UNI FR

Mobiliar Center for Resilience

Project Period 2024 - 2026

<<The Influence of Large Language Models (LLMs) on Country Reputation>>

Executive summary:

This project investigated how generative AI reshapes the formation, perception, monitoring, and management of country reputation. The project started from the observation that AI systems are increasingly becoming information intermediaries that actively select, structure, and personalize narratives about countries. When users ask AI systems about Switzerland's political system, values, economy, culture, nature, or international role, these systems contribute to the symbolic construction of Switzerland's country image. At the same time, the same technologies can be used to audit, monitor, and manage reputational risks, including biased narratives, synthetic content, and misinformation.

The project addressed four linked research questions. First, it asked how LLMs contribute to shaping Switzerland's country reputation and how they handle misleading narratives. Second, it examined how people interact with LLMs when seeking country-related information and how these interactions affect reputation attribution. Third, it explored how AI can support proactive and reactive reputation management by measuring Switzerland's representation across multilingual digital media. Fourth, it connected these questions to resilience by asking how the reflection and construction of national reputation influence a country's capacity to anticipate, absorb, and respond to reputational opportunities and risks.

Methodologically, the project combined conceptual theory-building, agent-based testing, online experiments, and AI-supported content analysis. The conceptual work developed a framework that understands GenAI as both a risk multiplier and a strategic resource for country reputation. The agent-based testing component specified a virtual environment in which standardized prompts about Switzerland are submitted to different VLMs across simulated locations and languages in order to compare visual outputs to misinformation. The online experiment investigated whether chatbot source affiliation (Swiss government vs. commercial provider) and source transparency affect perceived source credibility and Switzerland's country image. A further experimental line examines synthetic disinformation

presented in imitation news environments and tests whether conversational AI can function as an epistemic support tool that helps users critically evaluate misleading content.

The results show that AI's reputational relevance lies not in a single persuasive effect, but in its combined role as information source, representation system, and analytical infrastructure. In the first experiment, chatbots received generally high credibility ratings. The experimental source cues themselves, including government affiliation and source transparency, did not substantially shift credibility or country image. Instead, perceived credibility was shaped more strongly by users' attitudes toward AI. Participants with more positive AI attitudes evaluated chatbot information more favourably, while country image remained comparatively stable and was driven mainly by pre-existing country image. The LLM-powered content analysis produced clear operational results. Validation against human coding showed large model differences: smaller open models performed inconsistently, whereas the most recent model from ChatGPT achieved highest intercoder reliability. This demonstrates the potential of LLMs for scalable reputation measurement, while showing that model choice, prompt design, validation, data access, multimodal content and ethical governance remain decisive constraints. The synthetic-disinformation work extends these findings from reputation formation to reputation resilience by examining whether conversational AI can support critical evaluation of manipulated text, image and deepfake content

Overall, the project contributes to resilience research by showing that reputation resilience in AI-mediated information environments requires more than visibility management. Countries and organizations need the capacity to audit AI-generated representations, understand audience reliance on AI-based sources, detect synthetic and multimodal disinformation, and design epistemic support systems that strengthen critical evaluation without delegating truth judgments entirely to AI. The project therefore provides a scientific basis for AI-aware reputation governance, including transparency, bias auditing, human oversight, cultural competence, and tools for early detection and response.

Research Team

- Prof. Dr. Diana Ingenhoff: Co-Principal Investigator
- Prof. Dr. Olivier Furrer: Co-Principal Investigator
- Dr. Stefano Pedrazzi: Senior researcher / co-lead

- Dr. Friederike Vinzenz: Senior researcher / co-lead
- Josef M. Demling: Researcher
- Viktoria Sommermann: Researcher
- Maryna Sydorova: External researcher, University of Bern
- Dr. Mykola Makhortykh: External researcher, University of Bern

Impact and Outcomes

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Scientific

- *Research paper "Generative AI in Nation Branding and Country Reputation: Risks, Potentials, and Implications for Strategic Communication" accepted for presentation at EMAC Fall 2025 Conference in Istanbul.*
- *Research paper "Challenges of the duality of artificial intelligence as a tool and source of information for communication science" presented at the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research (SACM) in Chur.*
- *Research paper "When AI Talks about Nations: How Large Language Models Shape Country Perception" presented at the EUPRERA 2025 Annual Congress in Lund.*
- *Research paper "AI Against Synthetic Disinformation? An Experimental Study on Strengthening Digital Resilience Through AI-Based Epistemic Resources" accepted for presentation at SACM 2026 in Winterthur.*
- *Research paper "Designing AI-based epistemic support against synthetic disinformation" accepted for presentation at the 11th European Communication Conference (ECC) in Brno.*
- *Research paper "With AI Against Synthetic Disinformation? An Experimental Study on AI-Assisted Evaluation of Manipulated Online Content" accepted for presentation at EUPRERA 2026 Annual Congress in Malaga.*
- *Preregistered experimental design, questionnaire and codebook materials for the study "When AI Talks about Nations". Pedrazzi, S., Demling, J., Ingenhoff, D. Vinzenz, F. & Furrer, O. (2025, July 22). When AI Talks about Nations. Retrieved from osf.io/bv8fq*
- *Preregistered experimental design developed on synthetic disinformation, imitation news websites, text/image/deepfake modalities and conversational AI as epistemic support. Pedrazzi, S., Demling, J., & Ingenhoff, D. (2026, June 10). Conversational AI against Synthetic Disinformation. Retrieved from osf.io/8zuef*

- *Research seminar on “Digital personalities: Experiments on the impact of artificial intelligence in strategic communication” (Prof. Dr. Diana Ingenhoff)*
- *Workshop with Prof. Dr. Petter Bae Brandtzaeg, University of Oslo, on "How Artificial Intelligence is Changing Sociality and Free Speech", 22.11.2024.*
- *Workshop with Prof. Dr. Thomas Hills, University of Warwick, on “Humanistic Approaches to Understanding Biases in AI”, 27.05.2025.*
- *Workshop with Prof. Dr. Katharina Lobinger, University of Lugano, on “Trust in (AI-generated) Images”, 12.05.2026.*

Non-Academic Outreach

- *AI country reputation workshop conducted with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs / Präsenz Schweiz, strengthening transfer to public-sector reputation and communication practice, 20.06.2024.*
- *Transfer event “Künstliche Intelligenz als Reputationsfaktor: Chancen und Risiken für Länder und Unternehmen” in cooperation with ComImpact, 22.01.2026.*
- *Invitation as guest speaker to Café Scientifique, Düdingen “Presse und Medien – Wo finde ich nur zuverlässige Informationen?, 25.02.2026.*
- *Invitation as guest speaker at “IKAS 2026: Smart Leadership in der digitalen Transformation”, 11.09.2026.*
- *SRF Tagesschau, «Fake oder Fact: Wie können wir in der Schweiz Desinformation begegnen?», 27.01.2026.*