China). Artificial Intelligence (AI) has a big potential for companies and governments alike, allowing them to analyze large amounts of data and to identify trends and insights. For instance, the American corporate landscape is dominated by five big companies ("The Big Five"): Facebook, Apple, Google, Microsoft and Amazon. According to Bârgăoanu (2018, 110) the Big Five is, in fact, the most powerful instrument through which the US has projected its soft power. Digital platforms are based on production, distribution, and monetization of culturally signifying, value-laden content. Furthermore, platform corporations are complex and have multiple purposes. They are advertising networks, data intermediaries, social networking and identity services, content production companies, and software and hardware manufacturers (Van Dijck *et al.*, 2019). A good example

here is Google Alphabet, which operates Google Search, YouTube, Google Play, Android, and Google Ads. All these services tie together end-users, content producers, advertisers, societal institutions, app developers, and hardware manufacturers.

In today's "platform society" we experience the phenomenon of platformization, understood as "the penetration of the infrastructures, economic processes, and governmental frameworks of platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life", as well as "the reorganization of cultural production and distribution practices around these platforms" (Poell *et al.*, 2019, 5–6). The question that arises here is who should take responsibility for the content that is distributed through online platforms. This impacts nation branding projects as well, considering the fact that nation branding campaigns also use social media channels to promote a country in the international/ transnational public sphere. The power relations between digital platforms, Government, and citizens leads further to another discussion about democratization of communication. A wide range of cultural products and forms of expression circulates on platforms, but this "is not necessarily conducive to a diverse cultural landscape and democratic public sphere" (Poell, 2020, 654).

The nation-state is responding to the new communications and technology environment by reinventing itself. Smith and Sutterland (2002) use the term "networked diplomacy", defined as major ICT-related factors that affect the practice of diplomacy. Nowadays we can talk about cyber diplomacy, understood as "the use of diplomatic tools and mindsets in resolving, or at least managing, the problems in cyberspace" (Shaun, 2019). Public diplomacy is important in cyberspace, especially in combating cyber information war and disinformation operations.

Soft power and public diplomacy are linked to international communication. Pamment (2014) comes up with four public diplomacy models: output models, related to press clippings, outcome models, related to logic models and impact measurements, perception models, related to surveys, attitudes and favorability, and network models, based on hubs and multipliers, forming alliances and relationship management. In fact, technology can be integrated under network models because relationships can be measured through linkages, exchanges and patterns of interaction (Pamment, 2014, 57). Technology helps to identify nodes in a network and to identify people that have a leadership position in their respective social sphere.

Soft power is based on persuasion and attraction, while hard power uses military resources and draws from inducements or threats. For Surowiec (2017), nation states have become actors of the soft power corporatization. In a study on Poland's nation branding campaigns, Surowiec concluded that nation branding is a soft power resource that has the capacity to induce changes in the political arena.

Public diplomacy refers to transparent ways of communicating to international audiences, in order to promote national interests and achieve foreign policy objectives. In fact, public diplomacy is understood as "government communication with foreign audiences", referring to *domestic publics* in two ways: "either as the

domestic input from citizens for foreign policy formulation (engaging approach), or explaining foreign policy goals and diplomacy to domestic public (explaining approach)" (Szondi, 2008, 6). Citizens have an important role in the debates over foreign policy, while the role of the nation is in perpetual reconfiguration.

The "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) is now connected to the logics of fabricated content, which leads further to the hybrid concept of "DIY citizenship" (Hartley, 1999), based on cultural identity and choice, and not on the relationship of people to territory. Technology has impacted nations as well, producing a nation as an imagined commodity rather than an imagined community (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2020).

Furthermore, the concept of public diplomacy is also connected to the new information technologies, with a special focus on the impact of non-state actors in international affairs. Cyber diplomacy is also connected to cyber-challenges such as cyberwar, cyberterrorism, cyberespionage or cybercrimes. In cyberwar, state and non-state actors penetrate foreign computer systems with the intention of damaging the systems, extracting sensitive information and using it for various purposes. Vickers (2004) believe that all the technological changes give rise to the "new public diplomacy", so that technology has the potential to shape the governance of soft power. He notices the increasing ability of citizens and non-government organisations (NGOs), from transnational pressure groups to transnational terrorist organisations to access and use these information and communications technologies (Vickers, 2004, 183).

The "new public diplomacy" leads further to "data diplomacy", understood as

> "the harnessing of diplomatic actions and skills by a diverse range of stakeholders to broker and drive forward access to data, as well as widespread use and understanding of data" (Boyd *et al.*, 2019, 3).

In terms of data diplomacy, WikiLeaks has released more classified information that the whole rest of the world's media combined, compiling a database of more than 10 million documents. The leak consisted of US Army fields reports of the Iraq War from 2004 to 2009, being the biggest leak in the military history of America up to this point (Hehe, 2018). Therefore, new technologies can lead to moral and security implications (Susskind, 2019).

According to Van Ham (2001), one can talk about *brand states* as political players promoted aggressively by using power and national identity. Put simply, this shift in political paradigms implies a move from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence (Van Ham, 2001, 4). It is more and more difficult for governments to control, shape, and influence information and its distribution. More recently, nation branding has become part of a new paradigm of strategic communication between states, understood as "a social, cultural and political construct which defines a nation through national identity

discourses and with the participation of the public sphere as a debate arena on national issues" (Cheregi, 2018a, 97).

Soft power is connected to the attractiveness of the states' culture, social values, and the nature of their foreign policies. According to Nye (2004a), in order to measure soft power, we should consider five factors: the number of immigrants, tourists, international students, culture (the popularity of music, movies and books), and the number of resources spent on public diplomacy. The soft power instruments must be able to use information and knowledge to set the terms of debate on issues, shaping them in ways that are advantageous to it. Even though soft power does not consume as many resources as military power, it requires investments in technology, in order to be in line with the main leaders in cyberspace. The next section highlights the importance of nation branding in the age of disruption. In this broad context, the aim of our study is to investigate technology as a *soft power* (Nye, 2004a) instrument for Romania and to analyze how journalists and public actors construct the topic of new technology as a competitive advantage.

Nation branding and "techplomacy"

Public diplomacy is understood as the Government's use of *soft power* (Nye, 1990, 2004b) or the "second face of power", resting on the ability to shape the preference of others. Besides the three dimensions of soft power mentioned by Nye (culture, social values and foreign policies), a new dimension arises: the broadcasting capabilities of mainstream media as well as the narrow-casting capabilities on the Internet (Nye, 2004b, 192). Technology is an importance asset in diplomacy, especially in the era of hyper connectivity. At the same time, technology has created a new dimension of insecurity, if we consider various instances of cyberattacks and interference with democratic processes and civil discourses.

However, there are few studies exploring the link between technology and nation branding. Pawel Surowiec and Magdalena Kania-Lundholm (2018) explore the relationship between social media and nation branding in a study on `Logo for Poland` campaign, run by a coalition of state and corporate actors. The results prove that:

> "the practice of nation branding online is an ideological construct supported by the neoliberal ideology of the free market, embracing private interests, marketing goals and commercial techniques for self-promotion" (Surrowiec & Kania-Lundholm, 2018, 173).

Recent studies concentrate on analysis of Big Data that relate to countries' nation branding efforts (Cha *et al.*, 2017). Korjus (2017) believes that the next big industry to face digital disruption will be our nations. For instance, Estonia's brand image is based on the idea of a digital state, both for domestic and foreign audi-

ences. In Denmark, Casper Klynge has become the first nation state ambassador to Silicon Valley, describing his job as "techplomacy" (Baugh, 2017). Techplomacy was presented as a foreign policy strategy for 2017–2018 as a priority for Denmark.

In Romania, the situation is different, if we consider the above-mentioned countries. According to the Nation Brand Index (Anholt, 2005), Romania was ranked 42 out of 75 countries (Figure 1). Anholt's Nation Brand Index focuses on studying the nation brand as the sum of citizens' perceptions about the nations, considering six dimensions of the brand image: tourism, export, diplomacy, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, along with people. In fact, the hexagon is a perception model that lacks the sense of cause and effect (Pamment, 2014, 56), but it also represents a holistic approach to nation branding, measuring the global image, perception and reputation of countries. On the other hand, technology is missing from Anholt's Nation Brand Index, even though it is an important competitive advantage for countries involved in the "global tech race".

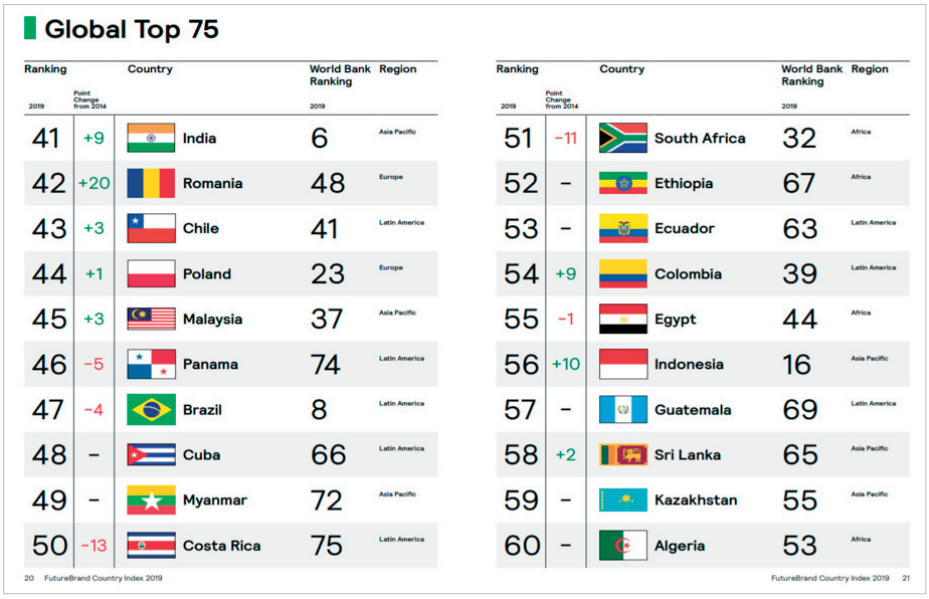

Figure 1. Future Brand Index (2019)

In small and under-developed countries, nation branding has the mission to enhance the competitive advantage on the global stage (Anholt, 2003; Dinnie, 2008; Olins, 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). In Romania, the aim is to improve the competitive advantage on the European and global stage.

In terms of digital competitiveness at a global level, Romania is ranked 46th in the world (Figure 2). The ranking analyses the extent to which countries adopt and explore digital technologies leading to transformation in government practices, business models and society in general (IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking,

2019). The three main factors defining digital competitiveness are knowledge, technology and future readiness. Firstly, knowledge is understood as the know-how necessary to discover, understand and build new technology. Secondly, technology is related to the overall context that enables the development of digital technologies (for instance Internet bandwidth speed), while future readiness is the level of readiness to exploit digital transformation.

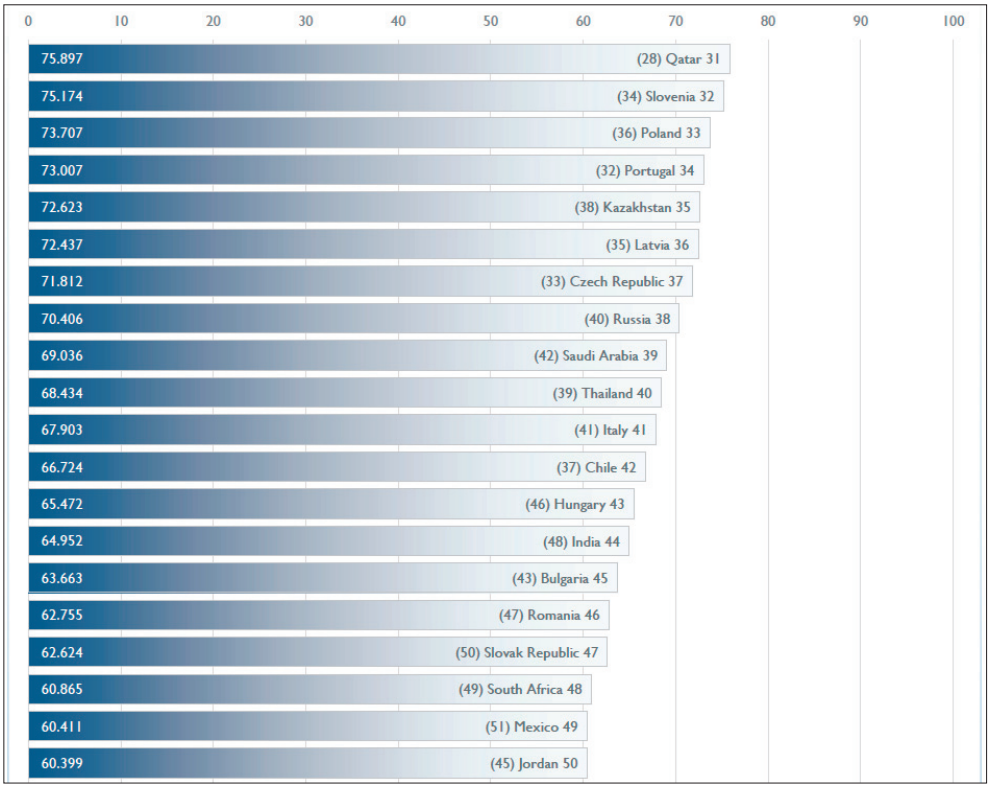

Figure 2. IMD World Digital Competitiveness Rating (2019, 27)

Nations hold a soft power advantage when their culture and values match prevailing global norms, but also when they have "greater access to multiple communication channels that can influence how issues are framed in global news media" (Nye, 2008, 96). The "Romania Tech Nation" project was launched in 2019 based specifically on these soft power premises. It aims to boost Romania's transformation through technology, involving both the Government and the private sector, while seeking a wide engagement of society as a whole around the topic of technology.

Artificial Intelligence and the global tech race

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has a big potential for governments and companies alike. Foremost, AI can be used to analyze large amount of data, and to identify trends and insights that improve the cyber diplomacy goals of a nation state. Furthermore, AI will be able to assist in the analysis of data and intelligence, pointing human analysts and police officers in the right direction (Wilner, 2018). In 2017, the Russian President Vladimir Putin declared at a meeting with students in Yaroslavl, Russia, that "whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world" (Caughill, 2017), introducing the notion of a global AI arms race. In fact, he made the strong point, later turned into a quasi-consensus among technology analysts, that technological superiority can be translated into global political power.

There are several definitions of artificial intelligence ranging from an optimistic to a pessimistic perspective, but we will consider the dimensions that shape the potential of AI in foreign policy. AI is a "field of science that seeks to provide machines with human-like qualities in problem solving, reasoning and learning" (Wilner, 2018, 313). There are several types of AI, such as *Narrow* AI – using algorithms to complete a specific task suck as face recognition and *General* AI – seeking to empower a machine to learn and solve any number of problems, much as humans can.

The definition of Artificial Intelligence (AI), as proposed within the European Commission's Communication on AI is based on autonomy and on a software-hardware approach:

> "Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to systems that display intelligent behavior by analyzing their environment and taking actions – with some degree of autonomy – to achieve specific goals.
>
> AI-based systems can be purely software-based, acting in the virtual world (e.g. voice assistants, image analysis software, search engines, speech and face recognition systems) or AI can be embedded in hardware devices (e.g. advanced robots, autonomous cars, drones or Internet of Things applications)."
>
> (High Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2019, 1)

Put simply, the AI systems are characterized through three main capabilities: perception, reasoning/decision making and actuation. Firstly, reasoning and decision making include knowledge representation and reasoning, planning, scheduling, search, and optimization. In doing so, data has to be transformed into knowledge, and then has to reason with it (knowledge reasoning), including references through symbolic rules, planning and scheduling activities, searching through a large solution set, and optimizing among all possible solutions to a problem (High Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2019, 3).

Secondly, learning includes machine learning, neural networks, deep learning, decision trees, and many other learning and computation techniques. These tech-

niques allow an AI system to learn how to solve problems that cannot be precisely specified. For instance, machine learning techniques produce a numeric model (that is, a mathematical formula) used to compute the decision from the data. Another approach is deep learning, which uses neural networks understood as a network of small processing units (analogously to neurons) with lots of weighted connections among them (High Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2019, 4).

As a discipline, AI includes several approaches and techniques, such as machine learning, machine reasoning and robotics. Robotics can be defined as "AI in action in the physical world (also called *embodied AI*)" (High Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2019, 4). In other words, a robot is a physical machine that has to cope with the dynamics, the uncertainties and the complexity of the physical world. For instance, robots can be autonomous vehicles (cars, drones, flying taxis), humanoid robots, robotic vacuum cleaners, etc.

AI includes methods such as machine learning, which trains algorithms to identify regularities in realms of data. Reinforcement learning is part of machine learning, based on a program built with feedback mechanisms rewarded on the actions it carries out. An example of reinforcement learning is AlphaGo, the machine that learned to play Go by itself and beat the world's top Go player.

European Union, or, alternatively, some of its member states have recently made significant progress in this direction, too. The European Union has been one of the driving forces for defining a national Artificial Intelligence strategy. The European Union's AI strategy is based on the member states national AI strategies or programs. The EU's AI4EU artificial intelligence project officially launched on 1 January 2019 "with a view to mobilizing Europe's AI community to build the first European on-demand Artificial Intelligence platform". The Aachen Treaty signed by Germany and France on January 22, 2019 stipulates the intensification of "co-operation in the field of research and digital transformation, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence and breakthrough innovation" (Article 21). Which can also be read as "France-Germany first in AI".

So far, only 16 EU member states such as Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden have a National Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategy (Moltzau, 2020). Romania has launched a draft strategy that will be analyzed at the results section.

Methodology

The aim of our study is to investigate technology as a *soft power* (Nye, 2004) instrument for Romania and to analyze how journalists and public actors construct the topic of new technology as a public issue and as a competitive advantage. This aim is guided by two research questions: how is the nation brand constructed in

relation to technology? and how do the journalists frame the technological developments of Romania?

First, the relation between nation branding and technology is investigated through a qualitative analysis of Romania's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy, entitled "Romania in the era of Artificial Intelligence. A strategy for the development and adoption of AI technology at a country level", presented at the IT&C Summit on May 8, 2019. In doing so, the method of critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993) will be employed. The categories for analyzing the draft on Romania's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy are nomination, argumentation strategies, constructive strategies and synchronization (Bolin & Stahlberg, 2020). Nomination refers to discursive constructions of social actors by membership categorization, argumentation strategies refer to claims of truth and normative rightness, while constructive strategies are the linguistic procedures which constitute a national 'we-group'. Synchronization is related to the production of a nation brand, bringing together actors from different spheres of society.

Second, in order to see how journalists frame the technological developments of Romania, the analysis concentrate on 50 news articles about technology and nation branding, published in Romanian newspapers such as *Adevărul*, *Gândul*, and *România Liberă,* collected during October 2018–March 2020. The search keywords when consulting the digital editions of the newspapers were nation brand, technology, country image, artificial intelligence. Although initially the results returned a number of 100 articles, only 50 were relevant for the analysis, after a close reading of the news articles.

Research design

Methodologically, this study is based on a mixed approach, combining media frames analysis (Entman, 1993) with critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993). The unit of analysis was the article, while the coding unit was the paragraph where the categories were identified. The coding frames are generated inductively (categories) and deductively (subcategories). In the first phase of the analysis, there were four main components that guided this approach: (1) identifying the problems defined by the Romanian journalists in the articles selected, (2) identifying the causes creating the problem, (3) identifying the moral judgments, and, finally, (4) the treatments and solutions for the problems defined. In the second phase, each function frame was associated to four main categories: artificial intelligence, 5G technology, education and smart city.

Framing works as "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974), enabling the audience to locate and perceive occurrences of information. Media frames are patterns of interpretation rooted in culture and articulated by the individual (Entman, 1993; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992, 384; Pan & Kosicki, 2003; Reese, 2007;

Table 1. The description of categories and subcategories for the media framing analysis

Category	Description
Artificial Intelligence	The adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Romania and to the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence
5G technology	The effects of the development of 5G technology in Romania
Education	The digitalization of the educational processes
Smart city	The digitalization of Romanian cities
Subcategory	**Description**
Define Problems	Defines a 'perturbation' in society, a topic that insists on what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits
Diagnose Causes	Identifies the forces creating the problem, defines the reasons and causes that influence an outcome
Make Moral Judgments	Evaluate causal agents and their effects
Suggest Remedies	Offer treatments and solutions for the problems defined and predict their likely effects

Van Gorp, 2007). The journalists frame the issues and events in the form of a news story, presenting additional layers of interpretation. This impacts the audience as well, creating "echo-chambers" (Jamieson & Capella, 2008; Nguyen, 2018) that reinforce their beliefs, discrediting other relevant voices. For Couldry (2006), the credibility and the legitimacy of the message producing and the communication environment is important in order to see how subjects will relate to those messages.

Research on framing nation branding come from different areas, such as international public relations (Li & Chitty, 2009), public diplomacy (Zhang, 2006) cultural studies (Volcic, 2008, Miazhevich, 2018), or from media and communication studies (Hyejung, 2007; Cheregi, 2017). For instance, Volcic (2008) performs a textual analysis of the official governmental websites of former Yugoslav states in order to see how they frame the nation as a brand. Miazhevich (2018) too uses the cultural studies lens to examine Russia's international broadcaster RT (formerly Russia Today), in the coverage of the Republic of Crimea in 2016, by drawing on a framing approach based on Gitlin's (2003) process of ideological hegemony and on Entman's (1993) framing devices. Cheregi (2017) also uses media framing analysis (Entman, 1993) and qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) to analyze 53 news articles on Romania's nation brand and on the national image building problem in four newspapers (*Adevărul*, *Gândul*, *Jurnalul Național*, *Dilema Veche*), published during January 2011–March 2014. She proves that the Romanian journalistic discourse is built on evaluation strategies, insisting on political responsibility of Romania's nation brand.

Our study focuses on branding Romania as a "tech country", considering the fact that nation branding is "a step in the process of discursively constructing the country image as a public issue" (Cheregi, 2018a, 20). In order to see how journalists and public actors frame both textually and visually the topic of new technology

as a competitive instrument in Romania, our research revolves around 50 articles, published in top quality newspapers such as *Adevărul, Gândul* and *România liberă* (brat.ro). In so doing, our analysis is based on Entman's (1993) framing model.

For Entman (1993, 52), to frame is "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and made them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." Drawing on Entman's approach on news framing, the research examines the news media's coverage of technology as a competitive advantage for Romania.

According to this model, a single sentence may perform more than one of the four framing functions and a frame in any particular text may not necessarily include all four functions. Following Entman's (1993) approach on framing, this research component uses inductive and deductive reasoning to content analyze frames and function frames in the coverage of the nation branding issue in the Romanian media.

The results section starts with the analysis of the National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy for Romania and continues with the media framing analysis.

Results – The Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy in Romania

The draft of Romania's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy, entitled "Romania in the era of Artificial Intelligence. A strategy for the development and adoption of AI technology at a country level" was presented at the IT&C Summit on May 8, 2019. The colors of the Romanian flag are present on each page – blue, yellow and red. This leads further to the "banal nationalism" concept (Billig, 1995), because national identity may be reproduced in mediated discourse in ways that go unnoticed. In fact, national identity in a document does not necessarily need to be marked. In today's continual 'flagging' or remining of nationhood, "the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" (Billig, 1995, 8). The flag metaphor suggests the unobserved character of national identity, which is reproduced through communication on various forms like standardized languages or classified words.

The main stakeholders (social actors) mentioned in the draft are public institutions, education entities, research entities, private sector and civil society. The main vision is stuctured on four areas: growth, knowledge, responsibility and community. An important catchphrase is "Grow responsibly through knowledge", insisting on becoming an active major contributor to the European and global AI ecosystem.

The mission of the AI strategy for Romania is to increase the quality of people's lives and obtain significant economic boost through the development and adoption of AI technologies at a country level. In doing so, the private, public and academic sectors in Romania must join efforts and create an optimal framework.

Furthermore, there are eight strategic directions mentioned in the document: AI talent, AI Research & Development, Industrialization, Education in STEM and Future of work, Data, European and international cooperation, Regulation, and Ethics. Some of these dimensions are also adopted in other European AI strategies. For instance, the National Artificial Intelligence Programme of France is focused on creating an open data policy to drive the adoption and application of AI in healthcare, a regulatory and financial framework to support the development of domestic "AI champions", and regulations for ethics, to ensure that the use and development of AI is transparent, explainable and non-discriminatory (Dutton, 2018).

The main part of the draft is related to the impact domains: (1) Agriculture & Environment, (2) Healthcare, (3) Education, (4) Infrastructure and Smart City, (5) Energy production and distribution, (6) Manufacturing, (7) IT services, Business administration, Banking, Insurance, Financial Services, and Cybersecurity, (8) E-government and public administration, (9) Tourism, travel, and entertainment, (10) National security and defense, cybersecurity. As a comparison, in France, the Villani report (2018) recommended a focus on four sectors: healthcare, transportation, environment, and defense. The Romanian AI strategy is built on ten impact domains, maybe some of the domains should be considered as top priorities, in order to have a comprehensive view of the AI strategy.

The proposed initiatives mentioned are: Teach the teachers (training program for high-school teachers from all over Europe to provide them with the basic knowledge and skills of AI), International Master's program (ensure high standards that will create and attract AI talent), Industry-funded chairs in Machine Learning (ML) for Romanian Universities, ML-ELI Machine Learning for High Power Lasers (Măgurele Laser is the highest power laser in the world, with a great potential to enable high impact biomedical technologies), Machine Learning for Agriculture, A (AI) doctor for every village, and Romanian corpus of text and speech (collect and gather Romanian text and spoken language from various sources).

Overall, the draft AI strategy for Romania deals with *Narrow* AI, using algorithms to complete a specific task or proposed initiatives. In general, the national AI strategies of most of the EU member states is based on *Narrow* AI, drawing attention to specific areas such as education, healthcare or environment.

From a discursive perspective, one can notice the use of argumentation strategies: "develop educational programs on AI to create talent", "create frameworks to facilitate collaboration between academia and industry on AI research projects", "create incubators/start-up/digital sandbox/accelerators to support fast transition from research ideas to products", etc. Also, one can notice the use of constructive strategies – Positive Self Presentation: "Măgurele Laser is the highest power laser in the world and has a great potential to enable high impact biomedical technologies", "Romania has a balanced electricity mix, with coal, hydropower, natural gas, nuclear energy, and wind power having comparable shares of capacity and power genera-

tion". Nomination strategies are also present in the draft AI strategy in the discursive construction of social actors such as AI talent, teachers, doctors, ML experts, etc.

Another important result of the analysis performed on the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Romania is that the discursive practices are similar to that used in PowerPoint presentations. We can see a unique genre because it creates a type of social practice and a type of textual expression. The sequencing of pages follows a generic pattern and „builds up a specific kind of narrative that makes up the generic distinctiveness of its narrative form" (Bolin & Stahlberg, 2020, 7). We can also notice the presence of synchronization, in relation to the production of Romania's nation brand, bringing together actors from different spheres of society, such as AI specialists, teachers, doctors, Government experts, citizens, etc. The draft strategy is both a rhetorical and a technology instrument, with its own affordances.

Next, we will move the angle to the Romanian journalists, in order to see how they frame the technological developments of Romania in 50 news articles about technology and nation branding.

Results – The Media Construction of Romania as a "Tech Country"

Overall, Romania is framed as a European destination for tech investors, an IT outsourcing destination with one of the best Broadband Internet speed, science-savvy workforce, women involved in scientific research and a "pole of Artificial Intelligence around the globe" (*Adevărul*, May 2019).

The framing analysis on approximately 50 news articles published in top quality newspapers such as *Adevărul, Gândul* and *România liberă*, in the period October 2018–March 2020, shows that there are four dominant media frames: artificial intelligence, the 5G technology, education and smart city. Firstly, the artificial intelligence frame refers to the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Romania and to the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence. The main indicators are digital economy, Romanian women involved in AI projects and health. The second frame is the 5G technology, related to the effects of the development of 5G in Romania. The main indicators are political actors, national security, Internet of things, and protests (against the implementation of 5G technology in Romania). The third frame is education, related to the digitalization of the educational processes. Here, the main indicators are digital tools used for teaching, research in technology and level of nepotism in Romania. Finally, the fourth frame is smart city, understood as the digitalization of Romanian cities such as Sibiu, Oradea and Alba Iulia. The main indicators are tourism and level of citizen participation in local decision-making.

In *Adevărul* newspaper, the most dominant frame is artificial intelligence, presented in relation to contactless technology – "Romania, on the 5th place in Europe in adopting contactless technology: 2 out of 3 transactions are now contactless" (Dobrescu, September 2018, *Adevărul*), national strategy – "How can Romania become the most efficient center of Artificial Intelligence in the world. A national

strategy" (Chirciu, March 2019, *Adevărul*), Romanian women participating at the first AI hackathon – "Alice envisions the future – the first AI hackaton in Romanian destinated to girls was a real laboratory for good ideas" (Brînduşescu, October 2019, *Adevărul*) and facial recognition – "The legality of implementing facial recognition technology in Romania was contested (Dumitrescu, October 2019, *Adevărul*).

In *Gândul* newspaper, the most dominant frame is the 5G technology frame. An interesting fact here is that some news articles reveal the threat connected to the radiations produced by the 5G antenna – "What is the real danger of 5G technology? Can radiations produce cancer or not?" (*Gândul*, February 2020) – while others concentrate on 5G as a threat – `The 5G danger is real`, nor virtual. Hundreds of people from Craiova have protested against 5G technology (Paraschivu, January 2020, *Gândul*).

As for *România Liberă*, the most dominant frame is also artificial intelligence, presented in relation to investments – "Romania will have annual investments of 50 million Euros in Artificial Intelligence (Diac, February 2020), robotics – "Romania, champion in robotics in South Korea" (Dumitrescu, February 2020, *România Liberă*), and transport – "A factory from Sibiu works at developing the car of the future" (November 2018, *România Liberă*).

The main political actors mentioned in the Romanian press are the Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, the USA President Donald Trump, Alexandru Petrescu, the Minister of Communications and Information Society, the former Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă, Gordon Sondland, the ambassador of USA at the European Union, the Authority for the Digitalization of Romania, the European Union and NATO.

Discussion & Conclusion

The contribution of our study is twofold. First, the analysis of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy in Romania shows a preference for *Narrow* AI, drawing attention to specific areas such as agriculture & environment, healthcare, education, infrastructure and Smart City, energy production and distribution, manufacturing, IT services, E-government and public administration, tourism, and nation security and defense. The strategy brings together actors from different spheres of society, being related to synchronization and the production of Romania's nation brand. Overall, the draft strategy is both a rhetorical and a technology instrument, with its own affordances. It creates a sense of sharing an AI project together, but we cannot infer that it creates a sense of national belonging. The AI strategy produces the nation as an imagined commodity, rather than an imagined community, as Bolin and Stahlberg (2020) stated in their study on the PowerPoint nation.

Second, the analysis performed on 50 news articles on technology and nation branding published in *Adevărul*, Gândul, and *România Liberă* shows that there are four dominant media frames: (1) artificial intelligence, (2) the 5G technology,

(3) education and (4) smart city. The Romanian journalists have an active role in constructing technology as a public issue in Romania, related to future policy-making and regulation endeavors, as well as the future of public diplomacy. Furthermore, our article proves that the journalists construct technology as a *soft power* (Nye, 2004) instrument, insisting on technology as a competitive advantage for Romania.

Overall, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has changed the goals, objectives, and purposes of diplomacy, leading to a genuine paradigm shift. Our study proves that technology is a soft power instrument in the age of technological disruption, so the nation states should get in line with the most powerful methods and techniques deriving from this disruption. The media has an important role in framing the nation in the global tech race. As we have seen in the analysis, Romanian journalists are actively involved in constructing technology as a powerful instrument, related to the country image as well.

The trend towards constructing technology as a soft power instrument and as an instrument for economic development as such will continue, even accelerate in the post-pandemic world, in Romania and elsewhere. It is to be expected that the aftermath of the major disruptions going on right now as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will be decided by technology, too, including advances in bio-technology and any other health-related breakthroughs. For Romania as well as for the entire European Union, it is important not to miss this new technology-driven race, which is likely to divide the world in technology-rich and technology-poor nations. Or just in rich and poor nations. For this, the importance of media actors and other institutional and private sector actors in raising awareness and shaping this problem as a public issue cannot be emphasized enough.

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