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Online soft skills systems as an effective protection tool for non-professionals against fake news distribution

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Abstract. The flood of information makes validating information more difficult because it is increasingly difficult for people to obtain valid information. Before there were new media technologies and the Internet, people could access information through print, radio, television, books, and orally. Online services are becoming the main space for public education, news, exchange of different kinds of data. Owing to online platforms it became possible for users to join social groups, stay up to date with the main events. Furthermore, the principle of operation of the same online services frequently causes information bubbles and prevents credible information flow. On its turn public sphere is getting fragmented. Consequently in this environment, variety often merges with uncertainty, resulting in information cascades in which people spread data with limited assurances of authenticity. The spread of misinformation online as a natural process combines with private interests looking for political or financial benefits. An intentional spread of false information considers as disinformation due to the damage it brings to society and its actors.

Key words: fake news, soft skills, misinformation, disinformation, non-professionals, false information.

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Научная статья

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Онлайн soft skills системы как эффективная защита непрофессионалов от распространения фейковых новостей

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Аннотация. Поток новостей затрудняет проверку подлинности информации, поэтому неспециалистам становится все труднее получать достоверную информацию. До появления новых медиа-технологий и Интернета люди могли получать информацию через печать, радио, телевидение, книги и устно. Сегодня онлайн-сервисы стали основным пространством для просвещения населения, новостей, обмена разного рода данными. Благодаря онлайн-платформам, у пользователей появилась возможность вступать в социальные группы, быть в курсе основных событий. Кроме того, принцип работы одних и тех же онлайн-сервисов часто приводит к возникновению информационных пузырей и предотвращает проникновение достоверной информации. В свою очередь, публичная сфера фрагментируется. Следовательно, в этой среде разнообразие часто смешивается с неопределенностью, что приводит к информационным каскадам, в которых люди распространяют данные с ограниченными гарантиями подлинности. Распространение дезинформации в сети как естественный процесс сочетается с частными интересами, ищущими политические или финансовые выгоды. Намеренное распространение ложной информации считается дезинформацией из-за вреда, который она наносит обществу и его акторам.

Ключевые слова: фейковые новости, soft skills, дезинформация, лживая информация, непрофессионалы, недостоверная информация.

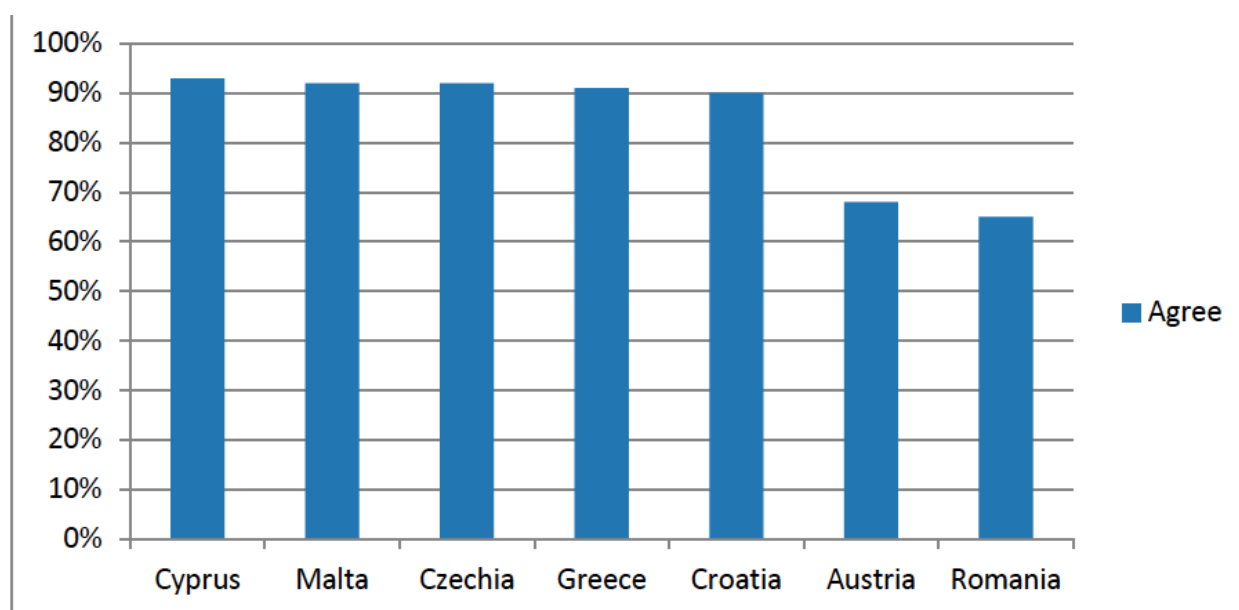
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Introduction

"Fake News" and its synonyms like false news or disinformation campaigns are all mostly dealing with different forms of propaganda and information warfare. Fake News becoming an effective tool to manipulate for more often the public especially non-professionals with false information. An online

survey conducted between January and February 2022 discovered that 93% of Cyprus respondents believed that news distorting reality, or false news, was a problem for democracy overall. A comparable proportion of respondents in Malta, Czechia Region, Greece, and Croatia agreed on that. Austrians and Romanians were less likely to accept that with fewer than 70% of respondents if the both EU member states (chat 1).

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Chat 1. Fake News and Democracy: Opinions in EU Countries 2022

Source: Attitudes to whether news or information that misrepresents reality or is false is a problem for democracy in EU member states as of February 2022, by country. Statista : website. Available at: URL: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1077905/is-fake-news-a-problem-for-democracy-eu/> (accessed 24.03.2023). Registration required

Countering fake news is a difficult task for an amateur. This is because either under the influence of emotions misinformation (unintentional spread of fake information) spreads like an avalanche and uncontrollably, or a team of professionals working against the townsfolk to spread disinformation with a set of soft and hard skills. Regular people need a set of instruments that could help them deal with any types of fake information correctly. That is possible by developing a combination of such competences as critical thinking, ability to acquire knowledge, ecological thinking, self – reflection. According to research it is proven that soft skills help common citizens detect and handle the effect of fake news [Bastick 2021].

The aim of the article is to empower non-professionals with a set of tools enabling to detect and protect themselves against fake information. The object of research is fake news as

a contemporary media phenomena. The subject of this study is the influence of fake news on soft skills of non-professionals. This research is based on recent sociological background of local media around the world with the aim to find out the possibility of non-professionals to detect and handle fake news. Rather than focus on a specific case, the paper provides an overview of soft skills level among modern online users in the age from 18 to 29 soft skills. Following a definition of essential concepts, the article summarizes the results of a survey that examined the level of soft skills among teenage online users.

The paper outlines the main features of BANI-concept as a determining factor for developing particular soft-skills. The study investigates into many problems for individuals whose work overlaps with atrocity prevention, such as social media firms, traditional (legacy) media, non-governmental civil society players, scholars and civil society,

governments and international organizations. The article finishes with specific advice for non-professional online media audiences to diminish the spread of misleading information and tensions. The study is based on surveys, scientific research, and practitioner interviews, as well as the authors' professional experience in this subject.

Post-truth era and Fake News Classification

Usually **disinformation** is distributed by netizens who are aware that the information is not correct. Disinformation is a deliberate deceit via spreading a lie, **mal-information**, is based on real facts though it is used to harm the target audience. **Misinformation** is spread by people who believe the incorrect information is to be true.

According to recent statistical studies, social networks have become the main source of news among Internet users in the last decade. The absolute majority of users of online information search services are young people aged 18 to 29 years. In this regard, it is this age group that becomes the main one in studies of the influence of fake news on Internet users [Auxier & Anderson 2021].

Also, recent studies have shown that it is difficult for this focus group to determine the consumed information as fake news. No wonder Americans of age 19 to 29 find it difficult to detect the level of news truthfulness. According to a new national research from edtech firm MindEdge Learning, 59% of young professionals are extremely confident in their mastery of soft skills, particularly critical thinking abilities. However, this confidence is grossly mistaken. The second annual State of Critical Thinking research, commissioned by MindEdge and performed by ResearchNow, discovered that the majority of people polled were unable to pass a simple nine-question exam of their digital literacy and critical thinking abilities. According to the 2018 findings, 64% of respondents acquire their news from social media, with just 30% of the sample saying that they read a verified news source (such as a newspaper) on a regular basis, the possibility of encountering fraudulent or misleading material online is significant (Chat 2).

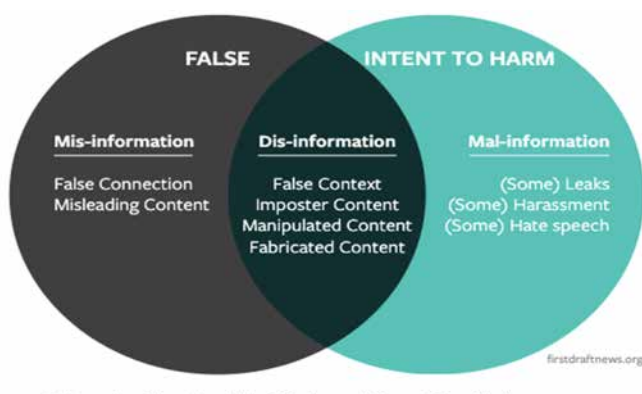
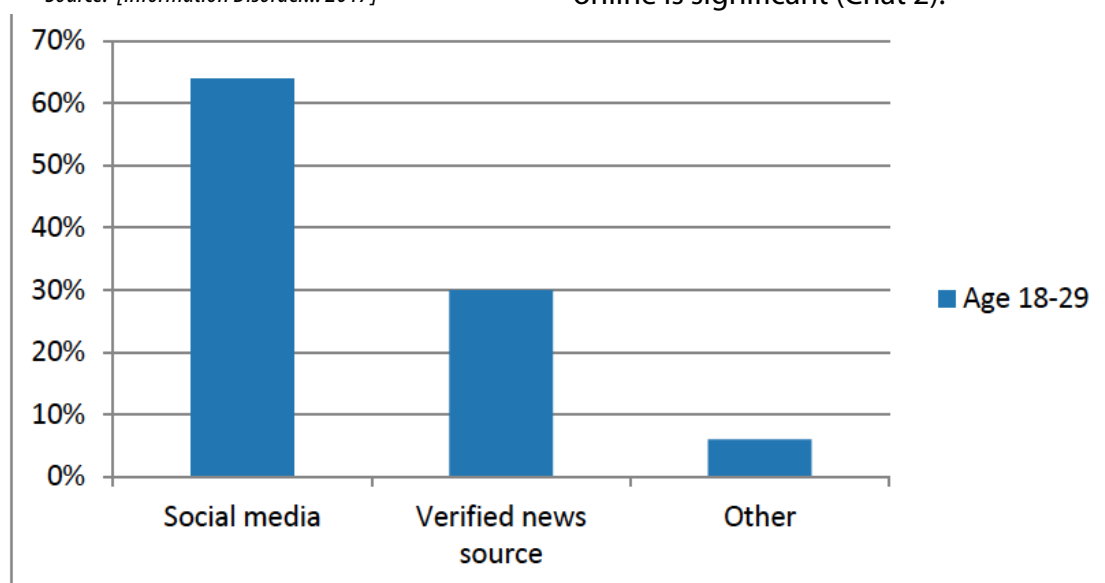


Figure 1. Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation.

Source: [Information Disorder... 2017]

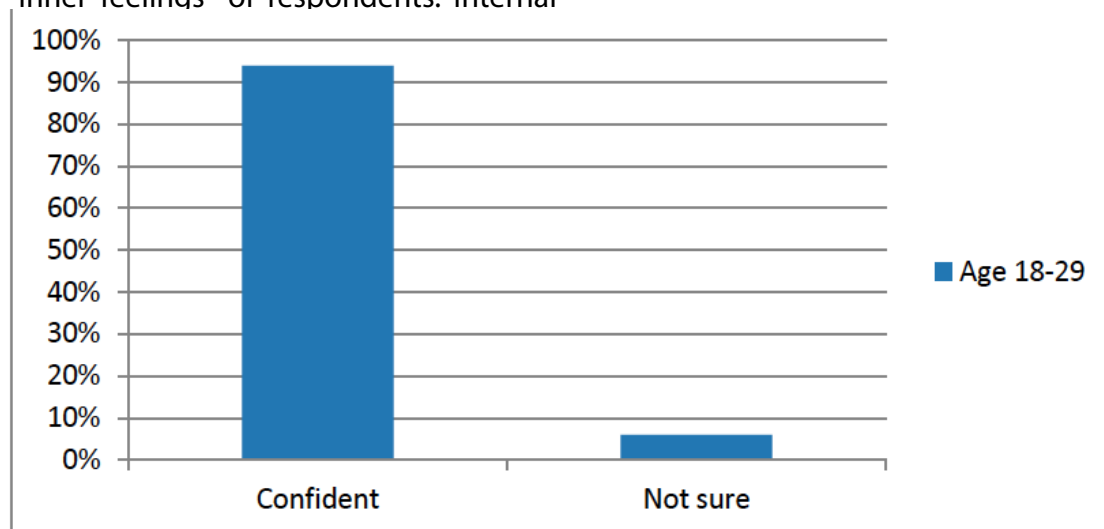


Chat 2. Source That Respondents Get Their News From

Source: [New MindEdge.. 2018]

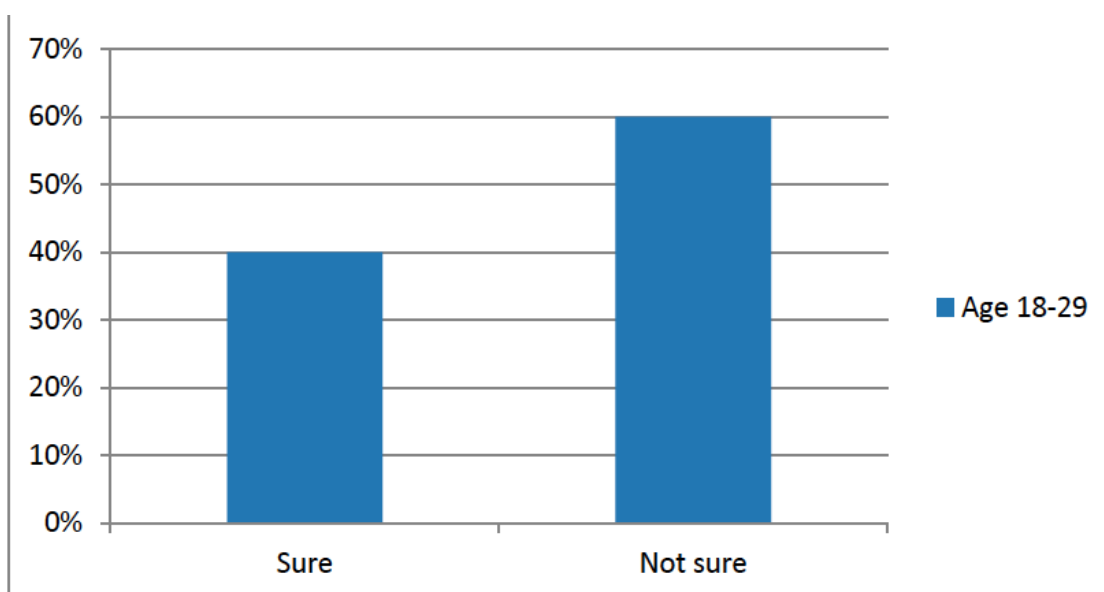
While nearly all young people (94%) feel soft in their own abilities (Chat 4) [Mindedge 2018] In skills are vital in evaluating websites and online this regard, it follows that the majority of the focus material (Chat 3), just 40% are extremely confident group does not rely on soft skills, but tries to apply

emotions. The main way to determine reliability is feelings are a subjective assessment. often the "inner feelings" of respondents. Internal



Chat 3. Soft Skills are Important in Assessing Websites and Online News Content

Source: [New MindEdge... 2018]

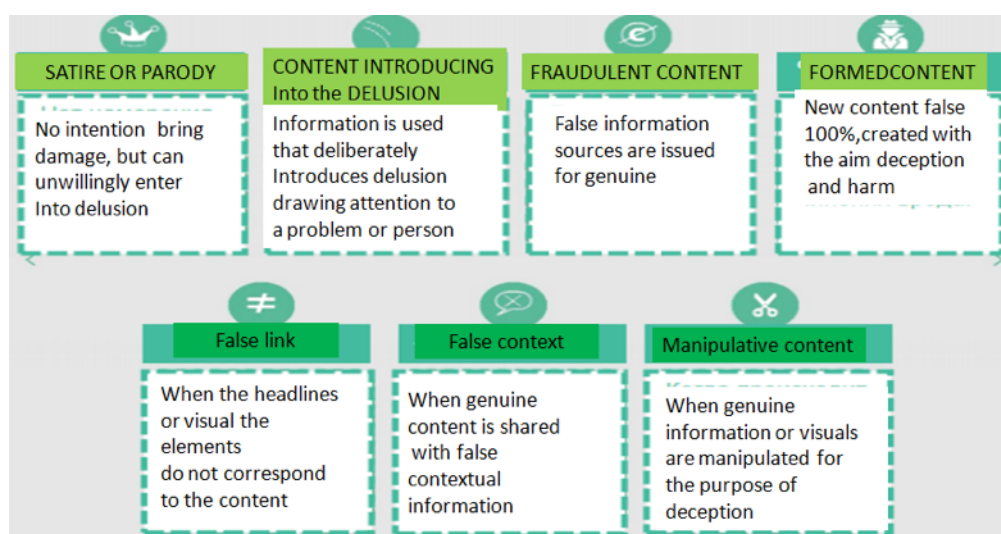


Chat 4. Confident About Their Own Soft Skills

Source: [New MindEdge... 2018]

However only feelings are not enough to adapt in the modern world of instability and instant changes. Economists Warren Bennis and Bert Nanus proposed a VUCA acronym (V – Volatility, U – Uncertainty, C – Complexity, A – Ambiguity) for explaining that post Cold War period proved world would no longer be the same and the technological flywheel was launched. With the development of technology, the pace of human life also increases, requires rapid adaptation and readiness for change [Bennis 2007].

Until recently, it appeared that humanity had adapted to the chaotic period and learned to deal with unpredictability and amorphousness. VUCA has become shorthand for modernism among humans. However, in 2020, the world was presented with a new problem, distorting the typical contours of chaos. To gain control over the processes seething in the global cauldron, we must first attempt to clarify them. In other words, the idea of VUCA eventually ceased to be adequate in describing the rules of the new world. Some scientists believe that the age of VUCA has already passed. A novel idea of BANI was coined in 2016 by futurologist Jamais Cascio. It functions similarly in that it defines the world in four words. Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible are the characteristics of BANI [Cascio 2020].



Chat 5. Seven Categories of "Information Disorder"

Source: [Information Disorder... 2017]

In his publication Cascio claims "BANI is a way to better frame, and respond to, the current state of the world." [Cascio 2020]. The BANI framework provides a prism through which to see and organize what is going on in the world. At the very least, the acronym's components may hint at possible responses: brittleness may be met by adaptability; anxiety may be alleviated by empathy and mindfulness; nonlinearity requires context and flexibility; and incomprehensibility requires transparency and intuition. These may be more reactions than solutions, but they do imply that solutions are possible.

In a changing and dynamic environment, acting according to a defined plan, following the set route, and being led by templates is inefficient. Proponents of the VUCA and BANI paradigms, on the other hand, advocate for emotional intelligence and "flexible" abilities, sometimes known as soft skills. % of them are highly confident in their abilities.

It was mentioned earlier that fake news can be misinforming – spread intentionally and usually by trained specialists and misinforming – spread unintentionally in a fit of emotion and a desire to notify a circle of acquaintances about shocking news first. Different soft skills developed by non-professionals are highly depend on the type of fake news and on who distributes them.

The dissemination of information may be compared to a battleground, with distributors and recipients on opposing sides of the barricades. To strengthen resistance to false news, information recipients must be able to recognize it in order to

recognize its untruth and choose not to distribute it. Such soft skills like critical thinking will be useful for these goals. The essential keys to developing critical thinking as a talent are logical reasoning and observation abilities. This may be accomplished using two methods: the "5-W, 1-H" fact checking system and the IMVAIN source checking approach.

Nevertheless, disinformation is more visible and preventive in comparison with misinformation. Often, society unknowingly becomes a distributor of false information and thereby triggers a chain reaction of the spread of fakes. According to a December 2020 questionnaire, 38.2% of news consumers in the United States had unwittingly posted bogus news or information on social media. A comparable proportion had not, and 7% were unclear if they had mistakenly propagated disinformation on social media [Watson 2023].

In this regard, singling out a critical thinking as the basis of a solution for fake news spread is not enough in the modern BANI-world conditions. In the current instance, there is a special need for the development of the particular soft skills that could help non-professionals to stop in time and not become another link in the unconscious spread of fakes.

To begin, ecological thinking as a soft skill is defined as the ability to relate to events consciously without harming oneself or others. Ecological thinking presumes responsibility for one's actions as well as a positive attitude toward the environment. In general, ecological thinking presumes a conscious grasp of the consequences of human behaviors,

not just for the individual but also for society. The development of constructive thinking rather than reactive thinking is the major means of encouraging eco-friendly conduct in individuals. Environmental thinking can assist you in recognizing the implications of unintentional propagation of false information – misinformation.

Secondly, self – evaluation is an objective examination of one's own actions, conduct, and activities. It aids in evaluating acts, realizing them, and deciding what to do next. This talent fosters awareness, or the capacity to make better judgments. If a non-professional is conscious of himself, he is conscious of his need for credible information.

Finally, learnability is the final but not least soft skill that non-professionals should cultivate. Learnability is the ability to learn new information and use it to solve issues in everyday settings. Skills develop knowledge, and knowledge creates skills. It is vital to put thoughts and theories into practice and develop them into full-fledged competencies rather than merely collecting them. Information management aids in the selection of acceptable information sources, classifying it, and maintaining the training plan.

Conclusion

Yesterday everything circled around the parties, today everything circles around and in the space of the media. The flood of information makes validating information more difficult because it is increasingly difficult for people to obtain valid information. Before there were new media technologies and the Internet, people could access information through print, radio, television, books, and orally. As it proved misinformation spreads naturally online, combining with private interests seeking political or commercial gain.

The deliberate distribution of misleading information is classified as disinformation because of the harm it causes society, such as skewed markets and damaged democracy. We presented quite a new conceptual approach to information

disorder concept, which is being based on the three platforms like agents, messages and interpreters.

The more serious case and disastrous for society is not the dissemination of disinformation as such, but the unintentional dissemination of disinformation, which is more damaging to the information field. This happens in view of the anxiety arising against the background of rapid changes in the world. A 5G network implementation case caused fake news circulating as 'COVID-19' spreader. The fake utterance supported by medical doctors who tried to convince their patients not to rely on major medical practices was also a form of fraud in the case of 5G.

In this regard, there is a need to develop a strategy not only for recognizing fake news by non-professionals, but also the ability of more non-professionals to resist the increasing lack of clarity and panic, which means not to unknowingly become a link in fake news distribution. Moreover, the problem of fake news spreading among non-professionals is not limited to the already popular skill of critical thinking. The set of soft skills for the layman is diverse and can help develop the ability. The main fact of reality is that when trying to verify information for authenticity, non-professionals make the main mistake – they use other unreliable sources, unaware that the resource is unreliable. In this regard, the relevance of this study is quite high, and recommendations regarding the development of soft skills as a possible solution to the problem are of practical value for non-professionals.

As a result of the study, it was possible to establish a set of tools in the form of unpopular soft skills with a description of techniques that can reduce the spread of misinformation. The paper concludes with exact recommendations for non-professional online media audience to prevent tensions and intensions spread of false information. The report is based on surveys, scientific and studies among practitioners, and the authors' own experience in this field.

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