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Disinformation in Polish Society in 2021 – Trends, Topics, Channels of Transmission¹

Abstract: A questionnaire-based study conducted in October 2021 provided analytical material on the degree and sources of disinformation in Polish society. The material has representative qualities and is the first comprehensive research project in Poland to cover issues regarding information security in such breadth and detail. The paper aims to analyse and present a study on disinformation in Polish society conducted on a representative group of Poles in 2021. The project's key research questions are: How receptive is the Polish public to disinformation content? What are the channels of information provided to Poles? Is the notion of disinformation familiar to the Polish audience, and do the recipients of media content search for methods to verify disinformation? The analysis and interpretation of the results identified some important features of the Polish disinformation map. The concept of disinformation is now commonly familiar to the Polish public (86%), and the sensitivity to content credibility can be regarded as high; the respondents were found to verify information, actively searching through various sources. Disinformation is rife in climate, energy (52%), and health (44%).

Keywords: *information security, information warfare, disinformation, psywar, media manipulation, information digitalisation*

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Introduction and Background

This study aims to analyse and present a survey of disinformation in Polish society conducted on a representative group of Poles in 2021. The project's key research questions are as follows: How receptive is the Polish public to disinformation content? What are the channels of information provided to Poles? Is the notion of disinformation familiar to the Polish audience, and if so, do the recipients of media content search for methods to verify disinformation?

The issues around information security and the multiple socio-political consequences associated with the communication-culture threats during the pandemic have been considered particularly serious in the global infosphere (INTERPOL, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; McKinsey&Company, 2020; D'Adamo et al., 2021). One of the factors behind this is the growing digitisation trend in information, entertainment, commerce, social life, and politics.

Therefore, a study to explore the issues in the disinformation sphere is not only of research and informative value but also provides an important contribution to evaluating the national security strategies related to the media, connectivity, shaping public opinion, and communication. It is the first study in Poland to address these issues in breadth and detail based on a representative group corresponding to the matrix of Polish society. The chief research objective is to provide an in-depth scientific description of the state of social beliefs as a starting point for further thematic analysis. The indicated goal will allow the formulation of legitimate generalisations based on a representative research sample.

Based on the study conclusions, recommendations were formulated on information security at all levels, from the individual to the group, the state, and the international level. However, given the mentioned areas of concern, the authors focus on the state level.

The relatively new concept of “disinformation” relates to a phenomenon that goes back much further in human history. The term itself was used for the first time in 1923 (Wachowicz, 2019, p. 227) to refer to the core objectives of the State Political Police of the Soviet Union. At the time, it meant „manipulating the national intelligence system by injecting credible but misleading data” (Saffire, 1993, quote after Wachowicz, p. 227). Golitsyn (2007, p. 6) constructed the following definition: “The term denotes systematic efforts aimed at spreading false information and falsifying or blocking messages consistent with the actual state of affairs and the politics of the communist world”.

Journals and journalistic publications have also attempted to conceptualise the term (e.g., “Misinformation is defined as “false information that is spread, regardless whether there is an intent to mislead” and “Disinformation as “deliberately misleading or biased information””) (McCorkindale 2020, p. 1).

The concept of disinformation is highly challenging in terms of its definition due to the scope of disinformation methods and their aims. In the 20th century, disinformation practitioners (Golitsyn, 1984; Volkoff, 1999; Bezmenov-Schuman, 2020; Barron, 1974) established the view that disinformation operations strongly collocate with the military

and political levels. For the purposes of this study, contemporary definitions of the term will be used, according to which political disinformation is one of the four sub-disciplines (in addition to economic, scientific and technical, and military disinformation), and is understood as the “conscious, intentional, and deceitful misleading of the enemy, within the physical or information space, by any state or non-state actor that conceals its actual intentions, using appropriately distorted (literally or contextually) data, information, and documents to cause those being disinformed to make decisions (through act or omission) benefiting the disinformers, to mislead, distract, or surprise them, to distort reality, as well as to protect the interests of the disinformers, whether legitimate or not; the unaware and unintentional misleading of superiors, allies, subordinates, or those within the disinformers’ immediate environment, cooperating within any social structure, by misinterpreting orders, instructions, or any other tactical and operational information, or by omitting important executive guidelines, failing to provide important information in a timely manner, and using ambiguous or incomprehensible terms” (Wachowicz, 2019, p. 250).

The research work focuses mainly on the following:

- public opinion research on the evaluation of information credibility (*Fake news in France 2021*; Ofcom, 2021; Goodfellow, 2017; IPSOS, 2018),
- the degree to which intentionally manipulated content pervades the infosphere (Reuter et al., 2019; *IPR Disinformation in Society Report. How Americans Perceive Intentionally Misleading News or Information 2020* – this report concludes that there is a downward trend in terms of verifying information and being sensitive to disinformation impulses (“A growing number of people are not going to other sources to verify information” – p. 4),
- methods to counter information manipulation (Vilmer, 2021; Hopkins, 2021),
- empirical studies trying to explain how fake news and manipulation resonate with society (Bryanov & Vziatyshva, 2021; Vidgen et al., 2021; Cvjetičanin, 2019; Al-Zaman, 2021; Mellon & Prosser, 2017; Allen et al., 2019),
- terminological dilemmas around the term disinformation and disinformation theories (Egelhofer, 2018; Merriam-Webster Dictionary online, 2021).

There also exists an extensive resource of publications on the history of disinformation, as well as source texts and historical accounts (e.g., Golitsyn, 1984; Bezmenov, 2020; Rid, 2021).

In the European realm, disinformation is monitored at national and supranational-institutional levels by EU authorities and European projects concerned with this subject (PROVENANCE, EUNOMIA, WeVerify – Funded projects in the fight against disinformation). In the face of the threats coming from the information sphere, fighting and counteracting disinformation has become the key strategic objective of the EU’s action plan (*Communication...*, COM(2020) 790 final). Counteracting disinformation as a strategic objective of the European Union was originally proposed by the European Council in March 2015 (European Council..., point 15, p. 5).

A team of experts from EU Member States has provided the official EU definition of disinformation. According to the definition, disinformation is false, inaccurate, or misleading information created, presented, and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally cause public harm. Disinformation should be understood as “verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm comprises threats to democratic political and policy-making processes and public goods, such as protecting EU citizens’ health and the environment or security. Disinformation does not include reporting errors, satire and parody, or identified partisan news and commentary” (*Communication...*, COM(2018) 236 final). Therefore, disinformation is a deliberate effort to elicit a specific social response, whether social, political, or economic. Disinformation undermines trust in public institutions and harms democracies by making it difficult for citizens to take informed decisions. False information sow uncertainty and contribute to social tensions, having potentially serious implications, particularly for public security and order.

Considerable research attention has been devoted to the phenomenon and concept of society, and sociology has developed its own methods, theories, and conceptual apparatus (Turner, 1999). Turner’s work contains one of the contemporary operationalisations based on existing research (2006, p. 592): The term “society” is used to describe a level of organisation of groups that is relatively self-contained. (...) Equally, the term society may be used to indicate the wider activities of those under the authority of a particular state, for example, French society or Indian society”. Piotr Sztompka, a senior of the Polish school of sociology, has provided the following preliminary definition: “Thus, contemporary sociology views society not as a specific community, but as a unique type of reality, which manifests itself in a whole range of ways in groups of all scales. A state or national society is only one of the varieties of society. Indeed, society also comprises groups smaller than the state: family, relatives, local communities and neighbours, family circles and social clubs, sects and parishes, associations and political parties, social classes and strata, ethnic groups and national minorities, schools and universities. The society also comprises groups larger than the state: international corporations, large Church communities, civilisations, federations, regional and continental communities, and finally, the global community (Sztompka, 2016, p. 21).

In 2021, Polish society had a population of 38,151. As far as digitisation related to e-administration is concerned, an increase of 5.6 pp was observed. 92% of households had access to the Internet, a 2% increase over the previous year. 60.2% of the respondents aged 16–74 shopped online (60.9% – 2020). There was also an upward movement in the digitisation trend in commerce and entrepreneurship (up by 1.4 pp) (Statistics Poland, 2021). It should be mentioned that 99.7% of households with children have access to the Internet and that a noticeable proportion of senior citizens use it (thus, Internet use cannot be said to be marginal in this group). A conclusion can be drawn that Polish society does not experience digital exclusion despite persisting differences between urban and rural areas.

Methods and Materials

The main research aim of the project was to investigate Polish society regarding broadly defined information-related issues – acquisition, reception and resonance – and to provide an in-depth research description. It required a detailed framing of the issues within the methodological model and the research techniques and tools applied. The study was based on a standardised questionnaire with single-choice or multiple-choice close-ended and semi-open-ended questions. The study's designers aimed to obtain a set of quantitative and qualitative data without using in-depth interviews, although with the option to collect material that was nuanced enough to allow analysis and interpretation that met the requirements of a representative study. Polish society is the unit of enquiry in this study; the social group is described through the aggregation of unit descriptions as part of probabilistic sampling, warranting legitimate generalisations (Babbie, 2010).

The study involved a group of Poles aged 18+ that was representative of age, gender, and place of residence. Due to the pandemic, the CAWI method proved useful and effective. Interviews took no more than twenty minutes, and the survey was conducted between October 1 and 6, 2021 by the market research provider GFK, a global company with market experience spanning eighty years. The study was organised into topics and problems and included several blocks of related issues forming the disinformation landscape of the Polish population. Due to space constraints and some data being hermetic for Polish society, this article does not provide a detailed presentation of all data.

The study included questions about disinformation in energy, health, new technology, and politics, and the opinions and beliefs provided in response to these questions could be assessed against the current state of knowledge. The questionnaire also contained a block of issues to allow the analysis of respondents' awareness of information threats, manifested as a tendency to verify content in specified sources considered by respondents to be reliable or primary.

The first research panel block inquired into respondents' assessments of a set of statements related to the selected issues. Experts selected the issues following the analysis of the state of research and of content widely considered sensational, popular, and socially contentious (e.g., 5G and nervous system diseases). The respondents were asked to state the degree to which they identified with individual statements using a scale (definitely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, definitely disagree, difficult to say).

The second block involved specifying the sources of information on the current events. The respondents were given the option to state the medium type and specify the source, and the question was of the multiple-choice variety. In this block, consideration was given to gender preferences, educational attainment, and the size of the place of residence. The study took account of the so-called alternative or niche sources of information – that are missing from the current Polish research map – related to specific industries, professions, trades, ideologically profiled, fact-checking websites, etc. The respondents could provide

their answers through semi-open-ended questions. The study obtained detailed data on the preferences of content senders in the form of specific outlets. Since the question pertained to actual sources of reliable information, the responses identified sender outlets considered credible and reliable, with a distinction between traditional (paper) and digitised versions of these outlets.

The third block was concerned with disinformation, its significance and impact. Familiarity with the term was investigated, and information on its definition were collected, with the respondents being given the opportunity to provide spontaneous answers.

In the last block, the study gathered data on how the respondents verified information regarding the number of sources used for verification and specific senders. The educational background and gender of the respondents were taken into consideration. The respondents were asked to specify the frequency with which they verified information.

It was the first study in Poland to have addressed these issues amidst the pandemic in such a comprehensive manner. However, it should be noted that although the research community has expressed interest in these topics, Polish literature on the subject is rather scarce. NASK Państwowy Instytut Badawczy (NASK – National Research Institute) continues to be the leading centre for research into information security online. Before the pandemic outbreak, in March and April 2019, NASK conducted a CAWI-based study on a representative group of respondents to investigate the presence of disinformation content in Poland. 19.1% of respondents admitted that they had no interest in verifying information. 51.6% stated that they trusted online information. (NASK studies: more than half Polish internet users encounter manipulation and disinformation online, 2019) According to the previous report from 2017, disinformation is increasingly an illegal foreign-policy tool that violates the principle of the free exchange of opinions and spontaneous shaping of social preferences in terms of value and interest aggregation (Freedom House, 2017). A 2020 report by the Polish National Broadcasting Council provided a summary of the strategies employed to tackle disinformation in selected countries (France, Germany, Italy, UK, and Norway) at the institutional EU level and commented on the NASK report, presenting conclusions and recommendations (Polish National Broadcast Council, *Fake news – dezinformacja online*, 2020). It is worth mentioning that the 2017–2022 Cybersecurity Strategy of the Republic of Poland, which outlines the assumptions and objectives of the national security system, ascribes a central role to information security and is considered a priority for public order and national security (Cyber Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland for 2017–2022, 2017).

Analysis and Results

The inquiry and analytical section will present the results of the studies on Polish society concerning four issues:

1. What is the level of disinformation among Poles?

2. Which media outlets provide a source of information about the current events in Poland and the world?
3. Where and how often do Poles check information credibility, including through fact-checking sites?
4. Do Poles know what disinformation is, and have they had, in their opinion, any experience with disinformation?

In order to investigate the level of disinformation among Poles, four areas of key concern for citizens were outlined: climate and energy, new technologies and politics. For statistical purposes, it was assumed that a respondent experienced disinformation if he or she gave at least one “definitely agree” answer in relation to any statement within a given thematic area.

The study found that the two areas most affected by disinformation in Poland were climate and energy. More than half of the surveyed Poles (52%) had false beliefs in this area, of which 53% (“absolutely agree” and “mostly agree” responses) believed that a nuclear plant posed a threat to the local population and that in five years Poland could experience problems with access to drinking water. Renewable energy sources were also targeted by disinformation measures. A total of 36% of respondents believed that the storage of phased-out wind turbines involved environmental hazards, and 27% thought using renewable energy did not contribute to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂). The same proportion of respondents in Poland, the country of the “black gold” (coal), claimed that a global warming conspiracy was organised to destroy coal-based economies, with 20% of the surveyed Poles having no established opinion on this matter. Some Poles also believed that global warming was a conspiracy plotted by globally powerful actors to keep people in fear.

Health proved to be an equally problematic area. Nearly half of the surveyed Poles held false beliefs about this crucial sphere of human life. Meanwhile, as shown by Eurobarometer’s April-May 2021 studies (European Union, 2021), not only was there no increase in interest in medical discoveries among Poland’s population relative to the previous year but a decrease of 4 points was recorded. Poland came second to last in Europe, ahead of Bulgaria. Most false information involved the belief that producers were hiding information about harmful food ingredients/additives (this belief was represented by as many as 63% of Poles) and that genetically modified plants were unhealthy for people (57%). A major part of disinformation measures involves the COVID-19 pandemic. A whopping 30% of the surveyed Poles believed that the pandemic was a plot, with 22% having no established opinion on the matter. The belief that breastfeeding eliminated the risk of cancers in women, one with very dangerous health implications, was displayed by 28% of respondents, and as many as 32% did not know the subject! Equally dangerous was the belief that a suitable diet (e.g., rich in vitamin C) could replace oncological treatment – 15% of the surveyed Poles agreed with this statement, while the same percentage did not know whether it was true or false. A total of 13% of the surveyed Poles believed that vaccines caused autism (21%), although this claim had been repeatedly disproved for many years. The same percentage believed that SARS, swine flu,

and COVID-19 resulted from introducing 3G, 4G, and 5G technologies (17% could not answer the question).

The development of the 5G network in Europe became the target of mass disinformation attacks in 2021. And it was largely owing to these attacks that 25% of Poles thought that the radio waves used by 5G networks, sent with the strength specific to this technology, were dangerous to humans (as many as 23% of the respondents could not answer the question), while 22% thought that 5G networks were activated to engage in government surveillance of users (20% had no opinion on the subject). 19% of the respondents believed that Wi-Fi and cellular networks caused headaches and brain cancer (a whopping 23% had no opinion on the matter). Conspiracy theories also affected technology-related issues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 14% of respondents thought that Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, was responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic (17% had no opinion on the matter), while 12% of Poles believed that increased COVID-19 death rates were experienced by those countries in which 5G networks were introduced on a mass scale (20% declared not know the subject). Interestingly, the same percentage of respondents claimed that Americans never landed on the moon and that the landing was a mystification shot in a desert. At the same time, as shown by the results of Eurobarometer studies, the majority of the surveyed Poles had a largely positive view of the impact of science and technology on society. Only 7% of the respondents had a negative assessment of the subject, placing Poland in the fourteenth position in Europe (European Union, 2021).

Disinformation was also a concern in the area of politics. The most polarising view among Poles was that feminism and LGBT were ideologies aimed at forcing the majority of Poles

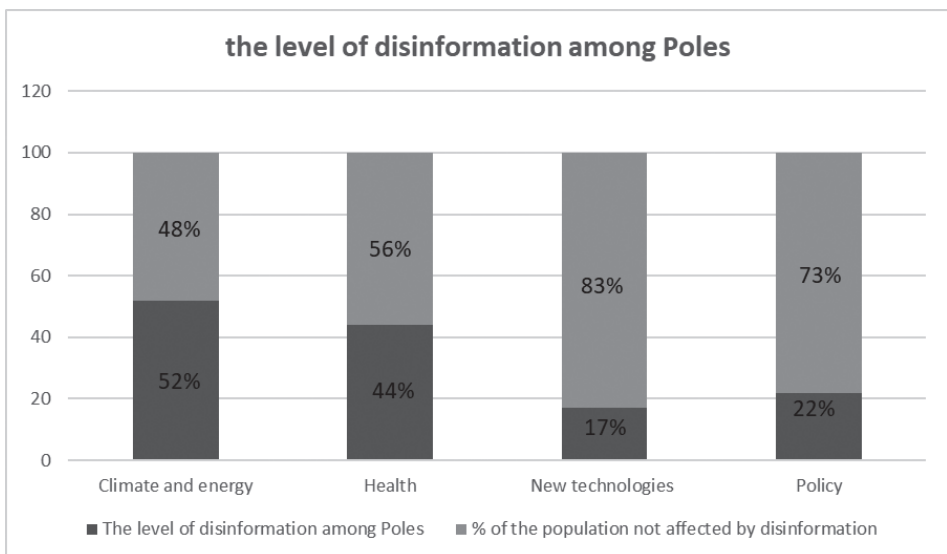


Table 1. The Level of Disinformation among Poles

to adopt a different lifestyle. This view was shared by a whopping 31% of the respondents (10% had no opinion on the matter). The pandemic is another highly controversial subject from a political viewpoint. A total of 24% of Polish respondents believed that hidden forces were aiming to take over the world and depopulate the planet and that the pandemic was a clandestine operation to achieve this.

In Poland, television remains the main source of knowledge of the world (66%). However, general Internet access has shifted the impact on Poles' views to online portals (61%), social media (45%), and search engines (42%). The radio and the press still have a significant impact (49% and 40%, respectively). Unfortunately, fewer respondents used online directories and specialist websites (e.g., medOnet, Business Insider) (31%). A similar percentage used blogs/forums and Wikipedia (30% and 26%, respectively). Family and friends play a crucial role in shaping our views. 39% of the surveyed acquired information from them. Other important direct interactions include contacts with work colleagues and school peers. 19% of Poles shaped their views based on such contacts. An alarming finding is that a relatively small percentage of people seek knowledge of the world in scientific publications/documentaries, encyclopaedias, and books (both hard copies and online versions). The proportion was 32% and 26% of the respondents. Unfortunately, only 5% of Poles used fact-checking sites while looking for information.

More often than women, men used external sources (69% television and 65% Internet). They also more frequently referred to scientific publications/documentaries (34%) and encyclopaedias & books (30%). For women, social contacts are more important as far as acquiring knowledge is concerned. They more often got information from contacts with family and friends (44%) or people from work or school (24%).

Television (78%), online portals (72%), and search engines (50%) were the main source of knowledge for people aged 55 or more. They were also more inclined to refer to specialist publications (over 30%). Young people (18–34) most often acquired knowledge from social media (54%). Interestingly enough, the opinion of people in their closest and more distant environment (e.g., school) was also important for them. As many as 46% of members of this age group built their knowledge of the world on these people's views.

Education is a variable with a crucial impact on Polish people's choice of sources of knowledge of the world. The most evident differences were identified among people with higher education. They most willingly used online portals (65%), search engines (45%), online directories (39%), printed press (44%), scientific publications/documentaries (39%), and encyclopaedias & books (31%). It is worth mentioning that television was used to a similar extent by people with all types of education, with a slight prevalence of secondary education (68%). People with secondary education were also more willing to use the radio (51%), search engines (42%), and social media (47%). The opinion of family and friends was also of the essence for members of this group (43%). They also more frequently acquired knowledge from instant messengers (19%). The knowledge of people with primary education comes predominantly from information sent via e-mails and text messages. These people

are also possibly more susceptible to phishing, as attacks are carried out through these channels. They are less inclined to discuss these topics with their families, friends, and work colleagues. However, they were willing to gain knowledge from television (65%) and the Internet, particularly social media (45%).

As it turns out, a place of residence significantly impacts the choice of sources of knowledge. Residents of larger cities above 500,000 residents were the most inclined to use television (70%), radio (56%), and printed press (50%). They were also the most frequent users of online portals (59%), search engines (53%), and online directories (42%). Their other favourite sources of knowledge were scientific publications (46%) and books (38%). Interestingly, they used fact-checking services the least often (2%). Residents of medium-sized cities (from 100,000 to 500,000 residents) most frequently acquired their knowledge from television and the Internet. They also relatively often used scientific publications (32%), instant messengers (19%), electronic mail (16%), and to a limited extent, the radio. In small towns, the Internet is a dominant source. Living in small communities, however, does not have any specific impact on the choice of sources of knowledge of the world. The results of their residents were within the national average. Greater deviations from the average were observed among the residents of rural areas, as they demonstrated less frequent use of online portals (56%), search engines (38%), and printed press (34%). Greater significance was attached to family/friends (45%) and contacts at work or school (26%). It is probably motivated by the natural closeness of direct interactions typical for small rural areas.

The majority of Polish society declared that the notion of disinformation was known to them (86% of the surveyed). The term was the most often familiar to men (91%), the elderly (92%), residents of urban areas (approx. 90%), and individuals with higher education. The data are largely consistent with the above-presented statistics on the sources of Poles' knowledge of the world.

At the same time, few people were able to provide their own definition of disinformation, the most often pointing to the following: *manipulation / intentional manipulation of facts / intentionally providing manipulated information* (36 indications where multiple answers were allowed), *lie/ false information / completely made up information passed as truth* (23 indications), *falsehood / false documents / fabricating false information / purposefully providing untrue information* (20 indications), *contradicting truth / denying facts / contradicting facts / not admitting the truth* (10 indications).

The obtained definition attempts to make it possible to formulate many interesting conclusions regarding understanding the category of disinformation rather than the ability to formulate thoughts. First of all, disinformation is expressed as a synonym of *fake news* (23), *intentional manipulation of facts* (36); in this case, the respondents associated disinformation with manipulation, *fabrication*, and *false information* (20), *anti-information* (5), and *concealing* (4). It should be noted that disinformation is undoubtedly evaluated negatively as dysfunctional communication.

In the second group of definitions, the respondents built a category based on its objectives or functions, which resulted in the following statements: *publishing information for one's own purposes or benefit* (4), *causing chaos or confusion* (2), *influencing preferences and attitudes of the public* (1), *causing disorientation* (1), *creating unrest* (1), *causing information overload and chaos* (1).

In the third group, the respondents attempted to define by associating the phenomenon with its best example, such as the name of a specific political party or TV station in the Polish media area.

It should be emphasised that each statement is a proper component of the dictionary definition of disinformation, but respondents adopted a different perspective or approach (objective, function, description). The attempts did not yield any concepts inconsistent with the essence of disinformation. The surveyed considered disinformation as relating to society, showing the lack of awareness that the phenomenon is nuanced and multifaceted. 1% of the respondents in their descriptions used a paraphrase of Goebbels' aphorism on propaganda, which provides a basis for a conclusion that the notion of disinformation is a separate category for the surveyed.

Slightly fewer respondents (81%) stated that they had encountered disinformation defined in one of five ways:

- Disinformation is the distribution of fake content to cause harm or achieve a different specific goal.
- Creating and distributing false information is most often motivated by the desire to gain profit, publicity or increase one's political influence.
- Disinformation means disseminating intentionally false information, e.g., on the military power or plans of a given country by, e.g., the government or the intelligence service of another country as part of, e.g., a hostile military *coup d'état*.
- The word disinformation is often used more generally to describe a series of intentionally misleading activities or disseminating biased information, a manipulated narrative, or even propaganda.
- The purpose of disinformation is, e.g., to cause the recipient of false information to make a wrong decision or develop a misinformed view on a given subject (e.g., vaccines, 5G, nuclear energy, climate, or government's actions).

Again, the majority of these respondents were men (87%), the elderly (89%), residents of urban areas (above 80%), and individuals with higher education (86%). Recognising disinformation was the most difficult for women (76%), young people (74%), residents of rural areas (75%), and people with primary education (66%).

Discussion and Conclusions

The image arising from the results of the survey is that of a digitalised information society which acquires content within a broad range of topics, from local to global. Polish society gets information from the media or directly from interpersonal contacts (even though the content acquired in such a way originates from the media), shows interest in current events, and actively responds to various dilemmas and challenges in the public sphere. Therefore, it may be assumed that Polish society has a consolidated pattern of participation through importing and exporting content in the national and international infosphere. The respondents showed fragmentary knowledge of categories of disinformation in the theoretical and practical aspects. Unfortunately, there are no more optimistic conclusions.

Despite the theoretically grounded knowledge of the issue, susceptibility to disinformation can be assessed as high. The consequences of disinformation overload, especially in areas related to national security, should be regarded as threatening the strategic areas of the state security infrastructure. The tendency to absorb disinformation content and its ignorant resonance may encourage the activity of external entities in the Polish public opinion sphere, which may be potentially effective. What is particularly alarming is the emergence of large volumes of disinformation content in the area of new technologies and climate, which pose a threat to the development of the Polish economy. In turn, disinformation in the area of health creates a risk to society and the economy. For instance, the low COVID-19 vaccination rate causes many health issues and impacts the economy (repeating lockdowns, high costs of treatment of non-vaccinated people, etc.) and children and adolescents' education (including psychological problems).

Society's sensitivity to information does not show a tendency for content verification but rather for questioning the content released by national broadcasters, interest in and active seeking of alternative sources which unmask official narrations (as many as 40%) based on opinions and wrong inferences.

The risk arising from these assertions in times of information management as a strategic resource with a central role in political and economic rivalry and other areas should be treated as a priority challenge to address. The accumulation of disinformation brings far-reaching consequences: apart from information chaos and arguments being based on emotions and impulses, which has an impact on the economy, psychological problems of various age groups, and destabilisation of the opinion exchange platform through the domination of conflict over consensus.

Within the democratic political culture, access and participation in creating and processing information are one of the principles and concepts of a democratic system. Therefore, the focus should be placed on systemic legal measures by consistently using legal instruments to reveal abuse and offences in the media sphere (Chałubińska-Jentkiewicz, 2021).

Despite its long-term perspective, an equally important issue is the prevention and counteracting of information manipulation. This challenge needs to be addressed, but,

considering the specific characteristics of the Polish culture based on rustic and noble models, it is extremely difficult. In the context of the survey, it should be assumed that Polish society incorporates distrust towards media messages in massively reproduced conspiracy theories referring to new technologies, the climate, health, and politics – in virtually all key social domains. The priority seems to be to direct society towards rational verification of content based on sources consistent with the current state of knowledge and science. Any permanent aspect of change in this area will bring positive effects on social security.

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