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# Resilient Multicultural Societies in the Face of Hybrid Threats

*Coord.*

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E I K O N

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# THE YOUNG GENERATION, BETWEEN INFORMATION CONSUMPTION AND MISINFORMATION

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***Abstract:** Recent socio-political events demonstrate the need for an in-depth approach to the way information circulates and produces effects. While in the past the famous saying “information is power” proved to be true in an information-poor or information-access-poor landscape, today it may not have the same ring of truth in the immediate reality. While the possession of and access to information continue to be relevant, technological developments, together with the transformations brought about by educational systems, add new dimensions. Where the information is presented, or in what form, becomes as important as the information itself.*

***Keywords:** misinformation, media, social media, young people, politics*

Media consumption in post-1990s Romania has evolved in a similar way to Western Europe. If until 1989, towards the end of the communist regime, most Romanians had to make do with the few hours of daily broadcasting, most of which was communist propaganda and the cult of personality of the political leaders in Bucharest, the escape was the movies that were watched through videotapes dubbed into Romanian, a business that was flourishing with the knowledge of the secret services at the time<sup>1</sup>. Consumption of alternative media also included access via the famous satellite dishes to western satellite TV channels. The development of cable networks, first with analog broadcasting, which offered access to a small number of TV channels (due to technological limitations), then with digital broadcasting and a considerably larger number of TV channels (including niche or theme-specific channels) not only diversified the media offer but also led to high TV media consumption.

The emergence and development of the online environment, which offered at least the illusion of much greater freedom but also of instant reward, had a major impact on the way consumers interacted with sources of information and entertainment. The Covid 19 pandemic accentuated media consumption, especially in the online area, facilitated both by the emergence and imposition of social-media platforms, entertainment content (movies, shows, etc.), and the use of e-learning applications (which have replaced physical presence in classrooms for the time being). Early exposure to the online environment, a reduced attention span/patience span, and the huge amount of data available today create the conditions for the

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1 <https://evz.ro/afacerea-cu-casete-vhs-care-l-a-imbogatit-pe-zamfir-securitatea-era-implicata.html>  
<https://adevarul.ro/stil-de-viata/magazin/contrabanda-cu-casete-video-cea-mai-mare-afacere-2363908.html>  
<https://www.g4media.ro/cea-mai-mare-afacere-a-securitatii-comuniste-contrabanda-controlata-cu-casete-video-rolul-jucat-de-irina-margareta-nistor.html>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uX0zPDO3C4>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZRWZWbdEVo>

consumption of partial information, truncated or sensational information. Young people are spending an increasing amount of their time online and for the first-time voting generation (18+) the sources of information consumption are not only relevant in terms of future choices but also in terms of the amount of information/units of time allocated to this consumption. To get a clearer picture of the mechanisms underlying the decision, the sources of information and the mode of exposure to information, the target group was individuals who were 18 years old at the time of the election, the upper age limit for those included in this study being 24 years.

*Assumptions:*

The interest in politics among the younger generation is relatively low, the consumption of information of this type is also moderate and to a greater extent mediated by social networks rather than traditional media. A difference in attitudes towards politics may come in the case of increased interest in the family environment or possibly in the circle of colleagues/friends.

*Methodology:*

In order to measure the interest in socio-political life, i.e. the consumption of socio-political information, we used quantitative analysis by means of a questionnaire administered to a sample of 1230 respondents aged 18-24<sup>2</sup>.

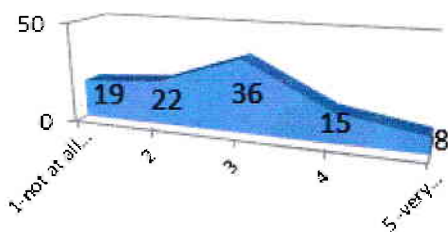
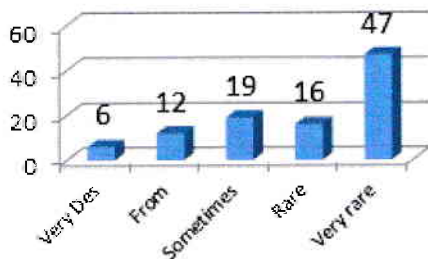
*Sources of information and interest in politics*

In terms of interest in politics measured on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means not at all interested and 5 - very interested, we obtained a significant correlation between young people interested in politics and those who are usually involved in such discussions mediated within the family. But a first contact with political issues within the family will not necessarily mean that they share the same views. However, the arguments heard in these discussions become arguments in discussions with older colleagues or friends, who also act as a catalyst for interest in politics or subsequent political choice.

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2 Rotariu, T. and Iluț, P. (1997). *Ancheta sociologica si sondjele de opinie*, Polirom, Iasi

As regards contact with political topics, we consider the family as a potential opinion-former in the existence of debates on socio-political topics, i.e. from the perspective of a first contact with these topics<sup>3</sup>. As regards the answers received, they reveal the following situation (how often do you/are you allowed to attend political discussions in the family):

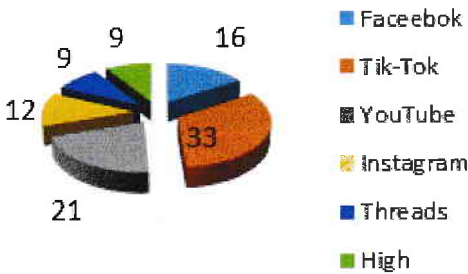
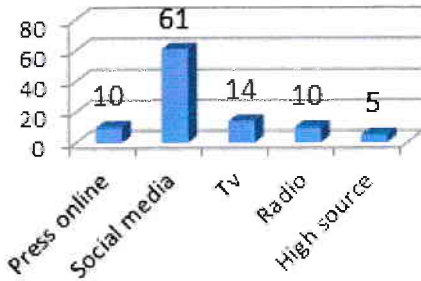


How often do you attend political discussions at home? How interested are you in information about politics in Ro. (of those who gave an answer) (of those who gave an answer)

Most responses, amounting to more than half of them (64%) reveal a low availability of discussions on socio-political topics within the respondents' families. The sources of political information vary, but the predominant sources are online, with

3 Lucian Săcălean - Mircea Munteanu, The Formation Of Voting Intention In Multiethnic Communities, The 7th International Days of Statistics and Economics, Prague, September 19-21, 2013, /<https://msed.vse.cz/files/2013/90-Lucian-Sacalean-paper.pdf>

a predilection for social media, which can be explained by the variety of applications used by young people. After accessing information on various online applications, some respondents use searches on traditional media sites and applications as a filter.

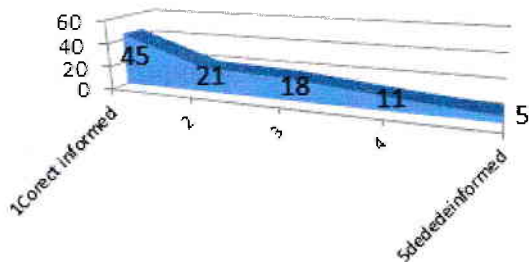


**Source type for first contact with political information**  
 For social media as a source of information (of those who provided an answer)

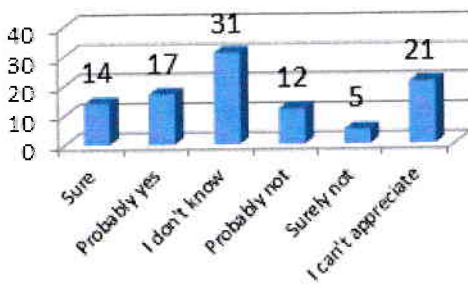
Some 32% of respondents say that they then look for information on traditional media websites and apps, either to validate the information or to find more information related to the topic. In terms of information accessed online, including information on socio-political topics, an important factor in accessing it is the recommendation of colleagues/friends who initially accessed the information. Very rarely does this information, links, reels etc. end up being shared with other

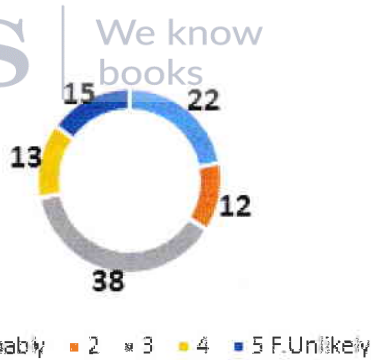
family members (parents), but it is much more often shared among peers, friends either through links sent via mobile messaging applications or even through repeated viewing within the group. In the case of young people interested in political issues, we can distinguish several situations: young people who are politically enlisted, young people affiliated to political circles, young people interested or involved in civic activism, etc. The stronger the political affinity, the more easily and credibly the messages are appropriated (if they represent communication from the political line of the party that is supported) or, on the contrary, they are considered less credible if they represent communication from the other side.

Another relevant aspect concerns self-placement on a scale of misinformation. Do you consider yourself to be correctly informed (on political issues)



Have you ever been a victim of disinformation? How likely do you think the possibility of (related to political issues) (of those with a choice) to be the victim of misinformation again?





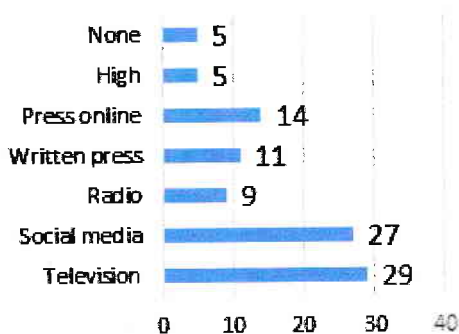
In terms of self-ranking on the informed/uninformed scale, more than half of the respondents consider themselves to be correctly informed, an assessment that is nevertheless subjective. At the same time, 64% of the respondents could not identify the situation (information) in which they felt they were misinformed. Confidence in one's own ability to manage information flows correctly is also reflected in the answers concerning the likelihood of being in the same position again. The emergence and use of AI makes approaches to identifying/recognizing fake-news, deep-fake even more difficult. It is not only young people who are exposed to this threat and it is incorrect to consider this age group as necessarily the most exposed, but from the perspective of

But what is disinformation? According to Volkoff<sup>4</sup> the term appeared in Russian after the Second World War to designate capitalist practices aimed at enslaving the masses. The term here has a strong ideological component. When translated into English, it means the deliberate leaking of misleading information or "the use of information techniques, especially mass media, to mislead, conceal or distort the facts". Disinformation can take on wide-ranging meanings, it can be understood in a broader or narrower sense, and although it may seem a trite term, it is present in public discourse and used as a weapon against rivals. Disinformation encompasses all forms of false, inaccurate, misleading information designed

<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Volkoff, Treatise on Disinformation, From the Trojan Horse to the Internet, Antet, 2002, p16

to be disseminated to mislead or gain<sup>5</sup>. Is education a solution against disinformation? Partially yes. Measures to combat disinformation are needed at both national and EU level, all the more so as misinformation is seen as a threat by 84% of the EU population<sup>6</sup>. However, these measures must increase young people's real ability to detect the real intentions of a given type of communication and must in no way affect freedom of expression. Moreover, the right approach aims to cultivate the real ability of young people to differentiate real information from that which manipulates or misinforms, without trying to impose a narrative that only a particular geopolitical actor resorts to such strategies. A strategy that resorts to restricting freedom of expression, as was the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, will not only fail to bring about a decrease in disinformation activities, but on the contrary, will create the perfect framework for discrediting legitimate media and increasing the credibility of various speculative narratives.

What are the most likely sources of fake-news? Which of the following platforms do you think encounter more often fake information/ items



5 Boris GHENCEA, Online Disinformation - A Multidimensional Challenge, [https://ibn.idsi.md/vizualizare\\_articol/174643](https://ibn.idsi.md/vizualizare_articol/174643)

6 Mihaela Daciana Natea, Redefining European Security in a Post Covid-19 World, L`Harmattan, 2024, p107