

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: DISINFORMATION RESEARCH: CURRENT TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES

*Special Issue Editors*

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The International Scientific Conference Dubrovnik Media Days (DMD), organized by the University of Dubrovnik and co-organized by the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), the Croatian Academy of Science and Arts, the Ministry of Culture and Media, the Agency for Electronic Media and the Representation of the European Commission in Croatia, was held on 29 and 30 September 2023. DMD has always been at the forefront of connecting academic research in communication science with new technologies and their societal impact. Moreover, we are proud to have organized the first European conference on AI in journalism in 2015. Similarly, the theme of the 2023 conference was "Disinformation Research: Current Trends and Perspectives". The conference brought together academics, practitioners and policy makers to tackle one of the biggest challenges of our time – disinformation.

The contributions published in this issue were selected from the high-quality presentations at the conference. They reflect the interdisciplinary and vibrant nature of current disinformation research and include contributions that address AI in countering false narratives, fact-checking practices, geopolitical use of disinformation campaigns, and the impact of disinformation on public trust and democratic processes. Although the articles present research from the USA and Europe, we hope that the results and discussions shared here will stimulate further research beyond US and European borders. Disinformation is a global phenomenon and only a joint cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach can successfully mitigate it and strengthen the resilience of societies.

"The Role of Media in Russian and Serbian Influence Operations" by Mato Brautović and Romana John examines the geostrategic use of media to shape narratives and influence public opinion in Southeast Europe (SEE). The authors analyzed a case study of canceled pro-Ukrainian concerts by the band Ljapisi Trubeckoj in Belgrade (Serbia) and Budva (Montenegro), which demonstrates the coordinated use of social networks, state media and local media to spread disinformation. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Russian and Serbian influence operations in the region and explain the complex dynamics of influence operations, which can have broader implications for the stability of the SEE region.

The paper "The Foreign Subsidies Regulation: More Than a Competition Tool for the Media Sector?" by Adelaida Afilipoae examines the role of foreign investors supported by foreign state subsidies and the impact of the EU Foreign Subsidies Regulation (FSR) as an attempt to regulate the distortive effects on competition. The FSR enabled the European Commission to scrutinize subsidies granted by non-EU governments, particularly with a view to mitigating the risks of media capture and foreign interference. The author argues that the FSR goes beyond competition concerns and contributes to broader efforts such as the European Media Freedom Act to protect media pluralism and public interest.

The paper "Fact-Checking Automation: An Ethnographic Approach to Newsrooms", written by Irene Larraz, Ramón Salaverría and Javier Serrano-Puche, explores the introduction of artificial intelligence-based automation tools in fact-checking newsrooms. The authors used digital ethnography and semi-structured interviews with staff from

Duke Reporters' Lab (US) and Full Fact (UK) to explore the motivations for adopting AI tools, their impact on fact-checking practices, perceived benefits, user attitudes and measurable outcomes, particularly with a view to identifying the potential for more efficient checking. The key findings highlight the resource constraints and skepticism of fact-checkers, urging the development of an internal system capable of detecting factual claims, finding matches with previously published content, validating information, and assisting fact-checkers in filtering the amount of information they are confronted with. The study identified difficulties in implementation, including high costs, lack of knowledge and communication about the tools themselves.

The paper "Uncovering the Links Between Internet Usage, Trust in Science, and Vaccination" was written by Aistė Diržytė, Gintarė Gulevičiūtė, Aelita Skaržauskienė, Monika Mačiulienė and Asta Zelenkauskaitė. They examine the complex relationship between Internet use, trust in science and vaccination based on data from the CROSS-National Online Survey-2 (CRONOS-2) conducted in 11 European countries. The authors analyze how Internet use influences trust in scientific disciplines or scientific claims and their impact on vaccination. The study found weak yet statistically significant positive correlations between Internet usage and general trust in science, trust in scientific disciplines and trust in scientists' claims, as well as a negative correlation between Internet use and age. The key findings include the fact that trust in science has a significant positive effect on vaccination and that Internet use has a significant positive effect on trust in science.

The paper "When Fact-Checks Go Viral: A Cross-National Analysis of Dissemination on Twitter", written by Lorenzo Federico and Mariavittoria Masotina, contains a multidisciplinary analysis of dissemination of fact-checking content on Twitter based on a cross-national sample of 19 European fact-checkers over a four-month period. The authors used network analysis and natural language processing techniques to determine what makes a high-engagement tweet attractive and to identify. The authors emphasize the need to adapt fact-checking content to the local context.

Marko Selakovic, Anna Tarabasz, and Nikolina Ljepava examine over 16,000 published papers in established scientific databases to analyze changes in the evolution of disinformation and fake news, as well as research trends on these topics over the years. The study highlights how the methods of sharing and disseminating fake news have evolved with the introduction of automated and AI-driven solutions capable of creating and distributing fake content. The term fake news has transformed from a single semantic concept into a two-dimensional phenomenon, encompassing both the fake news genre and the fake news label. Finally, the study explores the use of fake news in a novel context, positioning it as a critical pillar of information warfare strategies.

Brigita Miloš, Josip Šipić and Katarina Bošnjak's paper "Gender Aspects of Information Disorder" (in Croatian) provides a literature review on gender disinformation with a particular focus on disinformation tactics and manipulations aimed at discrediting women in politics and non-binary people. The article sheds light on the actors of gender

disinformation and examines the role of contexts that create gender discriminatory information and media spaces. The author suggests potential methods for mitigating gender disinformation and emphasizes the role of fact-checkers in combating gendered disinformation.

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