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MEDIA LAB FOR BRIDGING CROSS BORDER GAPS



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Media Lab for Bridging Cross-border gaps

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Analysis and recommendations of cross-border gaps in Media Literacy: the case of Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia and Poland



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Introduction

(Author: Paschalia (Lia) Spyridou)

Mounting evidence suggests that the Internet has democratized access to information but in doing so it has opened the floodgates to misinformation, fake news and propaganda (Tandoc, 2019). Social media, in particular, have contradicted long-held beliefs in the democratizing promise of the internet, as they are primarily targeted as information tools for amplifying and circulating disinformation (boyd, 2017). Since the American presidential elections in 2016 the amount of fake news and propaganda has proliferated raising serious concerns ranging from a poor news diet and an uninformed citizenry to opinion manipulation. Special concerns have been expressed in the case of young people; being avid users of social networks and lacking critical media literacy skills, young people are prone to consuming fake, polarizing and de-contextualized news. But a healthy news diet is a basic prerequisite for a functioning democracy. Despite a growing amount of problematic news, good information is still produced and with the right set of skills, individuals can sort through it and find something useful. However, considering that malicious actors intentionally dump disinformation online with an aim to distract and overwhelm, the task of finding well-resourced and well-meant news is becoming even harder. This development and its high-stake solution has focused renewed attention on the field of media literacy.

Media literacy “concerns the *relationship* among textuality, competence and power. [...]. The promise of media literacy is that it can form part of a strategy to reposition the media user - from passive to active, from recipient to participant, from consumer to citizen (Livingstone, 2004a: 20). Hartley (2002) argues that (media) literacy “is ideologically and politically charged - it can be used as a means of social control or regulation, but also as a progressive weapon in the struggle for emancipation” (p. 136).

According to a well-established definition of media literacy, media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms” (Aufderheide,1993). Although this definition emphasizes the skills mastered in order to cope effectively with symbolic content, the concept of media literacy cannot be reduced to the acquisition of skills per se, but it is important to also explore the institutional and social processes that influence and eventually shape the ability of people to access, analyse, evaluate and produce media content. In that vein, Sonia Livingstone (2004b) argues that media literacy is associated with the historically and culturally conditioned relationship among three processes, which are interrelated: a) the symbolic and material representation of knowledge, culture and values; b) the diffusion of interpretative skills and abilities across a

(stratified) population; and c) the institutional, especially, the state management of the power that access to and skilled use of knowledge brings to those who are 'literate'.

Livingstone's remark highlights the 'national' character of media literacy. However, in order to effectively discuss media literacy in a globalised and converged media environment one needs to take into consideration not merely the multidimensionality of the concept, but also to consider cross-border gaps. The current political and media environment is one of high stakes for media literacy efforts, and naturally there is a push for new media literacy initiatives (Bulger & Davison, 2018). It is important though that such initiatives should address the various dimensions, processes and stakeholders that ultimately shape media literacy efforts and also identify and analyse the subsequent cross-border gaps. If more systematic actions are taken in this direction, a more coherent and effective agenda can be developed for empowering citizens in a highly complex and often malicious communication environment.

Aim of the Methodology

Taking into consideration that participating countries (Lithuania, Poland, Greece, North Macedonia, Cyprus, and Latvia) comprise different communication environments and thus are faced with different challenges and barriers in the direction of media literacy, the aim of the methodology is to identify and analyse six existing cross-border gaps on media literacy.

These gaps pertain to the communication environment, the education system and institutional approaches and efforts. In particular, the project focuses on:

1. media trust
2. media literacy in compulsory education
3. impact of different media on youth
4. news consumption by youth
5. disinformation and fact-checking initiatives to combat fake news
6. media involvement in media literacy

Gaps are discussed in terms of their type, origin, scope, importance, and impact, with an emphasis on young people. For instance, in communication systems with low pluralism and few alternatives, the media are quite powerful, and users' dependency is quite strong. On the contrary, in pluralistic systems, people have many alternatives, the media are less powerful and thus barriers to media literacy tend to be weaker.

The methodology aims to guide and facilitate the development of a tool to evaluate efficiency of implemented programs and/or measures taken in the six countries. This tool will address the aforementioned parameters. Also, it aims to

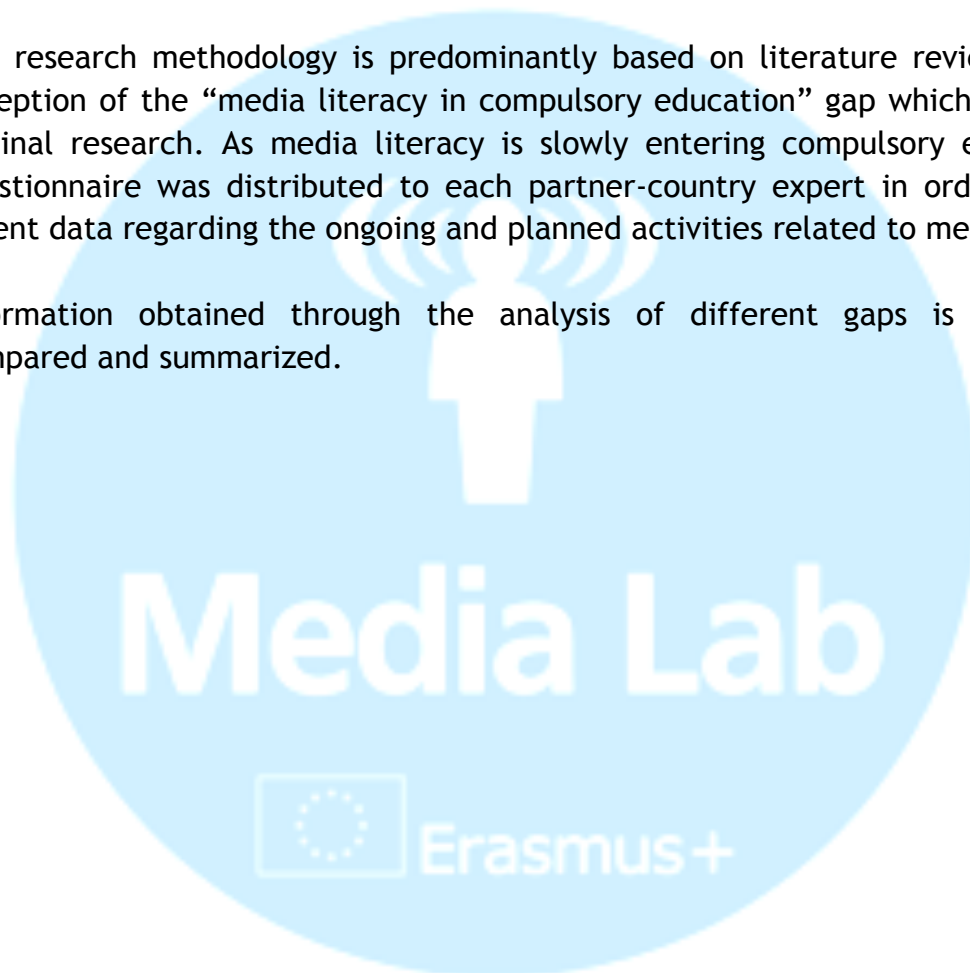
provide guidelines and tools for different stakeholders (media, trainers, politicians) as to how they can contribute in improving the media literacy skills of young people.

Theoretical and methodological provisions of the research

Methodology is part of the ‘Media Lab’ project and aims to provide a conceptual framework in order to implement planned analysis and to have evidence-based findings and recommendations for the policy makers and practitioners.

The research methodology is predominantly based on literature review with the exception of the “media literacy in compulsory education” gap which is based on original research. As media literacy is slowly entering compulsory education, a questionnaire was distributed to each partner-country expert in order to solicit recent data regarding the ongoing and planned activities related to media literacy.

Information obtained through the analysis of different gaps is confronted, compared and summarized.



Gap 1: Media Trust

(Author: Olga Dragileva)

Introduction

Trust is a concept used by researchers, pollsters and policymakers for decades to measure citizens' attitude to democratic institutions, including the media. Pavličková et al. (2013) refer to trust in media as a decision to be willing to take risks, active placing of faith in the credibility of a media outlet and a journalist. The publication points out that trust in media consists of faith in the journalistic process as having the audience's interest at heart; believing in the credibility of a media organization and motivations of specific journalists and their credibility. Even when trust in media is measured, pollsters do not provide definition of this term, in this analysis it is assumed that "trust in media" is understood as an active faith of the audience in the content, provided by the media outlet and its truthfulness.

For the purpose of comparing trust in media between partner countries this report largely relies on various studies and reports by reputable organizations. It has to be noted that there is no single comprehensive study, which measures general "trust in media" with the same methodology in all partner countries during the same period of time. Therefore, this analysis takes into account research into different aspects of trust in media in different countries.

Trust in media in partner countries

Poland

According to the "Digital News Report" by Reuters Institute, overall trust in news in Poland has fallen and is 48% in 2018 and 2019 (compared to 53% in 2017 report), while only 55% of respondents trust the news they use themselves (60% in 2017).

It has to be noted that overall in comparison to other countries trust in the media in Poland is not low. Despite the mentioned problems, it ranks in top-5 (out of 36) in the Reuters report every year. According to Eurobarometer, the percentage of Poland's population that has high trust in the media is slightly higher than in average in the European Union.

Authors of the "Digital News Report" attribute their findings to the fact that many journalists and outlets are transparent about their world-views and motives, and attract audiences who think alike. According to Reuters, Poland's political

landscape has become deeply polarised and media outlets that are able to distance themselves from this polarisation are trusted more. The authors notice that “the general trend is that private independent media score higher on a trust scale than public service broadcasters acting in recent years more like government cheerleaders. The biggest winners may be RMF FM and Polsat, broadcasters of the most popular radio and TV channels, whose owners try to stay away from political conflict”, while 2018 report points out that “the State TV broadcaster (TVP) rates lower than *Fakt*, a tabloid with a topless girl on a daily back cover”.

The fact that the Polish public broadcaster enjoys much less trust than private ones, is confirmed also by the recent IPSOS worldwide study on trust in media. Amongst 26 countries included in this study, Poland is the one where public media is trusted least.

“Special Eurobarometer 452” finds that 62% of Poles say their national media do not provide information free from political or commercial pressure and only 28% think that their national public service media are free from political pressure and 44% are convinced media provide trustworthy information.

“Special Eurobarometer 452” also finds that young people are almost as likely to find information media provide as trustworthy, the report says 42% out of the age group 14-25 agree with this statement.

North Macedonia

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung country report on North Macedonia states only 14% of respondents have high confidence in the work of journalists; contrarily 38% distrust the journalists tremendously. When asked to choose the most trusted source of information (TV, radio, social media, etc), a third of Macedonians give no answer.

The same report also includes findings that might explain such low levels of trust in media in North Macedonia. Majority of Macedonians do not believe in press independence.

(Only 15% percent of the population believes in a real independent press in North Macedonia) and a little more than a third (38%) of the citizens feel well informed about politics by the media. Macedonians are also unaware of institutions responsible for self-regulation of the media.

Levels of trust in media amongst youth are even lower than generally amongst the population. Only 11% of the respondents from the age group 18-29 have high trust

in journalists. Young people feel even less informed by the media about current political topics than the rest of the population (33% vs 38%).

The latest “Freedom house” report includes factors that possibly contribute to the possible level of media trust: “North Macedonia’s media landscape is deeply polarized along political lines, and private media outlets are often tied to political or business interests that influence their content. Some critical and independent outlets operate and are found mainly online”.

Latvia

According to the “Eurobarometer 88” Latvia (alongside Lithuania) is the country with the highest trust in media amongst partner countries. 65% of its population has high or medium trust in the media, which is slightly above EU-28 average and more than any of the partner countries included in the Eurobarometer research.

“Special Eurobarometer 452” has found that 66% of Latvians agree their national media provide a diversity of views and opinions, which is the EU-28 average and the second-best result amongst partner countries. Only 30% believe that national media provide information free from political or commercial pressure and less than half believe that national media provide trustworthy information.

It can be assumed that trust in media in Latvia might be influenced by one peculiarity of the media landscape in this country. Informational space is divided between two communities, Latvian- and Russian-speaking, with main media portals, newspapers and even public media serving the population in two languages often with different framing of the main political events. Mutual distrust can be observed between these communities and political parties representing them, which translates into distrust by members of one of the communities of the media outlets, catering to the interest of the other community.

“Special Eurobarometer 452” finds that youth in Latvia is more likely to assume that national media provide trustworthy information. 52% of the respondents in the age group 15-24 agree with this statement, a higher result than in any other age group in Latvian population.

Lithuania

In Lithuania, 65% of the population trusts the country's media, according to the “Eurobarometer 88” study. 35% of Lithuanians have low or no trust in media,

according to the same study - this result is slightly below the EU-28 average and is the lowest amongst partner countries.

“Special Eurobarometer 452” shows that in Lithuania 74% of respondents agree their national media provide a diversity of views and opinions (result well above EU average and the best in the partner countries). 39% believe that national media provide information free from political or commercial pressure - slightly above EU-average and the best result amongst partner countries. 38% believe that their national public service media are free from political pressure. This is also the best result amongst partner countries.

As to the young audiences, the same source shows that Lithuanian youngsters trust the media much more than the rest of Lithuania's population. 62% of respondents in the age group 14-25 believe that national media provide trustworthy information - this is significantly higher than in other partner countries.

Greece

“Digital news report” by the Reuters Institute ranks Greece as one of the countries with the lowest trust in the media. Even though since this report finds that since 2017 trust in news has increased by several percentage points, still only 27% of respondents report that they trust news overall and only 33% trust the news they themselves use.

Also, Standard Eurobarometer 88 finds that levels of distrust in media in Greece are amongst the highest in Europe and the highest amongst the partner countries, which are included in the Eurobarometer study (all the countries, except North Macedonia). According to this survey 48% of Greeks have low or no trust in media, while only 14% have high trust in media.

In “Special Eurobarometer 452” study several factors were discovered, which presumably explain low trust in the media in Greece. Amongst EU-28 countries Greece is the only country where a majority of respondents say their national media do not provide a diversity of views and opinions and has the highest percentage (87%) of population who thinks that national media provide information free from political or commercial pressure. 73% of the population thinks that national media do not provide trustworthy information. Only 9% of Greeks believe that national public service media are free from political pressure. Reuters Institute report on Greece paints an even grimmer picture. Only 6% of Greeks see the media as free from undue political or commercial influence.

Authors at Reuters Institute conclude that Greeks have the lowest levels of trust in news in our survey and the greatest concerns about business and political influence over editorial content: “decades of corruption, political and business undue influences, and their targeting by left- and right-wing populist parties have resulted in the media being widely distrusted by Greek. An annual survey of trust in institutions in Greece shows that newspapers and broadcasters faced some of the most severe increases in mistrust compared to other institutions since before the financial crisis”.

Only 19% of the Reuters Institute study respondents think that the news media does a good job helping them distinguish fact from fiction, which, arguably, is the most basic mission of journalism. “The key to improving trust may be to understand and address the concerns of those (25%) that disagree or strongly disagree with the notion that the news media does a good job of separating fact from fiction”, concludes the report.

According to “Special Eurobarometer 452” young people are even less likely to think that media in Greece provide trustworthy information - only 18% in the age group 15-24.

According to the Pew research center report young people (aged 18-29) are less likely to closely follow local news. Out of the project partners it includes analysis of data on Poland and Greece. The study finds that in Greece only 62% of young people closely follow the local news (compared to 90% in the 50+ age group).

Cyprus

As Greece, Cyprus also stands out amongst partner countries as a state with very low trust in the media. 43% of its population has low or no trust in the media which is one of the worst results in the whole of European Union.

“Special Eurobarometer 452” finds that 36% of Cypriots believe their national media do not provide a diversity of views and opinions and 67% say that national media do not provide information free from political or commercial pressure. Similarly to Greece, only 21% of Cypriots think that national public service media are free from political pressure.

Interestingly, a relatively large portion of the country's population believes that national media provide trustworthy information - 49%. It is below the EU average, but more than in most partner countries (higher result is shown only in Lithuania).

According to the same study, it is young people who distrust the media the most. 43% of 14-24 years olds believe that the media provide trustworthy information.

Comparison between partner countries

Comparing the data provided by Eurobarometer studies and several other research reports, it becomes clear, that there is significant gap in trust in media between the partner countries, where Greece, Cyprus and North Macedonia are the states where media are trusted less and Latvia and Lithuania, where media are trusted slightly more and which rank above or at the level as EU average. Poland sits in the middle of this scale.

There is a seeming correlation between trust in media and belief of the audience in impartiality of the content the media provides. In Greece and Cyprus, alongside low trust in media audience also shows belief in media bias, related to political or business influence, in Greece researchers note influence of political corruption and targeting of media by populist parties as the main reason to distrust journalists, as well as belief that media do not help its audiences distinguish fact from fiction.

It has to be noted that even though Latvian audiences tend to trust the media in their country the most, the attitudes toward public media in this country are rather negative. Levels of distrust in public service media in Latvia are comparable to those of Cyprus.

Media polarisation does not necessarily mean distrust in the media. Both North Macedonia and Poland are described as countries with polarized media scenes, but in Poland audiences seem to find the media more trustworthy. This could be attributed to the fact that some publications distance themselves from the polarisation while others are open about their affiliation. At the same time there are several examples of strong investigative journalism in Poland.

There is an observable dynamic in difference in trust in media in young audiences, which also divides partner countries into two groups. In Greece and North Macedonia, which have low media trust amongst their population, young people have even lower trust in the truthfulness of media than the rest of the audience. In Latvia and Lithuania, where trust in media is higher, youngsters have higher trust in the truthfulness of media than the rest of the population.

Overall, there is a staggering gap in trust in media trust amongst youth between partner countries. While in Greece only 18% of youngsters (age group 15-24)

believe that the media provides trustworthy information and in North Macedonia 11% of young people (18-29) have high trust in journalists, in Lithuania 62% of 15 to 24 year olds trust in the information provided by the media.

According to Standard Eurobarometer 88 conducted in 2017, radio remains the mediums that Europeans trust the most: “59% “tend to trust”, while 34% “tend not to trust” radio. These results are unchanged since autumn 2016, and are the highest since autumn 2009. As to the project partner countries, radio is the most trusted media platform also in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, whilst Internet resources are most trusted in Greece and Television is the most trusted media platform in Macedonia. It has to be noted that in North Macedonia radio is the least trusted form of media.

All partner countries included in the 2018 Eurobarometer show another observable dynamic - printed newspapers are trusted significantly more than online, with the biggest difference in Latvia 65% trust in print newspapers vs. 52% trust in online newspapers. The least significant difference can be observed in Greece and Cyprus, where there is only a 5 percent difference between trust in print and online newspapers.

Even though there has not been research into reasons for low trust in media in all the partner countries, many authors made general conclusions on what contributes to trust or distrust in media. Reuters institute report finds that: “the main reasons of distrust in the media relate to bias, spin, and agendas. Simply put, a significant proportion of the public feels that powerful people are using the media to push their own political or economic interests, rather than represent ordinary readers or viewers. These feelings are most strongly held by those who are young and by those that earn the least”. To further prove its point, Reuters institute report mentions that one of the most often mentioned reasons for trust in media by respondents is trust in the journalistic process and its transparency. Authors of the report come to a conclusion: “Audiences today seem to appreciate greater openness on the part of media organisations about what is known but also what is unknown - especially with fast-moving stories.”

Conclusions

Partner countries exhibit different levels of trust in media; however low trust in media generally correlates with beliefs of media bias in general. Public media overall are more likely to be viewed as less trustworthy.

Recommendations

Observed differences between the partner countries, as well as correlations between trust in media and other factors have led to these recommendations for policy makers and journalism professionals.

1. Professional code of conduct and ethics for journalists of the whole country. It is advised that this document would be developed by a journalistic NGO, which does not have connection to any of the political parties and is not funded by the government. Development of this code needs to be followed by establishing a system of implementation, possibly an oversight institution such as an ombudsman.
2. Initiatives by media professionals and organisations (journalists, reporters, editors, management of media organisations) to explain the journalistic process - both in terms of the rules of a specific organisation and in terms of specific examples of journalistic materials.
3. Initiative by media organisations to introduce new approach in reporting - including information about specific aspects of reporting what are still unknown or remain to be investigated further, especially in the case of - breaking stories
4. Fact-checking initiatives by media outlets
5. Transparency in media. Initiatives by media outlets to reveal their bias and ownership structure.
6. Laws ensuring transparency of media ownership
7. Transparent and reliable system which insures independent public media. System of financing of the public media which insures independence from political parties and year-to-year budget decisions. System of oversight of public media, which insures lack of political pressure.



Gap 2: Media literacy education in compulsory education

(Authors: Salomėja Bitlieriūtė, Danuta Szejnicka)

The question of media literacy development in compulsory education is not a phenomenon that has emerged in recent years. Rapid growth of information technology and an increase in various information flows, influenced the need to realise the necessity of media literacy education. This is why in 2007 “12 media literacy education improvement recommendations” were stated in the UNESCO Paris Agenda. This agenda invited every European stakeholder to come to an agreement on a media literacy education definition and take action to implement it at every level of education. The Paris agenda states that stakeholders must review their education programs and incorporate media literacy education, prepare suitable educational material for students, integrate media literacy in initial teacher training, and mobilize the stakeholders within the education system, as well as the stakeholders in the social sphere. UNESCO used this and later documents to define the content of media literacy education and provisioned measures to implement the content in the process of education.

These recommendations have become more relevant in recent years when information streams are becoming less and less manageable. Traditional information channels, such as newspapers, radio and television which once enjoyed news monopoly, but also had the resources to validate and filter information, is no longer the only acceptable way to receive information.

Accessibility of information provided the necessary conditions of becoming not just a media creator, but also a consumer, with unreliable and unverified information at hand for anyone to forge any agenda-political or corporate and even use the sources for criminal purposes.

Improving critical thinking, message identification and ability to communicate and deliver messages have remained significant tasks in media literacy education, which goes hand in hand with responsibility for content in the public sphere and respect for human rights.

As information becomes more accessible, civil engagement towards a nation's public and political life rises, which is why the citizens' ability to recognize erroneous, manipulative information and take the right decisions to prevent social harm, becomes increasingly important.

This makes citizenship education in the context of information wars, a vital aspect of the equation.

Media literacy in education

The definition of media literacy education has been analysed by various researchers. David Buckingham, Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, London University, a media literacy education researcher and pioneer defines media literacy education as a result of knowledge and skills which students acquire in the process of learning.

This learning process provides them with the ability to interpret and make decisions, involving both critical and creative ability development (Buckingham, 2003).

Media literacy education provides competences related to the usage of media tools. These competences allow an understanding of the means of communication (printed text, charts, sounds, moving pictures, and provided using various technologies). This process grants people competences related to media tool usage and their influence to society.

By developing media literacy, students acquire the necessary abilities to select, use, analyse and identify messages as well as interpret media messages based on their values.

Media literacy education is part of every citizen's right to self expression and information and supports the creation of a sustainable democracy. Charles Worsnop, leader in Canadian media literacy, teacher and consultant, defines it as an aggregate of message interpretation, analysis and creation capabilities: "the more you study the media, its processes, the more literacy experience is being acquired" (Worsnop, 2004).

Dr. Mary - Lou Galician, Arizona State University professor and media literacy activist, in an effort to emphasize the necessity of critical thinking, uses the term *dis-illusion* (emancipation from illusions): "I use the term *dis-illusion* as a synonym to media analysis and criticism". When analysing messages, necessary information is selected, interpreting and evaluating the information critically. In this manner, traps are avoided without becoming their victims. In order to receive healthy education in media literacy, the media should not be avoided, censored or boycotted (Galician, 2004, p. 143). Disillusionment, improvement of critical attitude to provide information allow for appropriate decisions not based on illusions created by the media.

According to László Hartai (2014), media literacy education is a process which provides competences related to media literacy. This essentially means that an understanding of how media communicates is being acquired: by print, visually, through sound, moving image and every other technology suitable to society.

By developing media literacy, students acquire the necessary abilities for selecting, consuming, analysing and identifying the sources of the message, as well as interpreting messages and values that they send. Media education is part of every citizen's integral rights and essential to expression and information freedoms, a pillar of any sustainable society.

Previously mentioned authors point to the fact that media literacy education envisages the knowledge sphere (communication tool recognition, basics of text creation, media technologies, manipulations, etc.), skills and capabilities (critical information consumption: identification, analysis, creation and interpretation) and values (responsibility, ethics, civic duty, respect for human rights). In this regard, media literacy education is a complex competence development which, according to Hartai, (2014), is an integral part of every citizen's rights in democratic countries.

Media literacy competencies development in compulsory education schools becomes an ever more relevant part of contemporary education, through which students acquire not only academic knowledge and skills, but the capability of relating their experience to everyday life and its expression in the media.

This is why it is imperative that we provide stakeholders' case studies in regard to media literacy competence development: how media literacy education is regulated on the national level; how media literacy competence development is reflected in curricula; what is the formal system of media literacy education; teacher training and qualification improvement. Certainly, there are additional indicators in determining the situation of media literacy education in stakeholders' schools. It can be argued however that the main criteria have been selected and on their own, they can allow us to identify media literacy education drawbacks, as well as measures of tackling them.

Implementation of the project “Media lab for bridging cross border gaps” was aimed at exploring the ways in which media literacy is taught in schools.

A survey was conducted by interviewing media literacy experts from the 6 countries participating in the project. The questionnaire consisted of 9 questions aimed at establishing the state of media literacy education in schools and then coming up with conclusions and recommendations.

Media literacy education regulation

In order to comprehend the situation of media literacy in compulsory education, it is important to analyse the legal context governing media literacy at schools and the political support the central government lends to media literacy education.

Experts from participating countries have pointed out the existence of media literacy regulation in schools. In Lithuania, Cyprus and North Macedonia media literacy education is regulated by strategic government policies.

In March 2017 a resolution was adopted by the Lithuanian government, approving policies on media and information literacy activities such as “Preparation and implementation of the modern concept of reading and writing, including information and media literacy, and appropriate educational tools suitable for children of different ages and needs, involving non-governmental organizations”, as well as “Training of educators to integrate media and information literacy in preschool, pre-primary and general education.”

In Cyprus, the national Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids in Cyprus was launched by the government in 2017. The main purpose, as stated, is “...the effective and creative use of the Internet with security, responsibility and creativity. The national strategy proposal is designed to provide information and education on issues of digital security to children, teachers and parents in order to become critical and responsible users of digital technologies and develop a culture of safe use of the possibilities of digital technologies.”

In 2019, a Proposed Plan for Resolute Action against the Spreading of Disinformation was prepared in North Macedonia as an action against the spread of disinformation, involving the entire society. The plan stipulates that “Media literacy programs will be prevalent in education, with the responsibility of the education ministry.”

In Poland, Latvia and Greece media and information literacy education is regulated, as part of other general programs in education policy.

In Poland, a Framework Catalogue of Digital Literacy was drawn up by the Ministry of digitalization in 2016. It was characterised as the ‘point of reference for measures aimed at improving the digital literacy of Polish nationals. At the time it was pointed out that an overall digital literacy development programme was being drawn up by the Digitisation Ministry.

In Latvia, the first draft of the new curricula for public consultation was published in 2018, with very slight representation of media literacy

The policy changed in 2019, when the newly approved curricula incorporated a number of media literacy sub-skills to be taught and achieved in the framework of the learning process. In spite of these additions, the Latvians have not drawn up a media literacy-specific national document, outlining overall strategy on this aspect.

In Greece, media and information literacy school modules are defined in the Curriculum of Audiovisual Expression (2011), compulsory in all stages of education, while optional courses are also set out, such as News Literacy-Modern Greek language (2011; 2013 new version).

Options for pupils include animation, video, video art in the 1st grade of Lower High School, Film education in One of the four sectors in Schools of Arts and Photography in Applied Arts sector in Vocational Schools.

Conclusions

The above outlined curricula and policies are a significant indicator that not all countries involved in the project have media literacy clearly regulated and have not taken any clear decisions about it-hence the absence of strategy documents, government bills and time-specific action plans.

The publication and implements of such documents provide an insight into the approach and commitment of the governments in question towards the issues raised, as well as whether they consider the development of media literacy to be significant in the framework of formal education.

In certain countries, such as Lithuania, incorporating media literacy education issues in the government's action plan means that the country provides additional funding. It does not imply however, by extension, that media literacy education in these countries is defined solely by specific strategy papers-it is more widely reflected in general programs too.

In other partner countries, where there is no state-level regulation of media literacy, these topics are integrated into educational level programmes or Framework Programmes, which further elaborate and particularize media literacy development directions and reveal education opportunities.

The next session involves a more detailed analysis of ways in which media literacy education is integrated into general programs.

Media literacy-based subjects, topics and forms of extracurricular activities in compulsory school

In contrast to mathematics or languages, media and information literacy education is not a traditional school subject in most countries and it is not included in educational programs as a subject which can be applied in the curricular and extracurricular activities, but it is integrated in different subjects of the entire educational program.

The project partners state that activities with developing MIL skills are emerging in the educational processes of their countries. These include workshops where students are learning how to use the Internet safely, how to make videos or radio shows and presentations using ICT.

They are also introduced to various media-related topics.

MIL topics appear in such subjects as *Gender issues, STEM topics, Environmental education, and Health education* (Greece). In Lithuania, general educational programs include cross-curricular topics related to MIL, like *Purpose and Effects of Advertising on Society, Media and Globalization*. MIL competencies are developed in moral education, native and foreign language lessons and such subjects as *Children and Media: where is the reality? How to recognize misleading information?* etc.

Since September 2019, the MIL competences and topics are integrated into other subjects in Cyprus starting from primary school. Poland, Latvia and Northern Macedonia claim that MIL topics are not specified in the general programs, and decisions concerning the MIL topics are taken at the school level, therefore everything depends on the enthusiasm of teachers and school management. In Latvia a new curriculum for secondary schools was adopted in autumn 2019 and will be followed from 2020/2021 school year. Various media literacy aspects are included among the results to be achieved by school graduates. However, the results might depend on the quality of learning materials, academic staff qualifications and enthusiasm.

The most common model is to use an integrated approach combined with MIL education as a cross-curricular topic. Fig.1 below illustrates the subjects into which the development of MIL competences is integrated most often.

Fig.1. *Integration of MIL competences in general subjects.*

	Lithuania	Latvia	Poland	North Macedonia	Greece	Cyprus
Language	+	+	+	+	+	+
Social and civic educations	+	+	+	+		
Health education					+	
ICT	+	+	+	+	+	+
STEM topics	+				+	
Gender issues					+	
Mathematics		+				

Case Study - Example of Lithuanian Curriculum Integration

Cross-Curricular Topic - *Purpose and Effects of Advertising in Society in Grades 9-12*

The following aspects of implementation help students develop an integrated approach:

Ethics lessons - ethics of advertising content;

Lithuanian language lessons - informative text writing, presentation of a book review, preparation for writing an essay and public speaking test;

Foreign language lessons - understanding and expanding the vocabulary of advertising;

Basic citizenship lessons - political and social influence of advertising;

IT lessons - peculiarities of text writing and image embedding;

Art lessons - aesthetic visual design of advertisements;

Mathematics lessons - practical calculations of how much a producer, a customer and a client pay for advertising, how much time advertising consumes in our lives;

Economics lessons - cost of creating advertisements and consumerist approach;

Classroom hours - positive and negative effects of advertising in solving tobacco and alcohol consumption, and other health-related and social issues.

There is a prevailing attitude in the education systems of the countries involved in the project that the younger generation should be prepared for life in the modern world where the development of media, information and digital literacy is important, which is why development of MIL competences is included in project and after-school activities. (REPHRASE)

Media literacy competences in compulsory school curriculum for youngsters 14-19

This report uses a broader concept of MIL education (compared to the three questions in the questionnaire) in order to extend its scope to include the diversity of national educational programs, therefore below there is a description of the elements of MIL competencies used in this project.

Media literacy competence elements and their description

1. The search and selection of information sources.

- Ability to decide and name what kind and scope of information is necessary and tell the purpose of using it.
- Ability to search for particular information effectively and ethically and find it.

(understands authors' rights and respects them, uses the legally provided media sources)

- Ability to use the information from various sources, e.g. media, internet, libraries, archives, organizations, persons, etc.
- Skills to save information by using various methods and tools.

1. Understanding and analysing the information provided.

- Understanding the role of the media, information providers, institutions and society needs.

(values independent media role in a democratic state (freedom of speech and its limits, censorship)

- Ability to analyse information content.

(determines the goal of information or media content, target group, main message. and is able to name the implied effect)

- Ability to compare the information from different sources.

(is able to use conventional and other sources of information and compares them)

1. Information evaluation.

- Ability to apply the main criteria in order to evaluate the information obtained, sources, media and information providers.

(evaluates the quality of information provided by different channels (relevance, completeness, precision, timelessness, reliability)

- Ability to evaluate the content of information and media, authenticity of its

sources and providers.

(determines the primary source (authorship) of information or media content)

1. Information systematising.

- Ability to systematise the information collected and media content.

(collects, processes, selects and prioritises) and presents the information)

1. Information creation and active participation.

- Ability to create new information and media content using innovative, ethical and creative methods.

(prepares/creates publicist stories, video messages, blogs, etc.; is able to communicate in public, give their opinion in a way that is not insulting or harmful to others)

- Ability to make use of the possibilities provided by media creators and information providers to contribute to promoting intercultural dialog and active participation in democratic processes.

(solves problems while communicating virtually; by using social networking and other tools, participates in social life, expresses their attitudes and gets involved in internet societies; is able to avoid harmful content and relationships)

1. Presenting the information.

- Ability to use ethical, legal and effective methods to present information, media content or news while using proper channels or tools.

(uses and cites the information without distorting the facts; spreads created content by using proper technical means and in a way that it could reach the target audience; keeps their private information).

1. Observation of the publicised information and purposeful use of feedback.

- Ability to observe and name the effect the existing media and other information providers may have on themselves and the society.

(recognises ideological/propaganda manipulation mechanisms and resists them, recognises and analyses stereotypes; knows the rights a person has while communicating with a journalist)

- Ability to give feedback (opinion, notices) to media creators and information providers.

(makes complaints or reports about the inaccuracy or offence in the media; recognises bullying, offence, internet fraud and reacts appropriately)

1. Observation of the created information and benefitting from the feedback.

- Ability to observe the effect of the created and published information and media content.
- Ability to demonstrate proper and ethical reaction to feedback.

(comments, remarks, suggestions, etc.).

This study confirmed that although there is no separate subject like MIL education, elements of this competence are included in the general national education programs in all countries. The study also confirmed that MIL education goes far beyond simple teaching of students about the types of media texts or ability to make presentations using ICTs.

The skills identified in Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish educational programs to develop MIL competencies related to the ability to search for and retrieve information from different media sources, the ability to understand, analyse and evaluate information from different media texts, create, monitor and use feedback provided in different media spaces.

Although the responses in the questionnaires of Cyprus, Greece and North Macedonia provide a very laconic statement that the main components of the MIL competences are integrated into the abilities of subjects such as language or social sciences, information technology, this nevertheless suggests that the MIL competence elements appear in the curriculum of all participating countries, although identified as elements of other subject competences or integrated in the description of subject or general competences, but appear in the national curriculum. This is depicted in the following matrix (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Elements of MIL competences in the general programs of countries participating in the project.

MIL competences elements in national curriculum	Lithuania	Latvia	Poland	Greece	Cyprus	North Macedonia
The search and selection of information sources	+	+	+	+	+	+
Understanding and analysing the information provided	+	+	+	+	+	+
Information evaluation	+	+	+	+	+	+
Information systematising	+	+	+	+	+	+
Information creation and active participation	+	+	+	+	+	+
Presenting the information	+	+	+	+	+	+
Observation of the publicised information and purposeful use of feedback	+	+	+	+	+	+
Observation of the created information and benefitting from the feedback	+	+	+	+	+	+

Case Study - Example of competences described in the general programs of Poland

SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION

in the Self-Education area:

- critically select sources
- use and critically assess multimedia information sources
- collect and process information, create a database
- use multimedia resources, e.g.: libraries, online dictionaries, e-books, original websites
- select internet sources taking into account the criterion of factual correctness,

and critically assess their content

- be familiar with the concept of hypertext, recognise its internet and non-internet instances, describe their function in communication, skilfully use them for gathering information

VERIFICATION

in the area: *Reception of texts of culture*:

- process and hierarchize information from texts
- distinguish between news and commentary in press texts; recognise linguistic means and their functions used in texts

in the *Linguistic Education* area:

- recognise evaluative vocabulary; distinguish between neutral and emotional vocabulary, formal and colloquial vocabulary
- apply the rules of the ethics of statement
- evaluate linguistic utterances using criteria such as true-false, correct-incorrect
- distinguish between the concepts of: manipulation, misinformation, post-truth, stereotype, filter bubble and virality; recognise them in texts and characterise them
- characterise changes in linguistic communication associated with the evolutions of its forms (e.g. internet communication)

in the *Compliance with the law and the rules of safety* area:

- act in accordance with the rules of netiquette and legal regulations concerning: personal data protection, protection of information and copyright and protection of intellectual property in accessing information; be aware of the consequences of breaching these rules
- comply with the applicable law and ethical standards regarding the use and dissemination of computer software, third-party and own applications and electronic documents
- apply best practices to protect sensitive information (such as passwords and PIN numbers), data, and operating system security; explain the role of data encryption

in the *National security* area:

- identify challenges to individual and collective security, categorize them, and assign them appropriate importance in the context of local and national security
- explain the importance of cyber-bullying and know the procedures to be followed in case it takes place, indicate improper behaviour related to cyber-bullying and know what the proper response should be

in the *Health education* area:

- analyses the symptoms of different types of behavioural addictions, including addiction to computer and internet.

Conclusions

An important new challenge in integrating MIL competencies is to improve their status in order to align them more closely with traditional, subject-based competencies.

Non-formal media literacy education based on compulsory school

Non-formal education is defined as the totality of the activities and educational influences with an optional or facultative character, unfolded within and outside the teaching system, organized, systematic and deliberate, which respond to the consonant educational influences with those of formal education and which are connected to the learning needs of each individual or to a group of individuals who have common values and goals. “The para and peri-schooling activities are anchored in the teaching system, having at their basis the contents used by it, to which others are added, they start from the same educational finalities by extending them and sometimes they take place in teaching institutions.”, state Moldovan & Bocoş-Binţinţan (2007). This type of activities is dedicated to all the students, but chosen, according to preferences, only by those who are interested. According to the authors, non-formal education must function to enable the student deepen, supplement and develop the knowledge acquired through formal education; realize self-expression needs through artistic, sports or other activities; develop as a social subject: have free and unrestricted communication with people of the same age, younger or older than themselves, people of different nationalities and beliefs; to develop competencies necessary for active economic activity, professional career; to develop citizenship, national and cultural awareness.

Non-formal education is also important for the assessment of educational opportunities of students in the context of media literacy, and not only complements the media literacy curriculum disclosed in the general programmes, but also provides more opportunities than engagement in practical activities, development of necessary skills and competences in formal education. Therefore, in this section we will discuss the main non-formal education tools of the partner countries for the development of media literacy in young people.

Fig. 3. Non-formal education activities developing media literacy

Country	Media literacy focus	Activities
Lithuania	Protecting children from negative influences of the Internet, critical thinking, films literacy, filmmaking, media content creation.	Project “Safer internet” Project “Big small screens” International Training Program for Journalists
Greece	Critical thinking, creativity, audio visual literacy skills. Protecting children from negative influences of the Internet.	Project “Video museums: our opinion and written critic competition”. Project “Safer internet for kids”
Poland	Critical thinking, fact checking Safety of children and young people on the Internet	Fact checking Academy Programme INDID Media watch Project “Cybernauci” to shape safe behaviour on-line. It covered schools across country, including student, teachers and parents
Cyprus	Development of critical analysis of media content, Protecting children from negative influences of the Internet.	European media literacy week Safer internet day
Latvia	Media content creation Safety of children and young people on the Internet Raising youth awareness about processes in media environment Critical thinking skills development, abilities to recognize manipulations and fake news	Media literacy initiative “All though” Media literacy activities organized by Net- Safe Latvia “Young media house” initiative Board game “The Populist” Media literacy initiative of Vidzeme university of applied science.
North Macedonia	Safety of children and young people on the Internet	Initiative “Safer internet day”

All countries involved in the project are implementing education projects and initiatives on Internet safety aimed at the safety of children and young people on the Internet, critical thinking, ability to find and critically evaluate information. This way, these non-formal education activities develop the skills of young people necessary for the development of media literacy competences. Internet safety

projects and initiatives take place after classes and integrate various forms of activity that cannot be used in the formal education process.

Another relevant competence in media literacy education is the development of critical thinking in evaluating information presented in media and recognizing various manipulations and fake news as well. In this respect, all countries involved in the project have interesting examples of activities as well. Polish program “Fact Checking Academy” organizes training and workshops for pupils and students on how to recognize manipulations, hate speeches and fake news. Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in Latvia organizes 7 media literacy seminars for Valmiera students each year. The initiative functions as a media literacy school for students. In Lithuania, the international journalist training initiative organizes various meetings, seminars, and lectures for the most talented students, which include, among other topics, issues of critical media assessment, media text writing and analysis. Of course, critical thinking competencies are developed in other activities as well, e.g. safety of children and young people on the Internet, but it is not the main goal.

Countries like Lithuania, Latvia, Greece, and Poland have various initiatives to create media content. Students learn how to create audio visual and written media content; videos, games, media messages. Lithuania has interesting experiences from implementation of the project “Big Small Screens”, which organizes media literacy classes and filmmaking workshops for students. There is a similar initiative in Latvia called “Young Media House” which organizes lectures and summer camps for students to introduce audio visual media content, and the Media Literacy initiative in Latvia invites school students to a competition each year to create media content with professionals.

Conclusions

The range of non-formal education activities in the project countries allow for a more targeted development of media literacy competence as defined by UNESCO, therefore the role of non-formal education is crucial. The information provided suggests that in project countries such as Greece, Cyprus and North Macedonia, media literacy is mostly expressed through the activities of safe Internet, therefore these countries should develop a wider range of non-formal education services, both by critically evaluating and creating the media content. There is a greater range of non-formal education activities in Latvia and Poland facilitating the development of MIL competences, and an active involvement of the non-governmental sector and cooperation between state institutions is observed in these countries. In Lithuania, the range of non-formal education activities is not abundant, but it ensures the development of MIL competences.

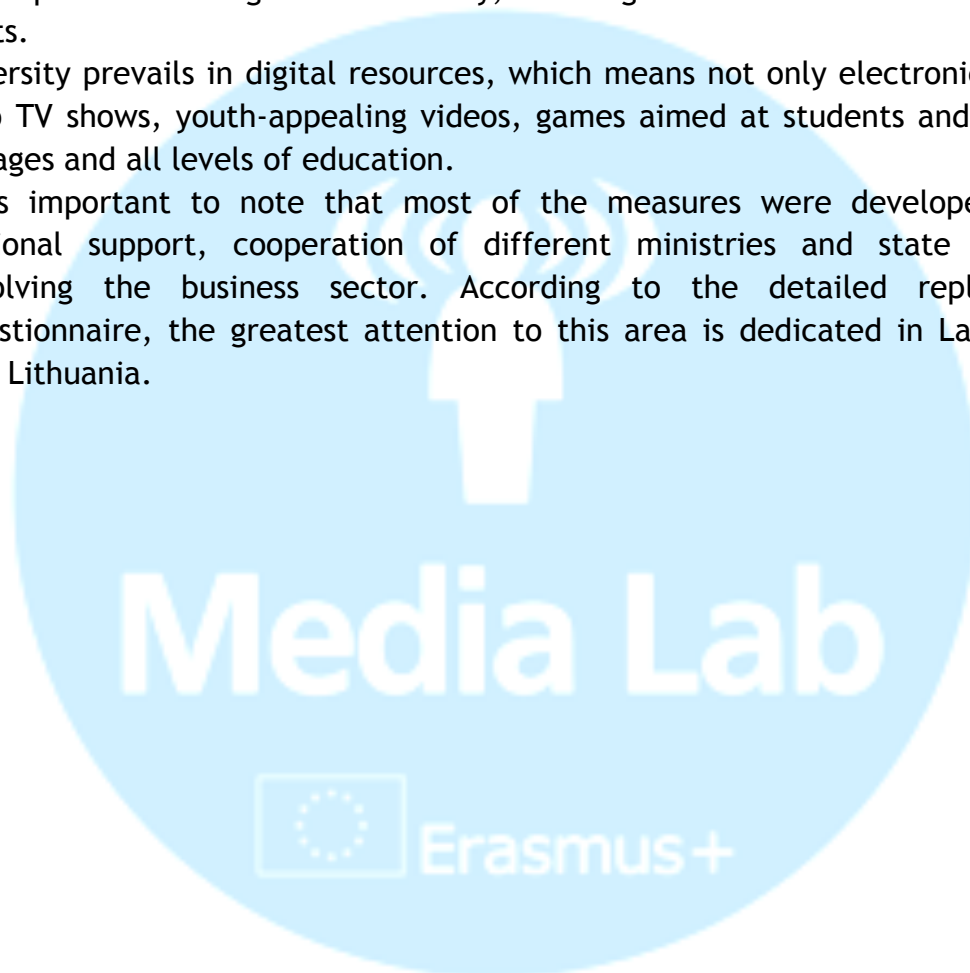
Media literacy most popular learning resources for youth from 14 to 19 years old

Although media literacy is not compulsory in all the partner countries involved in the project, given the importance of these skills in the modern world, considerable attention and support is given to the development of educational material at a national level.

Most often it is digital material, freely available and in some countries constantly supplemented online resources containing a lot of visual material, worksheets, self-assessment tools, and a variety of topics related to the history of media, preparation of media texts, and online etiquette presentation. The most popular are the topics of safe Internet or recognition of fake news, although there are also the topics introducing media diversity, teaching how to read and understand media texts.

Diversity prevails in digital resources, which means not only electronic books, but also TV shows, youth-appealing videos, games aimed at students and teachers of all ages and all levels of education.

It is important to note that most of the measures were developed with the national support, cooperation of different ministries and state institutions, involving the business sector. According to the detailed replies in the questionnaire, the greatest attention to this area is dedicated in Latvia, Poland and Lithuania.



Case Study - Latvian Example

Currently, project “School 2030” which is responsible for development of the new curricula is working on new text books that will correspond to the new curricula which will enter in force on the 1st of September 2020. Textbooks and digital sources mentioned in the table is just a compilation of resources on media literacy available in Latvian language for the youth audience. Usage of them depends on teachers’ choice, enthusiasm and knowledge.

Since in Latvia media literacy is actively being developed only for ~ 4 years and textbooks corresponding to the new curricula are not publicly available yet, the list of materials for specific audiences (14-19 years old youngsters) is shorter than requested.

However, media literacy learning materials are also available for younger audiences. For example, the Ministry of Culture with partners State Police, Net-Safe Latvia, enterprises “Rimi”, “Balta” and “Deep White” in the Autumn of 2018 started a social campaign for media literacy and internet safety “Superheroes on the internet!” addressed to 5-8 years old children. Campaign included methodological materials for teachers). At the beginning of 2019, with support of the Ministry of Culture and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences a book by Dr.sc.com., lecturer of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences Solvita Denisa-Liepniece “Catched you! Or the Wolf manipulator” (in Latvian - “Caps un ciet - jeb Vilks manipulators”) was published and followed by promotional activities. In cooperation with British Council in Latvia and Academy of Culture the video was made after the scenario of this book and disseminated to all schools in Latvia and Latvian diaspora schools abroad, however, its target audience is children aged 9-11.

Conclusions

One of the challenges faced by the modern school is the ability to plan activities to cover as many different subjects as possible, to integrate them intelligently and to select educational material purposefully.

Teacher and headmaster on-service and in-service training in media literacy education

The opportunities of media literacy in schools are directly linked to the qualifications of teachers in this field. As it was pointed out by Jeff Share in his report presented at the International critical media literacy conference in 2017 “it is crucial that new teachers learn how to teach their students to critically read and write everything, from academic texts to social media. This means that schools of education responsible for training the new wave of teachers must be up-to-date, not just with the latest technology, but more importantly, with critical media literacy theory and pedagogy in order to help teachers and students to think and

act critically, with and about, information communication technology (ICT), media, and popular culture.” Therefore, based on the information provided by the experts, we will look at how teachers are trained to develop media literacy at schools in the countries implementing the project.

University of Gdansk in Poland has a Media Education Lab, where students can attend media education classes and prepare for the development of this field at schools. At the University of Bialystok and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, future teachers are offered media and media and information literacy specializations after graduation of which, students are able to understand media literacy education methodology, critically analyze and evaluate information and further develop their own educational skills in this field.

Case Study - Latvian Example

The University of Latvia offers a three-credit Masters course in Media Pedagogy, after which the students understand the essence of media pedagogy and are able to critically assess and solve problems related to media literacy education and acquire other competencies necessary for this education. Similar course has been offered by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences since 2018. It is an academic MA studies program in Media and Information Literacy. It is the very first MA program devoted to media literacy issues in Latvia.

In 2017, the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of the Republic of North Macedonia has prepared a project to supplement the sociology study program with media literacy topics for future teachers. In Greece, media literacy is included in teacher education programs in all university departments. In Cyprus and Lithuania, media literacy is not included in teacher education programs, but in Vilnius University prospective teachers are allowed to choose related sociology studies and analyse media as a social institute in these studies.

More detailed various media literacy development methodologies and didactics are presented in teacher qualification training events in all participating countries. Public authorities, universities and non-governmental organizations, all contribute to this. For example, in Lithuania, the National Agency for Education provides training for teachers in different regions every year. Foreign organizations cooperate with public authorities and non-governmental organizations on various projects. One of such projects was the Media and Information Literacy Education Project implemented by the Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Lithuania and the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania, during which an electronic teaching resource platform was created, training tools were prepared and teachers were trained to use the tools. The program Mind over Media, Ethical journalism is implemented in Poland. Teachers are introduced to the researches and methodologies developed by dr. Renee Hobbs. Modular course Human 2.0 is designed to enhance digital and media literacy competencies of teachers. This project is implemented by the National Film Archive of Poland. NGO

Latvia Education development centre is implementing projects aimed at improving teacher qualification training and preparing teaching material.

Case Study - North Macedonian Example

In North Macedonia, the project “Promoting Media Literacy Education” was implemented in 2009-2011. During the project approximately 1000 teachers and a textbook “Media Literacy in the Teaching of Mother Tongue” was prepared. This tool is available in Macedonian, Albanian Serbian and Turkish.

Cyprus and Greece are implementing the Erasmus + project “European media coach initiative”, which involves teachers and youth workers to improve their media literacy competences.

Experts from all countries pointed out that there is no separate training for school leaders in the field of media literacy education in their countries and they are invited to participate in trainings with teachers.

Conclusions

It should be noted that, in all the project countries, the integration of media literacy content into the teacher training programs still remains fragmented, is optional and often implemented through the master's degree programs. This means that undergraduate teachers do not have the necessary skills to teach media literacy in schools.

It is tried to fill the gap with various teacher qualification training programs and projects offering various qualification development events on media literacy issues.

School leaders do not have specific qualification training programs or they participate as teachers.

Expert opinions on media literacy education situation and recommendations

To analyse the situation of media literacy education in the countries implementing the project, experts were employed to not only provide the most recent data on media literacy education, reviewed earlier, but also provide their own assessments, insights and recommendations on how to improve media literacy in the countries involved. Experts were asked to assess the current situation in the field of media literacy in their country and to provide suggestions and recommendations on how to improve media literacy at different levels: national, regional and school level.

The expert from Poland thinks that “the approach to preparing young generations to live in today's world predominant in the Polish education system still places insufficient emphasis on the shaping of deep media, information and digital literacy”. Polish experts offer a set of tools that they believe are essential for the

successful development of media literacy education. They think that the most important tools under the responsibility of the Ministries of National and Regional Education and Digitalisation are to “make media, information and digital literacy one of the priorities of education, in consideration of its growing role in the development of young people and their responsible functioning in the society and the state”. It was also noted that teacher training, their professional development, preparation of various resources needed for media literacy development, integration of media literacy education, curricular and extracurricular activities, implementation of various projects and favourable school environment would create appropriate preconditions for the development of media literacy. Experts emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to media literacy issues, which depends on political decisions and funding for various measures used to develop media literacy.

The Latvian expert described the efforts of her country to integrate media literacy into the general programs as a complex process of change. “The beginning was quite complicated as there was a lack of understanding about media literacy meaning and importance in citizens’ lives. An existing school subject “Computing” was considered to fulfill expectations towards schools’ involvement in media literacy development. However, thanks to the growing public interest, discussions and projects about media literacy and disinformation and fruitful cooperation of the Ministry of Culture and other stakeholders with education policy planners, media literacy is now included in a deeper and broader way in educational standards.”

According to the expert, the most important task for Latvia is the issue of teacher training. She stated that “in general the problem lies in teaching staff readiness to cover media literacy issues in classrooms, because the current training is insufficient to prepare all Latvian teachers in a qualitative manner to provide media literacy education. She thinks that “Media literacy could be included as a compulsory subject of life-long learning for teachers.” Universities in regions could play a more active role in teacher qualification training, because, according to the expert, recently NGOs were the most initiative in this field. In schools, librarians should be more involved in media literacy education processes.

The expert from Cyprus pointed out that media literacy education in schools is at an early stage and focuses on digital literacy. The expert identified the need for strategy and cooperation at a national level as the most important tools to strengthen media literacy education. There should be media centres in regions, and schools should pay more attention to the implementation of media literacy education projects.

The expert from North Macedonia stressed that the task of the highest priority is the need to “adopt a National Strategy for media literacy in primary and secondary education as soon as possible“, and pointed out that the change of responsible leaders is also a barrier to the strengthening of media literacy. Greek efforts to integrate media literacy, as it has been assessed by the expert, are fragmented

and not a priority. They focus on News literacy (compulsory level) and A/V literacy at an optional level. Media literacy in schools occurs through non-formal education activities due to a lack of methodologies and properly trained teachers. The expert stresses the importance of developing an appropriate methodological framework for the integration of media literacy in the framework programs. However, the most important task, according to the expert, is teacher training, which would create preconditions for successful media literacy education at school.

Media literacy in schools is implemented through non-formal education activities due to a lack of methodologies and properly trained teachers. The expert emphasizes that it is very important to develop an appropriate methodological framework for the integration of media literacy in the general programs. However, the most important task, according to the expert, is teacher training, which would create preconditions for successful teaching of media literacy at school.

In Lithuania, the topic of media literacy education is not a phenomenon of today. In 2008 already, an Information Literacy Program was developed with a set of methodological materials and proposed for implementation by schools and teachers. However, greater interest on this topic was paid in 2016, with more intensive teacher training, preparation and translation of training material. Currently, there is an interdepartmental work group operating in Lithuania, aimed at coordinating the activities of various institutions in the field of media literacy education. Media literacy education through various projects and other activities is carried out not only by responsible state institutions, but also by various non-governmental organizations and foreign organizations in Lithuania, such as the British Council, the French Institute and universities as well.

Case Study - Lithuanian Example

In 2018, Vilnius Salomėja Nėris Gymnasium has chosen media literacy education and has media classes. These classes integrate media literacy competences in all subjects and introduce a compulsory subject “Media and Society” 1 hour per week.

However, it should be noted that there is a lack of a systematic and complex approach to the topic described. There is no national media literacy strategy to demonstrate the importance of media literacy and ensures political continuity and funding of the activities. Moreover, the general education programme, which is currently being updated, should explicitly address the integration of media literacy competencies into all subjects of the general curriculum, and universities and regional education centres involved in teacher training and qualification improvement should develop modular media literacy curricula for all teachers: both those who are preparing to become teachers and those who are improving their qualification. Not only the development of teachers' competences on the subject, but also the ability of the leaders to reach every child through the

implementation of the action plan of the school and competent management in the context of media literacy education is a topical matter at schools.

Final conclusions

To summarize conclusions of the experts and qualitative research carried out, general recommendations for strengthening media literacy would be the following:

1. Development and approval of the national media literacy strategy. This step would provide political support, funding to meet the media literacy goals, and ensure continuity and sustainability of the processes. Out of all the countries involved in the project, only the Lithuanian government has a strategic goal of improving teachers' qualification in media literacy, and Northern Macedonia in 2018 has prepared a project "Proposed Plan for Resolute Action against the Spreading of Disinformation by Government of Republic of North Macedonia", and in the rest of the project countries, media literacy education is regulated via the general programs at the level of Ministries of Education.

2. Media literacy education must be integrated into all subjects of general education and be systematic. For this purpose, the experts suggest reviewing the general education programs and clarify media literacy education priorities, methodologies and tools. Currently, media literacy in all the countries involved in the project is mainly focused on information technology, development of citizenship, language and other lessons. In schools, these competences are mainly developed through non-formal education, various projects, etc.

3. Systematic, consistent development of teachers' competencies is a prerequisite for successful media literacy development in schools beginning with teacher training and ending with professional development of teachers and leaders. School leaders are a very important link, on which the priorities of school activities depend, therefore strengthening competencies of leaders on this topical issue would make a major contribution in ensuring media literacy education. Another important group of professionals in media literacy education are librarians of schools. As it was emphasized by the experts from all the countries, librarians could become the heart of media literacy education at schools, therefore their competence development is important.

4. The problem of lack of training material for media literacy education is significant in all the countries involved in the project. Although national governments and NGOs are making considerable efforts, due to the specificity of the subject there is a particular lack of relevant material, which needs to be constantly updated, presented in virtual, easily accessible platforms and regional

media centres. It is noteworthy that no country involved in the project has a textbook for students on media literacy education.

5. Non-formal education activities in the field of media literacy are abundant and diverse, however they are often of a project nature and do not ensure continuity of education and complexity of competences, therefore it is important to combine these activities with formal education activities.

The information, insights and recommendations were provided by the following experts:

North Macedonia

Gordana Janakievska, Bureau for Development of Education

Tanja Andonova Mitrevska, State Examination Centre

Poland

Katarzyna Górkiewicz, Nowoczesna Polska

Beata Biel, Fundacja Reporterów

Cyprus

Anastasia Economou, Cyprus Pedagogical Institute

Latvia

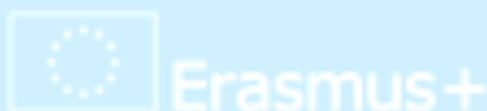
Dr.sc.comm. Klinta Ločmele, University of Latvia

Greece

Sofia Papadimitriou, Ministry of Education and religious

Lithuania

Rita Baškienė, Salomėja Bitlieriūtė, National Agency for Education.



Gap 3: Impact of different media on youth

(Author Melina Karageorgiou)

Introduction - Concept definition

The aptly named millennials have been sailing into uncharted territory. They are the first generation born into an era immersed in multimedia convergence. Their lives have directly engaged with this kind of technology from an early age and become part of their daily self, as they easily move and adapt from one screen to the other: television, computers, game consoles, mobile phones, phone tablets and a series of other interrelated technological innovations. This has created a need for updated research which must focus on the new media environment of the millennial generation, an engagement that has no comparison in its variety, scope and ways in which the early, mid, late teens, pro-puberty individuals communicate and the post-secondary school generation-what they see, how they see it, what they make of it (perception) and what is inscribed as a social impression.

Now, traditional media literacy used to deal separately with existing media: film, television, radio and so on, the conventional methods. Today, the trend in European countries is to deal globally with all media in an integrated way, considering, first and foremost, the new characteristics of interaction and interactivity presented by the new context.

This is mostly because media literacy is also sailing into uncharted territory, when it comes to the younger generations. Today's youth are often described as the Digital Generations. Children and adolescents increasingly turn to mobile media devices, particularly the Smartphone, to stay connected with family and friends and access a variety of digital media contents and services. The changes in the media landscape along with the dramatic turn in the way youth use, manage and perceive information in different media sources, require ongoing research and vigilance about the possible effects. But the researcher of the day must be aware. This does not mean 'dumbed' down or simplistic content. But adapted to the way they are informed, the speed they need and how you attract them. Just as 'The Economist' did with a Snapchat platform.

We needed to show and not tell, using our same editorial voice, but in a way that feels playful and relevant to the platform.¹

This new found complexity requires methodologies from a variety of fields. “Outcomes in turn call for tools that can measure, evaluate, and help explain how certain media experiences influence, and are influenced by, health and behavioral factors as well as cognitive and developmental processes”. (National research council)

The newer technologies are frequently viewed as having negative influences on young people. But this is just a statement. As the new media era is a reality, the relevant research must drive itself to seek new ways of understanding how media technology affects the people most easily impressionable, as well as what drives the youth, what interests them, how and why they are drawn to it and where they find it.

Use of traditional and digital media by the younger generations

The Reuters digital news Report concludes that social media as a news source is declining, more so in millennial generations. Facebook for news has been dropping since 2016 in many countries, particularly those with issues over misinformation that have taken over the media public debate. In parallel, more people have been using messaging apps such as WhatsApp for any purpose (44%), while average usage for news has more than doubled to 16% in four years. According to the Reuters digital report, Podcasts are now the most adaptable technological innovation in reaching younger audiences with the issues of the day, engaging them socially and triggering responses. But let’s now have a closer individual look at partner countries, approach the factors which determine digital media and content use, as well as comparing differences.

In comparing ages and mediums across the board and different continents, the Reuters report concludes that the under 35s are strongly pushing towards ‘greater use of mobile aggregators and social platforms and less direct access’.² Mobile news alerts are also rising sharply over the past 3 years, very popular with the under 30s and making the play in the news market, as outlets respond, offering even more ‘push’ notifications on a wider range of subjects.

Cyprus

¹ <https://www.journalism.co.uk/news/how-the-economist-engages-young-audiences-on-snapchat-discover/s2/a719289/>

² Reuters Digital News Report p. 15

Relevant research in Cyprus over the past five years, has indicated that the continued rise in higher education has been a decisive factor in digital media use as well as the utilisation of the internet platform as an educational and informational gateway for youths aged 15-34, the ages categorised by the Youth Board of Cyprus as ‘younger generation’ for research purposes. According to a 2014 study at the Cyprus Technological University, focusing more on the ethnic digital media and internet divide between the two communities (Greek and Turkish Cypriots),

More educated young users tend to be more experienced and use the Internet more as an educational resource - in terms of either formal learning (education purposes) or informal learning (fact checking and looking for word definitions).³

In the case of Cyprus, educational capacity seems to be a quite decisive factor in internet use frequency for the youth, as well as what they look for and how they find it, be it in the media or educational domain. As a socioeconomic factor, one could say that this might hold true of all the project-involved countries, with Cyprus tertiary education skyrocketing over the last decade and millennials living with digital media in school, daily life, informational and entertainment purposes. As the study in question argues, the frequency of online activities that involve content creation and sharing is affected, beyond socioeconomic conditions, by area, (urban residence) and time spent online.

An earlier study (Papaioannou, 2010) with organised questionnaires for 300 high school pupils (14-19), focused on digital media literacy, having Facebook as a point of departure. One major factor extending from the outcome, is the fact that in spite of extended use of social media platforms, engagement seems to be relatively superficial, with pupils being passive receptors of the visual images and written information presented. They lack the processes of sifting through the limitless social media gateways. *Compared to their technical skills, the students demonstrate weaker critical understanding skills...Less students actively conduct critical search and evaluation of information.*⁴

Only 57% say they verify information that might seem to lack credibility, before making judgment. They do seem however to have a better grasp of the need to cross-reference what they see or read. About 81% indicated at least two sources of information when they conduct research on anything they see on Facebook, whether media or entertainment related, or simply a piece of information. In

³ Milioni, Doudaki, Demertzis (2014)

⁴ Papaioannou, 2011

addition, 80% recognize that the media influence what they do and see on Facebook, including other digital platforms.

It has been argued by a number of media (both conventional and digital) and communication authors, that youth literacy in terms of digital media and news platforms offering a variety of information and by extension, the impact of these outlets, is significantly dependent on the cultural, pedagogic and labour market contexts of different countries and particularities of social situations. That's why, they point out, there is such variability of the phenomenon and is much more complex to look into. This particularly holds true of Cyprus, a small multicultural society with the additional political complication of division, making media impact much more significant in forging opinions at grassroots level, particularly when it comes to youth, irrespective of what media platforms they might find themselves on. Citing the results of an ethnographic study of teenage students in a multiethnic middle school in Cyprus, (participation of 60 teenagers -13 to 15) Skapoulli argues that locality, culture and identity is a major factor in youth influences. Though not media specific, the paper covers all aspects of the youths' daily lives, including education and language.

Greece

The research field in Greece has been scarce when it comes to youth media impact, particularly so with the advent of the digital age and social media platforms, on which youths, increasingly from younger ages (12 onwards) communicate, get informed and learn, in what has become the norm of the times. Previous studies had focused more on traditional media and the lack of follow ups over the past 15 years has led to a significant gap in how the millennials in Greece get their news, what is of interest, how they process it and what of kind of impact does it have on their daily lives, beliefs, values, culture and actions. Much in the same way as Cyprus, Greece is a highly traditional society and in terms of media literacy when it comes to social media platforms, internet reporting and digital sources of news, the older generations are lagging behind, while youths mostly communicate through such social media platforms and express opinions through blogs, thus creating a generational chasm, that's even more evident with the over 50s. Ostiouni (Thessaloniki 2016) points to the fact that traditional journalism has largely subsided over the past 15 years, giving way to 'citizen journalism', whereby individuals are no longer receptors of what gets chosen for them as a news evaluation, but *'...utilises the new technologies, focuses on issues that directly affect them, thus creating a dynamic community, taking part in formulating the media and political agenda...'*⁵

⁵ Ostiouni, 2016 <https://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/287690/files/GRI-2017-18522.pdf>

It has to be noted here that researchers in individual countries, including Greece, point to the fact that the only organised, large scale research sources on youth media impact in Europe are the Reuters Institute and the European Commission, as part of its yearly institutional obligation which, to a degree, contributes to formulating policies and establishing population trends.

It is a general trend in Greece for viewers and readers, irrespective of age, to increasingly turn away from television and into digital sources of news, as well as social media platforms and web news outlets. It ranks the 3rd highest in the Reuters Digital News Report (out of the 37 studied) where 'social media news use is higher than TV use for news among the population with an internet connection'.⁶ Greece also continues on the same path with most European countries in shifting towards private messaging apps for reading, posting and commenting on news, with Messenger and Viber being the most popular.

In a 2014 TNS Opinion Institute Report, conducted on behalf of the European Commission, television in Greece indicates a significant downward trend when it comes to television use as an information group, in the target group we're focusing on, dropping to 72% in the 15-24 category. At European level, internet use is 92% in the same group. When it comes to the written press, the percentage for Greece in the millennials group maintained a sliding spiral with 34%, one of the lowest in Europe.

In 2016, Ostiouni used a questionnaire on two target millennial groups in Thessaloniki, with all of them using their mobile phones to access the social media as well as news sites. The PC to access digital platforms was used by more than 66%. A third browses media sources once a day, with international or local news taking up the time of only one in ten. (11%). Mistrust is highest in the traditional media outlets, but also the internet, with youths citing its large scale and increasingly biased agendas.

*'...the internet provides the sense of choosing what we're reading and our source of information. But the issue here is that the internet is equally controlled.'*⁷ Particularly so, when it comes to popular pages.

The numbers are overwhelming. With a growing culture of distrusting traditional media outlets, much more paying for them (newspapers, magazines, subscriber web news sites) free sites and social media remain the most frequently accessed source of news in Greece. Smartphones have also become very popular as a news

⁶ Reuters Digital News Report, p. 82

⁷ Ostiouni, 2016, p. 33 <https://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/287690/files/GRI-2017-18522.pdf>

source, rising by 8% over the past three years. Online sources of news take a whopping 94%, with social media at 71%.⁸

Latvia

A small Baltic country with under 2 million (EU stats 2017), a diverse ethnic-make up (one quarter Russian) and a youth highly active in social media, in many cases innovative and highly skilled in digital media and platforms, using it on a daily basis. A 2017 European Commission Report on youth policies implemented in the country, clearly indicates and outlines realities, trends and impact of the dramatically changing media landscape globally on youth, how they react to it, what they find more useful and significantly, its social effect, short and long term. Young people 15-24 make up just over 10 percent of the country's population, around 200 thousand. Youth is defined legally in Latvia as being between 13 and 25 and therefore they formulate the target population, subject to the Youth Law, which aims at developing personality and social integration, according to the relevant legislation.

A youth reform currently being developed in Latvia, is the incorporation of digital skills in training of youth workers, is a clear indication that the digital reality of this era is being adapted into the country as a social need and skill when dealing with youth.

In Latvia, national authorities are investing in making the youth more politically aware through the media, providing information, education and relevant counseling. As the 2017 EU report indicates, although quite a significant percentage of youth do engage in political discussion and debate, particularly on social media platforms-36% write political comments on the internet-only 8 percent of those believe it's an effective form of political participation and 7% are members of political parties. One could say that Latvian youths do see media platforms as a source of political engagements, but this engagement emerges more from their own initiative, rather than being receptors of processed information. In essence, they are their own media makers, determining social impact. The problem, as recorded in the report, is the fact that their informed opinion does not turn into action.

'When participating in political activities, young people are not guided by what they believe is the most effective one, but rather by what they see as more accessible and more interesting for themselves...'⁹

⁸ Reuters Digital News Report p. 83

⁹ EU Commission Report on Latvia Youth Policies -2017 <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/gdllatvia.pdf>

In Latvia, authorities do make an active effort to present youths with many cultural media options, including promoting awareness on the history of the country in digital form, at a journalistic level. The Ministry of Culture oversees cinema, theatre, history and other such cultural options in many forms, pushing them through several public media platforms, press events and media activities available on the internet. One of them is the cinema education project 'Latvian Films in Latvian Schools', essentially a thematic block of films, aiming to imbue youths with a national sense.

'The project "Latvian Films Online" provides the possibility to watch free of charge about 100 films and cine magazines using the possibilities of 'www.filmas.lv'.¹⁰

The triggers are there for the impact to be forged. As of Autumn 2017, the government created an interactive website through the National Library of Latvia, the main goal being to popularise Latvian culture in the process of formal and non-formal education, also creating a digital version for youth audiences.

Latvia leaves nothing to chance when it comes to media impact, institutionalising, it could be said, the power of information when it concerns its contact with youth. As referred in the 2017 European Commission Report, the country's national library trains young people in the search and evaluation of information, while one of the basic priorities of the Latvian media policy is 'to raise awareness about the risks posed by the new media' and provide material to youths 'that is relevant to the Latvian public interest and contributes to the reflection of the basic values of the country as outlined in its Constitution'.

All in all, traditional media is mostly absent from Latvian youths' minds as a source of information or a social trigger, being highly active on social media platforms. But even that way, the limited research published over the past five years, indicates that Latvians aged 13-25 are mostly indifferent about major European wide issues, including their own membership of the bloc, as well as problems affecting their society. A Gausis (2017) study for the University of Latvia cites disappointing results.

'European Parliament`s social media publications in Latvian have little potential to develop the notion of European citizenship and there is a need for a well-considered use of social media...'¹¹

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ Gausis, 2017 'European Institutions on Social Media-Shaping the Notion of European Citizenship'
<https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/eb.2017.30.issue-1/eb-2017-0003/eb-2017-0003.pdf>

Quite of interest in the context of youth media impact in Latvia - a small country with high social media use and knowledge - was a 2-year youth media literacy programme funded by the US embassy, which concluded in February this year. It's established aim was to 'raise the democratic and transatlantic values in Latvia' and it included teaching teenagers, 'media analysis'. **Teams of teachers from 16 schools of Latvia** acquired this program in the training seminars and was implemented in the curriculum.¹²

Lithuania-media situation and youth impact

Lithuania is a similar sized country as Latvia, with a population of 2.8 million (2017 census), in the same region, sharing similar cultural views and an almost equal number of youths living in the country, a little over 12 percent of the population being 15-24.

A highly informative study commissioned by the European Union, also includes Lithuania, analysing the findings of the 'Impact on the Internet and Social Media on Youth Participation and Youth Work' in media-saturated, information-flooded European societies. Beyond the relevance of its content, it's also another example of the fact that beyond the European Commission, the literature on media youth impact in Europe, is scarce and limited to specific issues that are connected but do not answer all the relevant questions and only offer a broken social image, which is useful, but lacking.

The study is based on 'an extensive collection of data concerning the internet and social media-based tools and methods in youth work'.¹³ In Lithuania it is based on the SocialWeb network. Named the Project Generation 0101, with the participation of 7 countries, the research (focusing on youth unemployment) indicated significant differences with the use and update of digital technologies and skills. Lithuania was one of the countries more familiarized with the technology.

Much more apocalyptic as to the nature of the media in Lithuania, post-Cold War, the goals of media owners and by extension, the impact on public, particularly the youth, is a joint 2005 study by Balcytiene and Lauk, in which they argue that freedom from censorship and political control had been a media priority in Lithuania as well as the rest of the Baltic countries in the aftermath of the

¹² <http://iac.edu.lv/projekti-en-us/aktualie-projekti-en-us/supporting-youth-media-literacy-yml/>

¹³ <https://open-evidence.com/publication-of-study-on-the-impact-of-the-internet-and-social-media-on-youth-participation-and-youth-work/>

collapse of the Soviet Union and, in addition with the digital media revolution, this impacted youths accordingly, as also their first desire was to experience the newly-found press freedom. In that period, the early 2000s, when millennials began growing up, the press in Lithuania, as reported, became much more commercialized and privately owned, as well as increasingly digitized. This had a clear impact on what youths were reading and browsing through, as most of the information was internet based, available on web platforms. Today, this continues to hold true to an even greater extent. Media, **‘have, within the free market conditions, become a business of which the main features are concentration and commercialization.’**¹⁴ This is more evident in smaller, traditional societies, such as Lithuania.

North Macedonia

(contribution: Jovana Avramovska)

There are very few papers covering media impact on youth in North Macedonia. But the situation does not seem to be on the side of mainstream media.

Young people in the Cross Sectoral Youth Assessment survey (2019)¹⁵ said they get most of their information through social media and television. Family and friends are also resources. Far fewer youth listen to the radio or read print media. However, according to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2018) study which is mentioned in the survey, Macedonian youth spend an average of 6 hours a day on the internet—up from 3 hours in 2013. Some say the media is too regulated by political parties, and there are a few youth outlets. “Journalism is not a highly regarded profession.”

This might come from the fact that regarding mainstream media (especially Television as the most influential media in North Macedonia) there are very few youth targeted programs. There are a few shows for children in public and private TV stations, but there is a big gap when it comes to Youth. Even though more young journalists join the field, youth related topics are rarely covered. The shows in the bigger television outlets are mainly targeted for older audiences. This leads to younger audiences giving up on television almost entirely.

According to a youth survey in 2014¹⁶ on how young people are represented and participate in media, respondents answered that they are mostly represented in TV

¹⁴ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324363390_Media_Transformations_the_Post-transition_Lessons_in_Lithuania_and_Estonia

¹⁵ <https://www.edulinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Cross%20Sectoral%20Youth%20Assessment%20Final%20Report%20-%20North%20Macedonia%20%28USAID%29.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://issuu.com/youtheducationalforum/docs/youth-and-media-research-macedonia->

programs connected to sport, fashion and entertainment, and they are not involved in topics such as politics, economy and religion. Even the programs that the surveyed young people stressed they wanted to see on TV (such as documentaries, featured films, youth related news and programs, technology related shows) are rarely being aired. Maybe this leads to the devastating numbers in the Annual Report including data on Radio Stations reach and Television Stations Share in 2019, by the National Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services: only 11% to 13% of the youth watched TV on a regular basis in 2019.

Although the situation with the Macedonian youth is not exclusive and this is the case with youth in Media all over Europe, it is important that mainstream Media, and the journalists start speaking the “Youth” language in order for them to be able to communicate to and build their future audiences.

Poland

To say that Poland has an issue over the past few years with media freedom, would be an understatement. Particularly the country’s youth (15-24s make up 4 of the 39 million population, according to a 2019 census¹⁷) have been on the front of the battle lines of two major social outbursts in which they are no longer media receptors but news creators. One of them is the conflict between the Catholic Church and the LGBT community following remarks by the Archbishop of Krakow, who likened them to a social threat, like the Communist ‘onslaught’ following the 2nd World War, this time ‘not red but rainbow’.¹⁸ This was the Catholic reaction to ‘equality’ marches by the LGBT community throughout the country over the summer. The second, equally fierce front, are allegations against Polish state television of being a mere puppet of the ruling party and having launched scathing libelous attacks against the mayor of Gdansk who was murdered earlier this year. These issues and their effects, a deep-rooted cut into the body of Poland’s divided society, have taken such center stage amongst the youth’s concerns, that over the past few years, as most people of their age in Central and Eastern Europe, their digital news experience, has been one of participation and not just passive reception. It’s been a rollercoaster of an impact, as youth media web stories have sprung up in the big cities, as a fight on press freedom and protection of fundamental values has gathered pace. This has been a growing trend.

In addition, Poland indicates one of the highest levels of declining trust in the media, particularly in the traditional media and even more so amongst the youth, due in part to these growing scandals and in connections, allegations against the

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Poland (Source UN demographics)

¹⁸ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/church-poland-continues-confrontation-lgbtq-community>

government of restricting private media freedoms under the pretext of an anti-fake news campaign.¹⁹

Conclusions

Cyprus and Greece have major differences from their Baltic, Eastern Europe and Balkan counterparts when it comes to media impact and gaps in participation, action and ways of responding to media materials, web platforms and what is read and browsed through. Youth in the two Mediterranean societies have moved dramatically away from traditional media into a completely unbalanced polar opposite, without much guidance on how to achieve a more filtered view of what is being fed to them on platforms. Web media use is high, but understanding is low. On the contrary, the Baltics, North Macedonia and Poland, having experienced press restrictions, suppression and culture suffocation for decades, have not let the digital world bog them down but have taken on the reins and become media makers, not receptors. Crises in their countries have arisen, but they've been able to emerge as protagonists, making the media play instead of following it. This is because they have left the old culture behind, in spite of efforts to revive it by many conservative governments.

Recommendations

Invested and interested parties should take results and move forward with initiatives for more in-depth glances. In addition, when looking into media youth impact they should upgrade social and cultural particularities and events as a determinant of behavior.

The digital reality of this era should be taken into consideration and used by policy makers as the platform through which younger audiences will be encouraged to learn and cultivate critical thinking.

Likewise, while maintaining their standards, traditional media organizations must turn to more attractive ways in order to engage the new audience. Platforms and programs that would enable co-production and co-creation with youth would be an asset to that end, as opposed to a passive reception of the media production.

¹⁹ Reuters Institute Digital News Report p. 18

Gap 4: News Consumption by Youth

(Author: Vassilis Nedos)

Introduction

Digital media and information providers, different technological devices and platforms are currently a natural part of everyday life for most, especially the younger generations. Adolescents and young adult audiences, often dubbed ‘the Internet generation’, have increasingly gravitated toward online sources of news and information, raising questions about the quality, amount and truthfulness of news consumed. This study excerpt joins others in looking at the emerging processes of news consumption among youths - according to our group of interest, individuals aged 14-29 - in five EU countries: Poland, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia and the Republic of Cyprus, and also North Macedonia.

Finding and categorizing the news consumption by youth groups becomes all the more challenging mainly due to the continuous changes that the development of different media platforms bring. Nonetheless, a certain introductory point should be made: youths as defined above based on the study’s scope consume their news mainly from social media on their mobile devices. Print and radio become increasingly irrelevant, while TV still remains an easy choice, even though also declining in preference. According to the last relevant survey by Thompson/Reuters²⁰, youths get their first news in the morning using their smartphone (45%), their TV apparatuses (19%), radio (11%), desktop (5%) and print (4%). Around the EU, the proportion of the core youth group (18-24 years) that used each social network for consuming news in the past week (when the survey was held) is also very revealing. 48% of the participants used Facebook, 32% YouTube, 24% Instagram, 18% WhatsApp, 16% Twitter, 13% Facebook Messenger application and 10% Snapchat. At the upper edges (25-34) of the age group of interest the numbers don’t change substantially even though Facebook has an even clearer lead with 52% and a significant smaller usage of Instagram (17%).

Despite the trends of an image or video-based news consumption (YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat), it looks that even youths prefer to read their news items rather than watching them. For the ages 18-24, a percentage of 58% prefers text news, while 17% prefers mostly text and video. A significant 15% prefers mostly video and a 10% claims to be unaware or indifferent, having answered with a blunt “Don’t know”. It is interesting that the “mostly video” category has been increased by 8% since 2016, showing a clear tendency towards this medium. At the next age group relevant to our work (25-34 years old), 64% prefer mostly text while 15% is keen for a combination of both text and video, and 11% mostly video, with - again - a 10% providing. “don’t know” as their answer.

²⁰ Newman et al, Reuters Institute Digital news report 2019

In terms of per country analysis, it looks that Poland, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia and the Republic of Cyprus are generally covered by the EU surveys that are occasionally undertaken by the relevant statistics authorities in Brussels such as Eurobarometer.

A brief presentation of the youth news consumption habits could be presented as follows:

Poland

In Poland, the majority of students under the age of 25 spend approximately 1 to 4 hours a week on media consumption. That is; 7,6% less than an hour, 25,9% from 1 to 2 hours, 31,4% approximately 3 to 4 hours, 16,2% spend 5 to 6 hours while an 18,9% consume time for news more than 7 hours every week²¹.

Greece

One of the most interesting finds for Greece is the indirect relationship that young people (under 35 years) use to source their news. An enormous 71% is not visiting news websites but find their news indirectly, with only 28% of users going directly to a news website. This 71% is analyzed as follows: 29% uses search engines, 25% reaches news websites through social media, 7% via e-mail, 6% by mobile alerts and another 4% by news aggregators²². This enforces the theory that young people come across news incidentally on social media platforms, as they are using them mainly for non-news purposes, in the journalistic sense.²³

The above findings also complement another statistical finding on general news trust for the country, whereas only 26% of respondents agreed that you can trust most news most of the time, above just 1% from South Korea.²⁴

Cyprus

No detailed report can be found on the news consumed by youth in Cyprus; existing information is fragmented and non-comprehensive as a whole. Some related findings however show that 65% of individuals in Cyprus used the internet to read online news sites, in 2017, but usage was higher among those who used the internet within the last three months, at 80 percent²⁵. An analysis of the use of mobile devices to connect to the internet when away from home or work in 2016

²¹ Lyszkowska, Edyta, "Analysis of Media Consumption among Polish and Russian students", at *Journal of Intercultural Management*, vol. 8, 1, 2016, p.p. 71-89

²² Newman et al, Reuters Institute Digital news report 2016

²³ Antunovic et al., 2018

²⁴ <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/overview-key-findings-2018/>

²⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/386090/online-news-consumption-in-cyprus/>

shows that in Cyprus these were used by more than 9 out of 10 young people aged 16-29 in the country.²⁶

Latvia

Latvia is an interesting case in that - due to a problematic TV digitization process - even in 2010, 30,000 households still lacked access to any national channels; they either didn't watch at all or watched analog channels from neighboring countries, mainly Russia.²⁷ The number of terrestrial television channels increased with digitization, however experts indicate that the digitization process did not lead to better quality journalism, nor did it increase the volume of original news content. The failure to exploit online platforms to a great extent explains public broadcasters' inability to reach younger age groups in the country whose media habits tend to be more focused on non-linear and multi-tasking. They have made inadequate efforts to appeal to younger and more affluent audiences, with opinion polls showing that young audiences' engagement with the public service broadcasters was, and is, minimal.

In this context then, it doesn't come as a surprise the fact that as audience surveys have shown over the years, more young people in Latvia abandon newspapers and are the most passionate internet users in the country. Younger age groups are also better at multitasking, mixing digital platforms (news portals, social networking sites) and traditional television watching as their dominant sources of news. Even an older poll as far back as in 2008 indicates that television is even slightly more popular as a source of news among those aged 18-24, with news portals only in second place.²⁸

A 2015²⁹ study on adolescents in Latvia demonstrated that digital natives focus on the media that is available to them on screens that permit the use of sound and moving images. The youth population can be divided into two camps in terms of news consumption.: those who still read their news on paper and those who read it only via a screen. What is more, it was found that in an emergency situation the very first source of information is the phone, and the next operational source has been the micro-blogging site, Twitter.com.

In 2016, an EU Member States study showed at least 95% of young people aged 16-29 years in Latvia used the internet on a daily basis. ³⁰

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_digital_world#A_digital_age_divide

²⁷ https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/99fc4400-2b81-4d3d-ba01-f7c911c6aae7/mapping-digital-media-latvia-20130607_0.pdf

²⁸ Latvia Human Development Report 2008/2009.

²⁹ Digital native's attitude towards news sources - Sandra Veinberg.

³⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/39761.pdf>

A 2017 study shows the percentage of individuals in selected European countries who used the internet to read online news sites, newspapers or news magazines in 2017 - Latvia is at 68%, in equal numbers with the United Kingdom.³¹

For Latvian youth, instead of the radio, now it is Twitter; instead of the newspapers, now it's online media.

Lithuania

As registered in recent media use statistics, the overall public trust in media in Lithuania has dropped to its lowest position in the last decade. Only about one third of the population expresses trust in media³². This is an outcome in terms of audience reaction to the strategies observed in the mainstream media and its obvious shift towards entertainment oriented, sensational production. At the same time it is also a result signaling modifications in audience preferences - especially among young users - towards less institutionalized, less formalized, less mainstream-oriented news consumption. As is so often the case, the 'age' factor has gradually become the main distinguishing factor in media use in Lithuania.

The representative survey on media use in Lithuania reveals Facebook, Google and YouTube were absolute leaders among younger audiences (between 12-35), who also prefer TV channels in English (MTV, Eurosport, BBC, CNN News, Discovery, Travel, etc.). It is evident then that news consumption in foreign media probably depends most on having the knowledge and skills of particular foreign languages. It appears that a majority of Lithuanian citizens can speak and understand Russian (70,9%) while less than a third English (33,2%), Polish (12,6%) or German (8,1%). Here a clear distinction among different generations is also evident: Russian is mostly spoken and used by people of age 43+ (84,6% in comparison to 57,5% of people 14-42) while English is the mostly preferred foreign language by audiences between 14-42.

As data shows, young media users fancy online news portals, forums, and blogs. The Internet is their main source for daily news (following TV): 82,1% of 12- 14 year-olds, 87% of 15-24 year-olds and 73,8% of 25-34 year-olds are regularly browsing the Internet for informational purposes. Social media is also important for them (percentage of user ranges accordingly - 64,1%, 74% and 41,3%). For younger audiences, the Internet is also the most popular medium to access news and information throughout the whole day. That is particularly interesting when compared to TV use that reveals itself to be the traditional 'evening' media in all age groups - TV consumption in the evening ranges from 58,2% among 65-74 year-olds to 94,9% among teenagers of 12-15 years old. In fact, citizens of Lithuania

³¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/385972/online-news-consumption-in-european-countries/>

³² Public trust in media in Lithuania was 33.2% in June 2012 (down from 37.8% in May) (Vilmorus research, 2012)

between the ages of 12-35 are ‘multiple’ media users - namely, 41% of them browse the Internet and watch TV in the evenings (even though it is hard to find out whether they do both at the same time). Another interesting fact is that as another recent research demonstrates, the younger generation of ethnic minorities in the country tend to use more national media in Lithuanian language and in this regard significantly differs from the older generation, which is mainly focusing on minority media and Russian channels³³.

Corroborating the above is another study showing young people in Lithuania are not avid followers of news about their country and the world, and most rely on social media as their source of news³⁴. Lithuanian youth logs in to the Facebook network in the morning and logs off at the end of the day; television is no longer so relevant for this group, with print media and radio becoming almost obsolete as a news source for this particular age group in the country.

North Macedonia

According to some of the existing data for North Macedonia the media types used for news on domestic or foreign politics, social media have a clear prevalence. 73% of the users of the age 18-29 are getting their news from social media, with another 49% of youth consuming TV news. Radio and print media number for 11% and 8% respectively³⁵.

In order to comprehend the ever-changing media landscape around the world, we should make some points that seem irrelevant with the theme of the current paper, but are inherently connected with the evolution of youth understanding, even on the notion of news as such. A platform that is extendedly used by youths is Amazon-owned streaming platform Twitch.

A platform aimed at connecting and broadcasting during online gaming, the Twitch.tv website is the 31st most popular globally according to the Alexa rank. An average of 46 billion minutes are watched on this platform per month, with another average 3,3 million unique broadcasters during the same period. 55% of Twitch users are between the ages of 18 and 34, in the core of the youth group researched in this paper, while the rest of them are under 18 years old.

Even traditional news publishers such as the Washington Post³⁶ have invested in creating specific shows catered to the platform over the last year. The Post prioritizes comments on their streams – even as their channel is more about political news than gaming. Last July, The Post launched two shows, “Playing

³³ https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/46803/Lithuania_EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

³⁴ <https://en.delfi.lt/culture/young-people-in-lithuania-rely-on-social-media-for-news.d?id=71026708>

³⁵ Sokolovski, Public Perceptions, p.p. 10-12

³⁶ <https://digiday.com/media/publishers-growing-twitch/>

Games with Politicians” and “Live with Libby Casey.” While the first series had only four episodes, The Post has continued streaming talk shows and events.

“Even when we do a really big tentpole broadcast, multiple anchors, multiple locations, that is not enough for Twitch. It’s being around the community. We’re also finding we’re getting a lot of great questions from readers there” Phoebe Connelly, deputy director of video at The Post said. Based on the above, it is evident Twitch will eventually be a global power to be reckoned with on news consumption, especially for the younger generation.

Recommendations

The analysis of the aforementioned data on news consumption by youths in these six European countries underscore some trends that have been evident throughout the Continent, but also the rest of the so called Western World (U.S.A., Canada, Australia etc.); Younger generations tend to distance themselves from media platforms as a whole and learn their news mainly through social media, search engines and, even, messenger applications. This distancing from the traditional news making and news spreading industry - aka media industry, but also journalists as professionals - leaves an increasingly widening gap that has to be filled.

First and foremost, journalists and media professionals should focus on how to penetrate the ever-evolving social media platforms and brand their product in a way much more comprehensive for youths. Across the world, media brands and publishers are becoming increasingly aware that they need to approach hard-to-reach younger consumers in an organic way by collaborating with the mediums they use, and broach their specific interests within those mediums in a very natural and non-intrusive way. These so-called “millennials” are unapproachable even by traditional brands, as they watch less TV and have ad-blocking software on their PCs. In this context, the 6 aforementioned countries’ youth will eventually follow the same trend, if they haven’t already, rendering traditional media and news advertising obsolete. Even though there are regional and even local peculiarities, there also are certain conditions that are very similar all across the six countries, from Cyprus to the south, to Greece and North Macedonia, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Meaning that in spite of regional differences a common approach towards the way news outlets and journalists brand themselves into an ever-changing digital landscape.

Secondly, some kind of an up-bottom approach on media literacy is certainly not a panacea, but it is an important tool. Subsidising media literacy programs for schools, starting from primary education could be of use. In this respect media literacy is useful, but it cannot have a real impact unless tied to a wider perspective that takes into account the state of political things in Europe; EU is a union of countries that respect the rule of law and freedom of speech. There can be no discussion about news production and media anyway.

Last but not least, more as food for thought, and less as a recommendation, we need to point how media professionals adjust to the decline of long texts as a means of communication in general. The dominance of a video-game culture and the imminent arrival of augmented reality game play, certainly will change the rules of the game once more. This is a challenge that surpasses media discourse and enters the domain of psychology and human behaviour, but it is a probable future reality to be reckoned with.

Gap 5: Disinformation and fact-checking initiatives

(Beata Biel)

Introduction

Fact-checking has been a global trend in journalism in recent years. With the rise and development of social media platforms, the growing problem of fake news, disinformation and propaganda, newsrooms have started dedicating some of their resources to create or develop internal fact-checking efforts, but also to fact-check public statements, online stories, viral visual materials etc. Some new - often independent, not connected to mainstream - media outlets have also been created and focus solely on verification and debunking fake or misleading stories. Fact-checking has become as important a type of journalism as other genres, including investigative or data journalism.

However, not only media outlets and publishers have been involved in fact-checking initiatives - non-governmental organisations have also been dedicating their efforts to that.

There are different types of fact-checking initiatives. Many of them focus on debunking fake stories, verifying political statements, but there are also some that focus e.g. on science, climate change or health issues only.

Fact-checking plays an important and integral role in media literacy education. Learning how to verify various types of content is one of the skills for a digitally and media literate person. A wide range of different actors - from educators to technology companies - believe that raising media literacy (including digital and news literacy) would make people be better able to separate fact from fiction, potentially limiting the spread of false information and leaving them better equipped to navigate partisan and polarised media environments. Access to content that was fact-checked by professionals not only helps establish a more media literate society, but also supports democracy, protects the civil society and the public discourse.

Fact-checking worldwide

As written in the "Digital News Report 2016", "the new millennium has seen the rise and rapid global spread of what can fairly be called a new democratic institution, the independent political fact-checker". The first organisations dedicated to publicly evaluating the truth of political claims appeared in the United States in the early 2000s. Over the past decade independent fact-checkers have emerged in more than 50 countries spanning every continent.

There are different estimates about how many fact-checking organisations are currently active worldwide. According to Reuters Institute, 113 such groups were active in 2016 and more than 90% were established since 2010. These days those numbers are probably higher (the Duke Reporters' Lab estimates them at over 180) but it also needs to be noted that many fact-checking initiatives have been created within established newsrooms but are considered to be part of their overall news activity and thus not counted in many of the fact-checking initiatives statistics. E.g. currently in Poland, there are six fact-checking media-type initiatives, but only two of them are included in fact-checking databases.

The first regular source of political fact-checking was most probably a blog launched by the United Kingdom's Channel 4 News in 2005, to cover a parliamentary election. In 2008 similar efforts appeared in France and the Netherlands, and by the end of 2010 fact-checkers were active in ten countries. Currently almost every European country has at least one fact-checking initiative. Their focus has been changing and their efforts are no longer dedicated only to verifying public statements but also various forms of disinformation, including debunking fake news.

Some of the most important and oldest fact-checking initiatives worldwide include:

- [Snopes](#), an independent fact-checking newsroom that started in 1994, which makes it the oldest and largest fact-checking site online, which claims to be "the definitive Internet reference source for urban legends, folklore, myths, rumors, and misinformation";
- [Politifact](#), a fact-checking effort owned by the nonprofit Poynter Institute for Media Studies, that rates the accuracy of claims by elected officials and others who speak up in American politics;
- [FactCheck.org](#), a fact-checking project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, that aims to "hold politicians accountable";
- Fact Checker - a fact-checking initiative of "The Washington Post" that focuses on verifying statements of those in or seeking political power.

Fact-checking in researched countries

Some of the fact-checking initiatives worldwide are part of the International Fact-Checking Network at Poynter. It currently consists of 70 newsrooms and organisations, which were verified and signed the IFCN code of principles. Among those, there are:

- two initiatives from Lithuania (Delfi Melo Detektorius, Patikrinta 15min)
- one from Poland (Demagog Association)
- one from North Macedonia (Vistinomer)
- one from Greece (Ellinika Hoaxes)

There are no initiatives in the IFCN from Latvia and Cyprus.

187 active fact-checking efforts are also listed in the Duke Reporter's Lab database. Except for the above mentioned initiatives, the base also includes: Those include:

- oko.press from Poland
- Melu Detektors from Latvia.

It needs however to be noted, that more fact-checking initiatives exist in the researched countries - some of them have been created in the past year, some have not applied to the Network or do not meet some of the databases' inclusion requirements (number of articles; written policy or bios of the authors published on the websites, etc.). They will also be discussed in this paper.

Only projects that have been active in 2019 are included in this document.

No fact-checking initiative appears to exist in Cyprus. The highest number of such projects has been reported in Poland - the largest media market among researched countries.

Cyprus

As data from Eurobarometer 2018 shows, almost five in ten Cypriots say they come across fake news every day or almost every day, while more than seven in ten say they can identify this type of disinformation. Almost one in three say they feel very confident at identifying fake news, while 48% say they feel "somewhat confident".

On average, seven in 10 respondents in Cyprus perceive fake news to be a problem in their country. Around the same percentage feel that fake news is a problem for democracy in general.

Fake news in Cyprus usually concerns politics, the economy and lifestyle. According to the Kremlin Watch, a project by the European Values Think-Tank dedicated to tracking Russian influence campaigns, Cyprus is also prone to Russian disinformation, and however there has been no official indication of acknowledgement of Russian influence operations and disinformation campaigns in any policy document. One of the topics experts fear might be facing attempts of disinformation influence is the peace settlement between the parts of the island.

38% of Cypriot respondents say they believe it is the journalist's job to stop fake news.

However, as online research and expert statements show, there is currently no initiative in Cyprus that would be dedicated to fact-checking. There are also no relevant non-governmental activities or organizations focusing on disinformation campaigns or influence operations.

As the last lines of this document were being revised, it became known that a new initiative was formed during the Covid-19 pandemic under the name "Science Hoaxes" (<https://www.sciencehoaxes.org/>).

According to their statement on their site and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) "the pandemic demonstrated the problem of widespread dissemination of pseudo-scientific misinformation. This page is aimed at communicating science through the explanation of scientific findings, the refutation of pseudo-scientific myths, and the treatment of distortions in public scientific discourse." So far, they have been organising weekly online discussions, where scientists and experts discuss current issues.

Greece

According to the "Digital News Report" by the Reuters Institute, "the media market in Greece is characterised by online fragmentation, a changing and polarised TV market, a print sector in crisis and one of the highest uses of social media for news". Trust in the news remains one of the lowest in countries surveyed by the Institute - its level in 2018 research was 27% (with trust in news from search engines being higher - 37%).

Although Greeks use a number of different news sources (five online ones per week - Digital News Report 2019), in the long-tail list of the most visited websites are a number of news websites or blogs that regularly engage in dangerous conspiracy theories or sensationalism. "Many are preaching to the choir of left or right-wing partisans, reaching sometimes extreme levels of conspiracy and hoax reporting while others are focused on click-bait and social media distribution", Antonis Kalogeropoulos, a Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism noted.

That was confirmed by a survey conducted for the Digital News Report 2018 - 44% of surveyed Greeks stated that they were exposed to completely made-up news stories in the last week. Only Turkey saw a higher number (49%). The number is even higher in the Eurobarometer 2018 research - 74% of respondents said that they encountered fake news at least once a week. That number was higher in Spain, Hungary, Croatia, Poland (75%) and France. 55% of those in Greece said that they came across fake news every day or almost every day.

There are currently two active websites in Greece dedicated to fact-checking as such - Ellinika Hoaxes (Greek Hoaxes) and FactChecker.gr. They mainly focus on

debunking fake news and hoaxes. There are no initiatives that would be dedicated to fact-checking statements of public figures or to writing about foreign influences.

Ellinika Hoaxes - www.ellinikahoaxes.gr

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Ellinika Hoaxes	ca. 470 000	Facebook	ca. 150 000

It was established in 2013 and is based in Thessaloniki. It has been registered as an NGO since 2018 with the stated goal of tackling disinformation. The fact-checking activity includes - as stated by Ellinika Hoaxes itself - issues such as politics, pseudoscience, racist and xenophobic fake news, fake claims that proliferate through social media, historical hoaxes etc. It focuses on stories from Greece, but also writes about fake stories from abroad. According to Sophia Ignatidou, who was evaluating the organisation for the IFCN, “Ellinika Hoaxes fact-checks quite a few stories published on Greek conspiracy theory and far-right websites”.

As the website’s founder stated in one of the interviews, the initiative has ascertained that “most fake news have to do with current events, such as immigration, disinformation about neighboring countries including North Macedonia, misinformation about political statements, claims by politicians, then various sensational claims in the media that range from gossip to medicine, even conspiracy theories (sometimes peddled even by Greek politicians)”. It seems, however, from the website’s content analysis, that it rarely fact checks statements of political figures and rather focuses on debunking online content or claims submitted by readers.

It uses the voluntary help of scientists and specialists.

It occasionally showcases a sensationalist approach to what has been termed “fake news” as a way to engage its readers. It has a high social media reach, which is an important factor in a country with a very high “Facebook as a source of news” approach. Ellinika Hoaxes runs a Facebook group of 10 thousand members where claims for fact-checking are submitted and users collaborate to spot fake news and counter its spread. Content from the group is also used by the website.

Except for verification, Ellinika Hoaxes’ articles also include tips for things to watch out for so readers can develop a critical eye and be able to spot fake news themselves.

It was part of <http://FactCheck.eu> initiative, a joint effort of various fact-checking newsrooms before the EU elections. Ellinika Hoaxes states that apart from the limited funds its founders submitted to establish the NGO, the site does not receive any external funding and any contributors are writing voluntarily.

FactChecker.gr - www.factchecker.gr

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
FactChecker.gr	lack of sufficient data	direct	ca. 7 000

Although the website publishes regularly since 2017, very little information about the initiative is available online, its website also does not include any “about us” section. As can be read on Ellinika Hoaxes’ website, FactChecker.gr is affiliated with it and some writers work for both of the initiatives. However, it is not clear what the relationship is.

The website focuses on debunking scientific and historical claims, pseudosciences, and fake news. Its categories of articles are close to the ones Ellinika Hoaxes publishes. The content largely focuses on conspiracy theories and hoaxes.

Latvia

According to Eurobarometer 2018 data, 35% of Latvian respondents said that every day or almost every day they come across news or information they believe misrepresents reality or is even false. 28% said that happens at least once. 68% of the respondents are very or somewhat confident that they are able to identify misleading or false news. 39% said false news is definitely a problem in Latvia, while 43% said it is to some extent.

The phenomena of fake news in the country are - to a large extent - related to Russia’s disinformation efforts. Russia has long had an obvious interest in spreading fake news in the former Soviet space—an attempt to maintain a foothold in its “sphere of interest.” Disinforming content has been published on social media and such websites as Sputnik.

There are a few projects in Latvia debunking fake stories and verifying political statements, Russian propaganda and other deceptive content. However, at this point it is difficult to evaluate the results of their work as some of them have been recently launched, others do not publish on a regular basis. The type of content they publish varies and thus, no project dedicated to fake news and hoaxes has been widely spread.

Some of the efforts can also be observed as part of routine work by leading media outlets, such as the Latvian Public TV. Its investigative programme “De Facto” has revealed some of the Russian disinformation strategies and fake content used in the public discourse.

The core fact-checking initiatives include:

Melu Detektors - <https://www.lsm.lv/temas/melu-detektors/>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Melu detektors	lack of data (lsm.lv - 2 800 000)	lack of data (lsm.lv - direct)	no dedicated page

Melu Detektors (Lie Detectors) is a fact-checking project affiliated with the public broadcaster and its website LSM.lv. Content within the project has been published on the website since 2014.

The project operated on its own with a combination of government funding and advertising, however the governmental special programme was discontinued at the end of 2018. The project began as a partnership with Re:Baltica, a non-profit investigative news outlet and launched with support from the U.S. Baltic Foundation and the U.S. State Department.

Melu Detektors verifies claims by politicians, public officials, experts and other public figures. It also focuses on verification of documents, including e.g. party programmes. It was very active during the pre-election period. It does not publish regularly and the last story available online is from March 2019. The articles published hitherto are usually long-form, quite conservative in format. They rarely focus on fake news stories.

The project does not have a dedicated website.

“Re:Check” - <https://rebaltica.lv/2019/06/recheck/>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Re:Check	lack of sufficient data both for re:Baltica and the project	lack of data (re:Baltica Facebook)	no dedicated page (re:Baltica - 22 800)

“Re:Check” is a recent fact-checking project by The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism “Re:Baltica”. A team of journalists verifies the truthfulness of claims by significant public figures (politicians, officials, opinion leaders) and organisations, deconstructs lies (e.g. posts on social media) and researches communication trends on social networks. Readers can also send in statements that they suspect might include lies or disinformation.

Re:Check works under the auspices of Re:Baltica, but is an independent unit with its own mission, tasks and team. Money for the project comes from Re:Baltica

(mainly donors). So far there are nine stories published on the website of the project, which launched in June 2019.

Among other fact-checking efforts, a regular blog by Arnis Latisenko, an analyst with the Centre for East European Policy Studies (CEEPS), can be mentioned. Once a couple of weeks on the most popular news portal in Latvia, Delfi.lv, he publishes examples of Russian disinformation. Latišenko selects the most striking and typical instances of deception created by Russia while dispelling the lies.

Lithuania

Like every country worldwide, Lithuania is prone to fake news, however - because of its history and geopolitical situation - it is also prone to foreign influences and disinformation campaigns. As has been observed, fake stories that go public in Lithuania, are often connected to Russian narratives. Some of them might threaten the state's order and territorial integrity and arise from Russian media outlets (mainly television).

As Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė mentioned in her interview with "Foreign Policy" magazine in 2018, "After Crimea, the investment in propaganda and information warfare was massively increased by the Kremlin. We are already in a non-conventional war because of the [constant] cyberattacks, TV propaganda, and information attacks from Russia. We see this all the time. They try to invest in some politicians. They plant fake news stories".

It is interesting to note however, that although the disinformation threat is largely recognised by Lithuanian institutions, it seems not to have been observed by the citizens. According to Eurobarometer 2018 data, respondents in Lithuania were the least likely (53%) to say that they come across fake news at least once a week (the higher number was observed only in Estonia and Malta -54%). 23% said they come across it every day, while 21% - seldom or never.

When asked which institutions should mainly act to stop the spread of fake news, most of the respondents in Lithuania answered "journalists" (37%).

Fact-checking initiatives in Lithuania are relatively new. They are run mainly by journalists.

Patrikinta - <https://www.15min.lt/patikrinta-15min>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Patrikinta	lack of data (15min.lt - 21,6 mln)	lack of data (15min.lt - direct)	no dedicated page (15min.lt - 580 000)

Patrikinta (Checked) is a fact-checking section of 15min.lv - an established Lithuanian website (second most popular news portal), owned by the biggest

publisher in the Baltic countries, Eesti Meedia. Patrikinta was the first fact-checking project in the country, launched in 2016.

It covers a wide variety of topics, from claims made by politicians (also on a local level), businesspersons and other public figures. It also publishes articles on fake stories disseminated on social media and Russian disinformation. The project includes a "[Government Promise Meter](#)", launched in 2017, which helps keep track of the current government's promises.

Reports are published on the website on a regular basis (at least one report a week) and are often based on recommendations from the readers.

Delfi Melo Detektorius - <https://www.delfi.lt/news/melo-detektorius/>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Melo Detektorius	lack of data (delfi.lt - 33,2 mln)	lack of data (delfi.lt - direct)	no dedicated page (delfi.lt - 540 000)

Melo Detektorius (Lie Detector) is a fact-checking project of the largest Lithuanian media outlet Delfi Lietuva' (owned by Postimees Grupp), launched in October 2018. As it stated for the IFCN submission, "the platform unites professional journalists and experts determined to seek the truth and maintain fair journalistic standards". The project's journalists analyze speeches and claims of important Lithuania's political figures. Some articles available on the project's website are focused on debunking fake stories or myths.

So far the team has published only 31 articles. To find potentially harmful publications it uses i.a. an AI based disinformation spotting tool, developed by Delfi, called debunk.eu. The team accepts requests to check doubtful information sent by readers.

Debunk.eu (Demaskuok) - <https://debunk.eu/>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Debunk.eu	lack of sufficient data	direct	no dedicated page

Debunk.eu (Demaskuok in Lithuanian) is a unique Lithuania-born initiative uniting competing seven media outlets, journalists, volunteers for a single purpose - to make society more resilient to orchestrated disinformation campaigns. Altogether its outreach is 90% of the Lithuanian population.

Also involved in the initiative are three StratCom units of the Lithuanian MoD, MFA and armed forces (expertise), volunteers including Lithuania's community of "elves" (volunteers fighting online against internet trolls and disinformation),

researchers (expertise including cross-checking), experienced team of IT geeks. The project is funded by Delfi and Google Digital News Initiative’s Innovation Fund.

For the project’s purposes, an analytic tool driven by AI has been under development. The project claims that it is capable of spotting and identifying disinformation within 2 minutes in real time. Currently the tool analyses 10,000 articles in Lithuanian and Russian languages per day. It involves civil society of elves and journalists in the verifying process.

North Macedonia

During the American presidential elections of 2016, North Macedonia became a country largely associated with the fake news phenomena, since many of the fake websites originated in the country. They were, however, aimed at the Western market, published in English on issues related to the USA. Still, fake news and disinformation is obviously not an unknown problem to the country itself either.

Internal disinformation campaigns were observed e.g. during the recent referendum of 2018. Before the vote, social media platforms became not only channels for sharing political opinions, but also venues for deliberate polarization and misleading content. A number of websites appeared on social media, sharing false information about the consequences of the referendum. According to experts, Russian involvement in the campaign was also observed (including Sputnik publications).

According to a report by German Marshall Fund, in North Macedonia, bots and automation tools have played a key role in pushing anti-West narratives. “A key venue for such rhetoric was the online media infrastructure inherited from the previous government’s propaganda machinery,” states the report.

According to the Kremlin Watch, “There may be further risks of Russian interference on the horizon with Greece dropping its longstanding veto against Macedonia joining NATO over resolving the dispute regarding the country’s name in 2018. The Kremlin will seek to detach Macedonia from Western influence by using the media and propaganda to further exploit local ethnic tensions within the large Albanian population and make appeals to those sensitive to Russian Orthodoxy and the pan-Slavic identity discourse”.

A 2018 survey ranked North Macedonia last among 35 in media literacy, indicating its high vulnerability to disinformation

Currently there is one established initiative that debunks fake stories and fact-check public statements in North Macedonia.

Vistinomer - <http://vistinomer.mk/>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Vistinomer	not sufficient data	direct	19 500

Vistinomer (Truthometer) was established and is run by a non-governmental organization in Skopje - the Metamorphosis Foundation. It has been funded by the National Endowment for Democracy. Its main website is located at vistinomer.mk, however it also owns some other addresses that have a different graphic design and selection of content. That includes <http://proverkanafakti.mk/>, <http://verifikimiifakteve.mk/> in Albanian and <http://factchecking.mk/> in English. The main purpose of the project is to create a permanent public record documenting key issues related to media quality and accountability in Macedonia, through expert peer reviews and analyses. The project's team analyzes statements and promises of political parties and figures and presents them in an aggregated form. One of its missions is to recover data which disappears from the online sphere; in 2016 it published a large archive of leaked wiretaps implicating top officials in a major corruption scandal. It also systematically fact-checks the news media.

'We view [fact-checking] as touching on investigative journalism and inspiring investigative journalism,' said Filip Stojanovski, founder of Macedonia's Vistinomer.

The articles of the project are often republished by media outlets. However, it does not focus on debunking fake stories that are published online, especially in the social media sphere.

Poland

Media in Poland has become deeply polarised in the last few years. According to the Digital News Report 2019, 43% of Polish people are concerned about what is real and what is fake on the Internet when it comes to news. That is one of the lowest numbers among researched countries (e.g. Greece - 61%). A year earlier that level was 42% (Greece - 66%, average - 54%).

The Polish political establishment seems to be highly concerned about Russian influence. According to the Annual address on foreign policy goals from 2016, Poland acknowledges that Russia seeks to expand its sphere of influence and inhibit the democratic transition of Eastern Europe with the means of hybrid activities, including propaganda. According to a report by the Polish Internal Security Agency, Russia might attempt to spread pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian views among the Polish public through internet blogs, portals and news services.

Media experts and journalists in Poland say that intentionally misleading stories are currently not an everyday occurrence in the country. However, fake stories - especially on such issues as immigration, LGBT, health issues (vaccinations) - are observed more and more often. Also - as noted by the International Press Institute - "experts warn that content from the government-controlled public broadcaster is often only a very thin line away from outright propaganda".

Some fact-checking initiatives have been launched in Poland in recent years (five of them in 2018 and 2019), three of them with the support of Google’s Digital News Initiative Fund. The initiatives vary in their main focus, however all of them seem to be providing verification of public statements, as well as debunking fake stories. Some of them dedicate their efforts also to investigating or describing Russian disinformation in Poland.

Demagog - demagog.org.pl

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Demagog	not sufficient data	Facebook	14 800

Demagog is the oldest-running Polish fact-checking initiative, which focuses on verifying public statements by politicians. It has been created and run by a group of volunteers - mainly students from around the country, of different schools and faculties, and young journalists. Demagog has been registered as an NGO since 1989.

Over the course of the past five years the team has fact-checked more than 3300 statements and more than 200 promises. The team does not work in a newsroom style, thus the verification statements are often published some days after the original statements were made. The publications of the project are very structured and according to a standardized format (both in social media and on the website). Demagog is also involved in quite a number of media literacy dedicated initiatives.

oko.press - <https://oko.press>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
oko.press	3 100 000	Direct	270 000

Oko.press describes itself as a “non-profit, investigative journalism and fact-checking project created to preserve freedom of speech and secure availability of information in Poland”. It was launched in 2016 - initially as fact-checking as the main focus. Its team of about 20 (with a number of established journalists) has built a reputation for its investigative reporting and creating watchdog content, however it is largely directed at the government and the ruling party (recently also the Catholic Church). As Agata Szczeńiak of oko.press states, “we are, for example, seen as the news outlet most actively and closely reporting the protests movement in Poland”.

Oko.press is 80 percent financed by its readers, at the launch - it was financially supported by two big newspapers, Polityka and Gazeta Wyborcza. It was created soon after the Law and Justice Party (PiS) came to power, as a way to preserve freedom of speech.

The content that can be considered as fact-checking, focuses on verification of statements by public figures - politicians, experts, but also journalists and commentators - mainly from the public media. Oko.press journalists have also been investigating Russian influence in Poland and disinformation campaigns on social media (both foreign and internal).

The style of Oko.press publications (both on the website and social media) is engaging, however sometimes politically involved (therefore by some considered biased).

Konkret24 - <https://konkret24.tvn24.pl>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Konkret24	1 500 000	Referrals	5 500

Konkret24 is the most popular fact-checking-only website in Poland. It verifies both typical fake news stories from Poland and abroad, as well as statements by public persons (not only politicians). Through access to public information, it also checks on politicians promises and public spending, etc. It also publishes articles on disinformation (reports, new trends) and from time to time - news stories connected to current affairs but with a fact-checking or watchdog component. The team consists of some leading Polish fact-checkers.

Contrary to oko.press, it does not publish commentaries or general current affairs stories, as well as investigative journalism.

The project launched in November 2018 with the Google News Initiative's support. It is part of TVN Discovery media group and is often linked to by its main news portal - tvn24.pl (61,7 mln views in June 2019), which helps it build readership. The project includes suggestions from readers for their reporting and verification and is building a dedicated tool for that.

[DISCLAIMER: The author of the report is the head of Konkret24 project.]

Trudat - <https://trudat.natemat.pl/>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Trudat	170 000	Referrals	no dedicated site

Trudat is a Google News Initiative supported project, launched in early 2018 by naTemat media group. It verifies public statements by Polish politicians and also debunks popular fake news stories. From time to time it also answers questions to most popular questions on the Internet.

It does not publish regularly and its style is very often of clickbait nature - which is consistent with the naTemat media group's style. The project has not gained much

traction individually, its articles are rather perceived as part of naTemat website. The fact that Trudat does not have its own social media adds to that.

Demaskator24 - <https://demaskator24.pl/>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Demaskator24	not sufficient data	Referrals	300

Demaskator24 is yet another project that launched with the Google News Initiative’s support - in January 2019 - as part of Polska Press media group (the biggest group of local news outlets in Poland).

Although it describes itself as a fact-checking project, it publishes such content very irregularly. Other stories published within the content include interviews and commentaries on current affairs (some of them as backgrounders), as well as articles on the phenomena of disinformations.

As of yet, it has not built a significant audience.

Sprawdzam AFP - <https://sprawdzam.afp.com>

Name	Total visits, June 2019	Main source of traffic	Facebook followers
Sprawdzam AFP	not sufficient data	Facebook	no dedicated Polish site

Sprawdzam AFP is the latest fact-checking project in Poland. It was launched in May 2019 by AFP press agency and is part of its global efforts to debunk fake news. It publishes content related to disinformation content published on social media in Poland and abroad. It does not verify statements of politicians, as long as they don’t go viral online.

AFP is one of the largest publishers worldwide cooperating with Facebook on its fact-checkers project. The Polish branch is also part of FB fact-checking initiative. As of yet, AFP’s project has not yet reached much traction - it is not very active on social media and since Similarweb tools show there is no sufficient data on the number of visits to the project’s website, it probably is not reaching a wide audience. Still, the content that is verified by the team, is later lowered by Facebook rankings. Sprawdzam AFP is the only team in Poland working with Facebook.

Conclusions

Disinformation - including the dissemination of fake news - is a global phenomenon and thus it also affects, to a varying extent and in different forms, researched countries. Although the topic is widely discussed in the media, by official bodies and academia, the approach to fight it varies, but publishing debunking and fact-checking content remains one of the leading ones.

In researched countries, only Cyprus does not have any prominent and visible on the market fact-checking initiatives, either led by publishers (independent or mainstream) or by NGOs. All other countries have at least one such initiative with Poland and Lithuania having a few of them.

The number of initiatives in Lithuania and the cross-newsroom character of one of them mirror the overall situation in the country when it comes to the recognition of disinformation problems.

The amount of initiatives in Poland is largely influenced by the size of its media market and population. However, the data shows that only few of the initiatives have gained audiences and can have a substantial influence on the public discourse. The reasons for that might be different: from the level of journalism provided (this paper does not estimate it), through types of publication and promotion scheme, to the fact that possibly the audience might prefer a limited number of sources to look into when searching for verified content. So far there has been no research into that in Poland.

What needs also to be noted is that out of the researched initiatives in the respective countries, only few (where data is available) have a website viewership over one million: oko.press and Konkret24 (it is still much lower than leading news portals in Poland). What helps Konkret24 is its connection with tvn24.pl news portal, while for oko.press its big user engagement and political identification with the publisher plays a role. Ellenika Hoaxes has not reached one million viewers but its results put them on third position in compared initiatives. That might be caused by its length of operation time, its consistency and sometimes also sensational (though trustworthy) way of reporting. Also, the initiative has a very good visibility on Facebook, which - when it comes to fake news - is a very important factor.

Surprisingly, some of the projects are not active on the platform or have not built a proper audience. Also, most of the initiatives mentioned are active only on Facebook and Twitter, which limits their possibility to reach younger audiences (such as Instagram, YouTube or TikTok). Although those social platforms - because of their nature and linking possibilities - would not bring traffic to the websites, they might help reach a bigger number of people who might have faced disinformation content.

As some studies, users' contributions to the fight against the spread of misleading information online are crucial due to the fact that their results might be used by media outlets as well. Most of the initiatives created in researched countries, do give the readers such an opportunity and the readers input is used when creating content.

Most of the initiatives researched do not mention their sustainability strategies, however - based on available worldwide data - they are most probably not bringing profits. That makes it easier for initiatives started by big publishers (Melu Detektors, Konkret24, Patrikinta) to remain on the market.

While researching the described countries and their fact-checking project, it has been noted that there is very little research into them - including their strategies, editorial content, audience engagement and influence. Their visibility in search engines is also rather low.

Recommendations

1. launching a fact-checking initiative in Cyprus
2. (academic) research into the processes and effects of fact-checking initiatives might help better and more effectively shape their future work and fight against disinformation
3. Cooperation between different media outlets and also other parties (NGO, academia, governments) might help debunking and anti-disinformation efforts as the content might reach larger audiences. Although data for Lithuanian Debunk.eu and North Macedonia's Vistinomer's different language versions of website is not available, it is suspected that such cooperation lowers the costs of debunking fake content and helps spread content more widely
4. Very few websites inform their audiences about the experts they work with. Such cooperation among experts of different backgrounds is advised (e.g. social scientists, lawyers, politicians, mathematicians, doctors, civil activists, etc.)
5. supporting newsrooms with digital tools for fighting disinformation and trainings is advised
6. As recommended by the European Commission's High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation, the diversity and sustainability of the European news media ecosystem should be safeguarded. Actions should be taken both on the European level but also on the national one. Public support for media outlets of such importance should be provided, with no influence on their editorial integrity
7. More cross-border cooperation between news media organisations may have positive effects on both quality standards and raise collective awareness about false narratives across newsrooms. Although usually fact-checked content is of national, individual nature, sometimes fake stories also cross borders and sharing content might help debunk them faster
8. The majority of the initiatives rely solely on human expertise to perform all tasks related to fact-checking. To make them truly effective, more technological solutions should be used, with AI being one of them. With

limited resources, what could help is yet again some kind of cooperation - with tech companies or researchers

9. The initiatives seem largely to be dedicated to grown-up audiences (conclusion based on the conservative style of writing, means of dissemination, etc.). Ways of reaching younger audiences should be found and experiments with various social platforms undertaken.
10. As noted by Reuters Institute in “Misinformation and Disinformation Unpacked” [Richard Fletcher], “concern over misinformation is generally greater among those with higher levels of interest in the news and lower levels of trust”. Although some of the newsrooms are involved in news literacy initiatives, more efforts should be undertaken by them. That should include more backgrounders and explanatory materials on how content is created, better research into audience consumption trends and adjusting the style to different types of audiences.

Gap 6: Media (industry) involvement in Media Literacy

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Introduction - Concept definition

So far, we have discussed trust in media, media literacy in education and policies promoting Media Literacy. But in order to restore trust in media and to ensure that efforts linked to media literacy will be effective, the media organizations must actively contribute to this effort. It is important to highlight that the mean which conveys the message has a growing responsibility in a changing news ecosystem.

The explosion of digital media provides unlimited opportunities for learning, social connection and entertainment but also unprecedented responsibilities. As Flanagin & Metzger (2008) say, the wide-scale access and multiplicity of sources which ensure vast information availability also make assessing the credibility of information extremely complex.

Back in 1999, Renee Hobbs was posing the “seven great debates in the media literacy movement”, which was gaining momentum in the United States; among which the crucial question: Should media literacy initiatives be supported financially by media organizations? The author of the paper encouraged the readers to vote yes, if they thought media organizations have a social

responsibility to help people develop critical thinking concerning the media, thus making the media a kind of consumer skill [?].

Initiatives on a European level

The European Commission supports Media Literacy, stressing that it is important to ensure everyone can understand and engage with digital media. It adds that Media literacy is vital for economic growth and job creation. Accordingly, the European Commission supports initiatives, manages programs, collaborates with the countries and is preparing a report on media literacy levels across Europe.

Recognizing the need for Media Literacy in the Newsrooms, the Global Editors Network has created a media literacy toolkit for newsrooms, in collaboration with a number of partners, among which the European federation of journalists. The aforementioned initiative is supported by the European Commission.

The question posed is “How can newsrooms and journalists take ownership of promoting trust and transparency in their work? How can we reinforce the responsibility of journalists towards confronting falsehoods and engaging the public in identifying and fighting disinformation?”

In 2018-2019 the toolkit included “unconferences” in European cities with the participation of journalists and experts, followed by a hackathon in Paris.

Further, some media organizations in the UK have designed special programs for youth such as BBC’s young reporter, the Burnet News Club from the Economist Educational Foundation, the Sunday Times Media Literacy programs etc. These are just a few of the projects run by some of the biggest media organizations in the country, in which students are invited to join media literacy projects.

Analysis of gaps - What happens in the countries?

A list of media, information and digital literacy-related organizations throughout Europe can be found here by EAVI, a non-profit organization based in Brussels. Though a limited list, it provides an array of relevant organizations and descriptions of their tasks:

Cyprus

The Cyprus Radio-Television Authority, which is responsible to safeguard the right of expression and, in that framework, to regulate the media for the public interest, states that “specific conditions and restrictions are necessary so as to serve the public interest and so that human rights are not violated and that harm is not caused to viewers and listeners”.

Following the suggestions of the European Committee, in 2011, the Authority formed a special committee for the implementation of its declared Media Literacy policy. On its website, it dedicates a section to Media Literacy, with a list of documents and EU publications, while it has organized a few events on the topic. Since 2014, it has offered workshops for primary school students, mainly focusing on recognizing the messages of commercial spots. In 2019, the workshops expanded in Lyceums (15-18 year old students) and were focused on the topic of misinformation. According to the Authority, in 2018-2019, 673 students participated in 22 workshops.

In its “Media Literacy whitepaper” the Authority declares that it undertakes the task of implementing media literacy projects in collaboration with public and private media.

It is also mentioned that, by law, the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation participates in the campaign which is coordinated by the Authority, especially through the dissemination of useful information and the support of campaigns in the digital environment, about the responsible use of the internet.

The Public broadcaster does not implement specific programs or projects related to Media Literacy. However, during the last few years, public or private media have organized a number of events related to Media Literacy in collaboration with representatives of the European entities in Cyprus, or have joined, as partners, European initiatives on the topic. Private TV station Ant1 joined two such initiatives, the DIMELI4AC project and the MELde project.

Some examples of events: the European Parliament Information Office in Cyprus, the Cyprus News Agency, the Union of Cyprus Journalists, the Cyprus Radio-Television Authority and the Cyprus Media Complaints Commission organized a conference on “Fake News: Phenomenon of Manipulation in the Modern World”

“Cyprus news and the digital agenda” was another conference organized by local private media and supported by the European Commission, where fake news was the first topic at the line-up, with the participation of European Commission’s representatives.

Greece

By checking the facts, there is a country-wide educational policy to educate youngsters on the proper usage of all means of digital communication. The state scheme provides via GSN [The Greek School Network] schooling in various methods

of digital literacy and digital education [Papadimitriou, 2015, p.114] The latter is succeeded by an interconnection between schools and the general supervision of the Ministry of Education. This let's say “digital hub” comprises numerous technological tools [email, video on demand, web hosting, e-learning, safe and remote access, instant messaging etc] and attempts to digitalize the educational process.

Along with this, there is the Educational Radio-Television of Greece (EduTV) which is a multimedia platform, that can be found in the most widely-used social media, and aims at “at complementing educational resources in the classroom” [Papadimitriou, 2015, p.114] by offering the teachers and students alike, the chance to improve their teaching and learning abilities. All these are part of a general policy of the *Digital School* of the Ministry of Education [MoE] that is in line with the Rethinking Education, a pan European strategy.

Greek Media Literacy Week

In terms of awareness of the general public it is worth to mention the efforts of Media Literacy Institute [MLI] (member of EC's MLEG) to organize high impact campaigns, events and workshops, as well as to establish the «Greek Media Literacy Week» every fall, echoing the similar work by UNESCO, as you can see here

<https://medialiteracyinstitute.gr/actions/greek-media-information-news-literacy-week-2018/>

These quite important campaigns move from the scope of MIL as a pure educational process, and promote and focus “on information and misinformation issues, which are critical to defending democratic values and improving our daily lives.” They aim to acquaint people from all backgrounds and ages with elementary concepts in order to comprehend and evaluate properly all the content they read, both online and in print. Apart from that, the campaigns of Media Literacy Institute attempt to educate in some manner the public to the extent of their individual posts on social media i.e. the shared content and the dissemination of information.

Along with the workshops facilitated by academics and journalists, MLI has a set of videos online like “why do we believe in fake news”, “How to recognize misinformation”, “Media education: How fake news affects us”. The videos can be found in the link above.

Some of the main themes of last year's Media Literacy Week were:

- Propaganda and the Internet: Guidelines for Effective Online
- Propaganda Media Literacy: The Need of the 21st Century
- Our social media image
- Misinformation as part of Russia's military doctrine

- Disinformation and Addressing Propaganda in South Eastern Europe
- News: What and how we “believe”: the importance of news literacy for Democracy

The MLI targets in enlightening society and bring it to the fast and informative world of 21st Century through “the creation of online content, research journalism, capacity building, skills development, campaigns, curriculum development and guidelines, seminars and workshops, networking and public discussions, as well as partnerships with domestic and international organizations”.

At this point it is important to highlight that the main sponsor of the week was Kathimerini, a major national paper in Greece and Cyprus.

Latvia

“**Pilna doma**” (can be translated into English as “Full thought”) is a project by the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, which runs for several years now and is aimed at school students (years 10-12) and at their teachers. The project aims at increasing media literacy of young people by teaching them the difference between journalism and some other types of non-informative content.

“Pilna doma” has attempted different approaches over the years - it has created a database of learning tools: learning plans for educators on different topics of media literacy (for example on sources of information, tactics of disinformation and how to spot them, conspiracy theories and search engine algorithms), self-test to assess one’s own media literacy, short presentations on most common journalism genres and formats.

The project has also cooperated with journalists from various media outlets: public and private, Latvian- and Russian-speaking, online, TV and radio. Over the years the cooperation has been diverse. For instance, in 2017 journalists were invited to record video-lessons about different aspects of media work, such as creating content online, reportage work, and specifics of regional media. In 2018 journalists visited schools and gave interactive lessons on media-literacy, and explained their work and mission.

In addition, “Pilna doma” also tries to involve school students by organizing nation-wide competitions. In 2018, journalists from various media outlets became mentors in a journalism contest for high-school students from all regions of Latvia. It is planned that in 2019 the competition will be held online with the help of the LSM.lv online publication of the Latvian public broadcaster.

“Tīri fakti” (part of “pilna doma”), (“Pure facts”) is a project by the public radio of Latvia, aimed at young media consumers. Here is how it is described by its creators: “The aim of the multimedia project Tīri fakti (Pure facts), created by the BCME in collaboration with the youth radio station Pieci.lv and the public multilingual news portal LSM.lv, is to introduce key media literacy topics and issues to a wider audience of young media users. Along with clear explanatory journalism, a range of user-friendly formats are employed to attract the public’s attention – from infographics to comic strips”. The series of short video-clips and radio programmes about different aspects and tools of disinformation, as well as explaining how fake news and interpretations influence the news cycle.

“Melu detektors” (“Lie detector”) is a fact-checking project of the public broadcasters portal LSM.lv. Its aim is to pick statements made by politicians, public officials, experts and other public figures, and make deep analysis of specific statements or longer documents (such as party programmes) and was provided in different formats. Authors of the fact-check then gave an evaluation, such as “truth”, “half-truth”, and “empty talk” or “panic inducing”. The project was widely noticed and very active during the pre-election period. It was financed by a special government programme, which was discontinued at the end of 2018.

“Re:Check” is the newest fact-checking project by the centre of investigative journalism “Re:Baltica”. Readers can send in statements that they suspect might include lies or disinformation.

4facts is a crowd-sourced fact-checking platform, created by the centre of investigative journalism “Re:Baltica”. It allows readers to become fact-checkers and give their take on the credibility of an article or news story. However, the project seems to be inactive.

Lithuania

“Inconvenient Films” is an international competitive human rights documentary film festival, taking place in various cities and towns across Lithuania. The festival invites filmmakers, experts, activists and festival audience to appreciate and discuss the role of documentaries in reflecting and shaping our understanding of reality. Inconvenient Films also has an education section: movies are accompanied with educational activities.

Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT) is a non-profit public broadcaster whose mission is to serve the public by providing objective, reliable information to the people of Lithuania and the world, and to create and broadcast professional educational, cultural and entertainment programs that bring together and unify progress. *LRT* has a TV channel, radio station and a website.

The following series of short videos related to Fake News were made with the collaboration of Inconvenient Films and LRT:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=749762792024844> How to spot troll/bot?

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=499879543812106> How to spot fake news?

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2156376717706278> Fake news in Lithuania

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2032421210169979> Fake pictures

Lithuanian Journalism Centre organizes conferences, seminars and workshops on journalism and mass media problems, does applied media research and offers insight into communication policies, offers critical thinking, media and information literacy training. It also publishes journalism books and methodological materials. For example, *Lithuanian Journalism Centre* in collaboration with the Swedish Embassy and the Swedish Institute developed methodological material “Internet media map” which explains how media works.

Second most popular (in 2018) news portal in Lithuania was *15min.lt*. It is a part of The International Fact-Checking Network which is a unit of the Poynter Institute dedicated to bringing together fact-checkers worldwide. IFCN monitors trends, formats and policy-making about fact-checking worldwide, promotes basic standards through the fact-checkers’ code of principles and projects to track the impact of fact-checking and etc. *15min.lt* has several segments for fact checking: “Checked by 15min“, “Government promises meter” and “Reminded by 15min.lt”.

<https://www.15min.lt/patikrinta-15min>

Nanook is a private modern multimedia company, which produces professional multimedia documentary content and creative projects. *Nanook* education program unites aspiring and enthusiastic professionals. The team of *Nanook* journalists visited 22 schools in Lithuania to familiarize students with the principles of media literacy and learn from the pupils themselves. Their experience is shared in a podcast called Nyla together with the voice of students.

Discussion festival *Būtent* in Lithuania was inspired by the examples of Democracy festivals in all Scandinavian countries as well as Latvia and Estonia. The festival’s mission is to contribute to building a democratic welfare state by fostering a culture of discussion, concord and tolerance. Media literacy was a part of this initiative’s interest field in 2018, when people gathered to discuss the “Map of the Future Medias: Surviving and Extinct”.

Liberty TV (“Laisvės TV”) is the first independent TV based on YouTube and fully crowd-funded by the public on Patreon platform. *Liberty TV* is a non-profit and civic society education mission, which uses different channels to educate society, such as civic actions, TV shows, podcasts, events and others. *Liberty TV* has a TV

show “Deconstructions”, where Russian propaganda in Russia, Lithuania, or anywhere in the world is deconstructed while analysing its objectives, ways and means of dissemination. *Liberty TV* has a civic project “R.I.T.A” which stands for Real Information Research Agency, where investigative journalism and civic initiatives intertwine. On the interactive page - the map of Lithuania - project volunteers or any other person will be able to announce non-transparent purchases in their municipality. This project is co-funded by the European Union Structural Funds.

Online daily newspaper *Bernardinai.lt* is founded by MBO (The Order of the Minor Brothers) St. Casimir Province Francis and St. Bernardino Monastery. The purpose of *Bernardinai.lt* is searching for the truth, trying to get to know yourself and the world in which we live, to proclaim and testify to Christian values through modern means of public communication. *Bernardinai TV* is without violence, emotional irritation, shallow entertainment, and manipulation of the audience's feelings and minds. A relevant TV show about media literacy has 10 episodes: “Mass media and their place in our lives”, “From Gutenberg's Galaxy to the Internet”, “Reality and its portrayal in the media”, “How the media constructs reality”, “How the media manages our habits and attitudes”, “One-sided stories or stereotypes”, “Promotional tricks”, “Media & Global Village”, “Social Networks: Exclusion or Communion?” and “National identity and media”. The project was supported by the Lithuanian Council for Culture.

Debunk (demaskuok in Lithuanian) is a unique Lithuania-born initiative uniting competing media outlets, journalists, and volunteers for a single purpose: to make society more resilient to orchestrated disinformation campaigns. The problem is complex, and it requires complex solutions and *Debunk.eu* has it all: the analytic tool driven by multiple AIs that spots and identifies disinformation within 2 minutes from real time, civil society of elves and journalists who verify claims and competing newsrooms that seek for maximum outreach.

Debunk initiative is uniting the efforts and expertise of seven largest media outlets in Lithuania (online, TV, radio) with 90% of national audience coverage (outreach), three StratCom units of the Lithuanian MoD, MFA and armed forces (expertise), volunteers including Lithuania's community of “elves”, researchers (expertise including cross-checking), experienced team of IT geeks (development of multiple AIs). *Debunk* is funded by Delfi (Lithuanian private media channel) and Digital News Innovation Fund (Google).

Debunk unites Lithuanian community of volunteer fighters against internet trolls and disinformation. The community unites professionals from different fields, including but not limited to experts in foreign, security, IT, cyber, environmental, economic and other affairs. Depending on the situation, elves may act both proactively or reactively. They operate both individually and as a well-organised social media community.

North Macedonia

In the Republic of North Macedonia, there are several media literacy connected initiatives. Most of them come from the civic sector, and the associations of journalists.

Other than these, the platform <http://mediumskapismenost.mk> has been created by the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, which is an independent regulatory body, and by the Media Literacy Network. The Media Literacy Network was created in order to facilitate the communication and consultation between different entities in the country working on raising the level of media literacy of all citizens. It should contribute to more frequent cooperation between the relevant factors and for better and more sustainable results from the projects.

Below are some of the most important initiatives:

MIM, the Macedonian Institute for Media is probably the organization that has the most (successful) projects connected with media literacy in North Macedonia. As stated on their official website, The Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM) is a non-governmental, non-political and non-profit organization founded by the Danish School of Journalism, USAID/IREX Pro Media and the Macedonian Press Centre in 2001. The Institute has gradually grown into a massive media platform in North Macedonia, encompassing into its professional network the bulk of the media outlets in the country. MIM enables free and easy access to media literature, up-to-date resources for professional development and education, media research and analyses; as well as opportunities for joint production. The Institute is a founder of the School of Journalism and Public Relations, an educational institution accredited by the Ministry of Education and Science, offering graduate and postgraduate studies in journalism and communication sciences.

Some of their projects involve creating a manual for teachers in collaboration with the Biro for Education Development under the Ministry of Education which can be found on:

<http://mediumskapismenost.mk/publikacii>

“Mediateka” is the name of the TV show made by the Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM) which is broadcasted on national television. It is a show targeted for children and youth. Here is a link to one of the shows:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3O_Q6MfGfU4 Every episode has a different theme, and the guests are respected professionals and also students from primary and high schools that can ask questions and participate in the discussion.

Other than this, MIM has created a very popular campaign with one of the most famous actors on media literacy. They created a series of educational videos and

put serious effort into promoting them. They had their sponsored videos running on Facebook, on YouTube, but also on the most used news aggregator TIME.MK. The following link demonstrates how this looked:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfTDoCjTcvM&t=3s>

Additionally, F2N2.MK is a platform that “debunks” not only news stories but also the whole narrative around them. It is created by MOST, a very influential NGO formed in 2002 that focuses mostly on monitoring the election processes. The F2N2 stands for Fighting Fake News Narratives.

It started in November 2018, when Citizens Association MOST began to implement the project Fighting Fake News Narratives (F2N2) which consists of daily systematic monitoring of selected programs of broadcast media, social media and internet portals, through the use of various tools, programmes and open-source software.

The main goal, according to their website, is to contribute towards rebuilding citizens’ trust in democracy and the democratic values through comprehensive and systematic monitoring of the development of narratives, thus combating disinformation and fake news.

F2N2 produces and publishes short rapid-response stories, longer debunking / research and analytic reports and detects the dissemination channels of disinformation. The focus is on the disinformation narratives (domestic and foreign) appearing around the Key events related to Euro-Atlantic Integration of North Macedonia.

There is an ongoing project by the Foundation Metamorphosis and the NGO EuroThink called КриТинк (CriThink (Critical Thinking)) that should promote Media Literacy among citizens and create materials for improving media literacy skills. Metamorphosis has a website called visitinomer.mk (truth meter) which “measures” the truth in some of the statements by public figures.

Last, but not least is The Association of Journalists of North Macedonia (AJM) was founded in 1946. AJM is a member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). AJM is an independent, non-governmental and non- political party organization whose purpose is to be the protector and promoter of professional standards and freedom of expression. The association is very vocal and promotes media literacy as well as professional journalism.

Poland

Very few Polish media outlets are involved in media literacy initiatives as such, and if such involvement occurs, those are not newsroom-inborn initiatives, but rather cooperation on initiatives undertaken by other parties.

Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (KRRiTV; The National Broadcasting Council) is the Polish broadcasting regulator. On its website it has a part dedicated to media literacy, [Drogowskaz Medialny](#) (Media Signpost). It explains what media literacy is, how media can be used in the education process, how organisations are involved in media literacy activities, etc. It is not clear however, if the website is used by schools and other practitioners and it has not been updated for some time, as most of the content is since or before 2016. Little has also been heard about KRRiTV's involvement in media literacy, other than having patronage over events organised by other parties.

Fact-checking initiatives involved in media-literacy:

[demagog.org.pl](#) is the oldest-running Polish fact-checking platform that focuses on verifying public statements by politicians. It is created and run by students from around the country, of different schools and faculties, and young journalists. A group of volunteers verifies the statements. It is important to mention that Demagog is registered as an association and not a publisher. Two years ago it launched [Akademia Fact-Checkingu](#) (The Fact-Checking Academy), an educational initiative focused on teaching secondary school and university students how to verify information, how to spot fake news and manipulation. Akademia's trainers visit schools around Poland, as well as are involved in special fact-checking events. One of their projects was focused on providing education on fake news and verification to teachers. Some educational materials are also provided on Akademia's website.

[Demaskator24](#) launched in 2019 as part of the Polska Press media group and publishes fact-checking and current affairs articles. The website also has an educational component - Akademia Demaskatora (Demaskator Academy) in which short videos about verification tools and techniques are published. The website also includes Przewodnik Demaskatora (Demaskator Guide) which includes some general articles on what disinformation is, however that part of the website has not been updated for quite a time (the website as such does not publish regularly either).

[Konkret24](#) is the most popular fact-checking-only website in Poland. It verifies both typical fake news stories and statements by public persons (not only politicians) and articles on disinformation (reporters, new trends, steps taken by governments/big tech, etc.). It does not have a special educational section, but many of the articles describe verification techniques and tools used. From time to

time Konkret24 also shares verification tips on social media. The project launched in November 2018, it is part of TVN Discovery media group.

Fundacja Reporterów (Reporters Foundation; one of the project's partners) has also been involved in various media literacy initiatives. The team has organised special training on verification techniques, primarily for university students (in Poznań and Warsaw), and was a co-organiser of more in-depth training in that field for local journalists and activists. Fundacja's representatives have also, e.g. cooperated with Demagog in providing training on MIL and verification to teachers, have spoken about MIL at various open events.

In 2018 Polityka Insight together with Facebook also organised open trainings for university students on detecting fake-news, verifying public statements etc.

Some other media, although not having media literacy education per se as part of their agenda, do have activities that can be called that way. Radio TOK FM focuses quite a lot on new technologies and many of their interviews and programs (e.g. Człowiek 2.0 - Man 2.0; interviews by Zuzanna Piechowicz, podcast with Panoptykon Foundation) give advice on how to use new media, what kind of challenges they bring (e.g. online security, hate, polarization, disinformation) and how we can try to fight them.

Individual journalists also get involved in MIL (or at least of MIL nature) initiatives, mainly speaking at local and school events, talking about how media work and what journalism is all about. Some prominent speakers were Ewa Wanat, Bartosz Węglarczyk, Michał Tracz.

Conclusions

Our research shows that initiatives which connected the media industry with the media literacy movement do exist. They are often supported by European institutions. But they are not consistent and they do not appear in the vast majority of the local media. After examining the situations of Media literacy and the media involvement in it, it seems that Latvia and North Macedonia tend to stand above the other countries in terms of combating fake news and media illiteracy. As discussed, it is prevalent that they have various tools for targeting these concerns. Further, these tools could underline the tendency to move towards a more open and democratic way of thinking, communication and general function of society. They start from schooling, recognizing the importance and the change of our times, namely that children nowadays are exposed to the internet and information, in contrast with previous generations. Therefore, they apply the need for media literacy and filtering of right/wrong, fake/real information on school education. They use all kinds of media means from radio, television, internet, campaigns, social media etc. to get that message across. In addition, in Latvia and North Macedonia, there are even platforms that filter the fake news from the real

ones and dilute the information emitted and separate the truth from the lie. In terms of the latter especially, this is quite extraordinary.

In the same manner, we have Lithuania but in contrast with the mentioned countries, the projects and campaigns on the matter are not fully supported by, let's say, state and official scheme, rather than individual networks of professionals and private media companies.

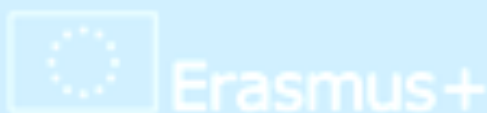
In Poland, the situation is not as active or at least, that big as in the previous countries however there are many media literacy initiatives, though scattered.

In Greece and Cyprus, maybe because of the latest financial struggle, fake news and misinformation were prevalent and even worsened the situation towards media literacy. However, in Greece there is a country-wide effort supported also by the state and other stakeholders like Universities, Libraries and Cultural Foundations, to digitally educate the population, especially students.

Nevertheless, this huge effort focuses on the access of historic and cultural databases, and addresses the need of modernization of the professional skills of someone, and not towards the fruitful criticism and recognition of media practices and information. However, the initiative of Media Literacy Week and its activities are quite encouraging, by inviting professionals and academics [similar to Poland] to discuss the importance of the matter.

More specifically, in Cyprus, the study on the subject is worse, where there are some attempts by the European bodies and private media to address the issue and make it more public; the relevant state offices stick to their policies on the subject, but do not take sufficient measures for educating the locals; and if we take into consideration the explosion of social media networks and the easiness of information to be carried, the case of media literacy seems to be more demanding than ever.

Recommendations



The case of Latvia and North Macedonia is quite astonishing and their dedication on fighting fake news and teaching the population on how to recognize fake news from real is a methodology that could, and should, be used by media professionals. With the abundance of information, case studies and toolkits that exist, especially online we could follow their lead on the matter and organize and try to push an official, this time, campaign [try maybe to get state support] for the education of people on the matter. News organizations such as news portals should build collaborations with reliable fact-checking initiatives. At the same time, digital literacy is not enough. Media organisations should take this responsibility and since there are European policies and support by the Commission and other Directorates, they should dedicate themselves in seminars and other means, in order to make Media literacy an incorporated part of their programs, not only of youngsters, but

of adults too. The example of the British media which incorporate Media Literacy projects is a distinctive case of media industry involvement in Media Literacy in a comprehensive way.

Discussion

(Author: Melina Karageorgiou)

In this work, we identified and analysed six existing cross-border gaps on media literacy, with an emphasis on young people. The analysis covered gaps in the partner countries of the Media Lab project: Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia and Poland. Different communication dynamics, political situation and developments, societal needs inevitably lead to different levels of Media Literacy in each country. However, there are some common phenomena, as well as trends and weaknesses. Different levels of Trust in Media are observed in the respective countries. The reasons behind low trust are complex, depending, among other factors, on the media framework, existence of bias and quality of ethics. Our study suggests various ways of enhancing Trust in Media.

Concerning Media literacy in compulsory education, our qualitative research has brought recommendations and conclusions from experts and practitioners in the field from all six countries. They concern the development of national strategies, integration of Media Literacy in all the curricula spectrum, training programs for educators, material and targeted activities.

The impact of different media on youth is another cross-border gap, which has - not surprisingly - shown a growing shift towards digital and social media as opposed to the traditional ones, but not equally developed in each country. So does news consumption; but traditional media can compete in this race by following some of the recommendations expressed in this analysis: engage their new audiences with co-creation, brand their product in a much more comprehensive way for youths.

Moreover, this work provides recommendations on the need for more fact-checking initiatives against disinformation and also a stronger, strategic media industry involvement in media literacy, especially for some partner-countries. Overall, there are certainly Media Literacy gaps to bridge, and to that end, countries can share aforementioned positive examples and expertise from each other, or incorporate suggested initiatives. The whole process of the Media Lab project has been a distinctive experience of how gaps between partner-countries can be indeed bridged.

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