

**STATE UNIVERSITY OF MOLDOVA
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

With manuscript title
U.D.C.: 070.16:659.4:316.776.2(4)(043.3)

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**PUBLIC EUROPEAN POLICIES TO COUNTER
DISINFORMATION**

SPECIALTY 571.01 – JOURNALISM AND MEDIA PROCESSES

Summary of doctoral thesis in communication sciences

Chisinau, 2026

The thesis was elaborated within the Doctoral School of Social Sciences of the State University of Moldova

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The public defense of the thesis will take place on 5 of March, 2026, at 14:00, at the meeting of the Doctoral Thesis Examination Committee. Chisinau, Mateevici street, central block, hall 421.

The abstract was sent on the 27 of January, 2026.

The doctoral thesis and the abstract can be consulted at the National Library of Republic of Moldova, the Library of the State University of Moldova and on the website of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (www.anacec.md).

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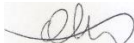
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CONCEPTUAL REFERENCE POINTS OF RESEARCH

The relevance and importance of the topic addressed. In the present work we will deal with the phenomenon of misinformation, which in recent years, with the development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT's) is created and spreads more easily and faster than in the past. Misinformation creates various problems on a massive scale, for various groups of citizens in society, preventing proper information and fomenting democracy. For this reason, it is treated as a public problem and efforts are being made by various states of the planet to restrict it or disappear it. By nature, man strongly wishes to know what is happening in the immediate and wider environment. In the past, this knowledge was limited, since it was formed based on information that was transmitted by word -of -mouth and mainly concerned the events of local communities. However, this situation has changed radically in our time. The development of ICTs offers the modern man the ability to access knowledge and information coming from all parts of the world. Education, science and the production process have been significantly affected by the development of the Internet, which offers increased access to a large amount of information. Daily life incorporates new cultural elements at a fast pace. New sources of information are constantly developing in all scientific fields. Information as mentioned by Luciano Floridi [10] is a basic component of the human cognitive process and its use as a concept varies from the everyday language, meaning news/message/situation update/fact, to its scientific use which concerns the collection and processing of data. The concept is associated with the transmission of a message, meaning, the acquisition of knowledge, teaching, etc. The raw material of the information is data [23], which after being processed are eventually converted into knowledge. Information, then, is the composition of data elements, which is distinguished by semantic relevance and organization, so that the receiver can interpret it. Similarly, Tefko Saracevic [22] explains that for something to be considered information, it must include three properties: subject matter, processed data, and relevance to the user's environment. Thus we can say that information is essentially knowledge. So by the term information, we refer to the form of communication, in which the transmitter (holder of the media) communicates to the receiver (public, citizens) facts, situations, knowledge and ideas, also providing him with a set of relevant parameters that allow the receiver to understand their deeper meaning. Information is of great importance for a person's life, as man needs information to use it as a means of social interaction or work, thus meeting his other basic needs. This human need for information, as G. G. Chowdhury &

Suddata Chowdhury write [4] of course depends on various socio-political factors and can be differentiated during his life, depending on the circumstances:

- The need for information varies from person to person, from job to job, from the type of information required on a topic. It is affected by the environment in which one moves. The information one needs in an academic environment is different from that in a work or business environment.
- The need for information is sometimes expressed less than it should or not at all. For example, the library user often fails to locate the book he is looking for because he does not have the knowledge to properly search a database.
- The need for information changes during search and retrieval. For example when someone finds a useful piece of information about the topic they are interested in, they may feel that it is not sufficient and that more knowledge is needed to understand a topic.

Information spreads faster and has a stronger impact on social relations and modes of production, using the new possibilities of communication channels. The speed of dissemination of information makes it a product that offers faster information updating, it is composed with the knowledge of its researcher and affects his environment and his culture. Skyttner [24] states that the information can be measured on the basis of the degree of surprise, the lack of predictability or the new values it conveys to the recipient. So it is obvious that the information contains some values. After all, the concept of value, as written by Saracevic & Kantor [21], is demonstrated when it guides actions, relationships, priorities and exchanges (financial exchanges). In the same article, the authors mention both terms used by Aristotle and Adam Smith and which distinguish the two uses of information: value in use and value in exchange. So in the literature, we find the value of information in two forms: a) the use value and b) the commodity value.

- The use value of the information is recognized in relation to the content and the context in which it will be used. It is an intangible quantity and depends entirely on the relevance of the information and the efficiency in its use, according to Herold [12]. The more relevant a piece of information is to the subject at hand, the more useful it becomes. That is, it has a use value. According to Sveiby [27], information is synonymous with the term knowledge. The use value of information exists as long as it supports the development of knowledge. When its role in the composition of new knowledge is reduced or eliminated then the value of using the information is reduced at the same time. The value of using information

is therefore not stable and absolute. It changes, because it depends on whether it is true, whether it corresponds to reality and whether it is relevant to the subject under consideration.

- The commodity value of information, on the contrary, is measurable and includes the cost of its production, the resources spent, the funds allocated and the surplus value, determined by the market demand. The commodity value of information, in other words, transforms information from immaterial to material good. The information is essentially a commodity, has a production cycle, is available, distributed, used and has a purchase cost as Oppenheim et al. [18] write. In fact, in some cases it can be reused, as it's done with various other goods according to Bogdanowicz & Bailey [3]. That is, it can be reprocessed and redistributed.

Information, as we can see, has two uses: a) the cognitive use, which is identified with its use value and b) commercial use, corresponding to its commercial value. In this thesis, we do not act as economists, we do not examine the financial terms, the profit or loss margins of a Media as a business. In other words, we are not so interested in the commodity value of information. We focus on *protecting the use value* of information. The value of information is examined from the point of view of its socio-political role. According to his public sphere theory, Habermas [11], only well and comprehensively informed citizens can exercise control over power. Under this light, information is a necessary condition for the proper and valid information of public opinion and the smooth functioning of democracy. We are thus referring to the value of using information, to whether information is valid, corresponds to reality and is relevant to issues related to the community. Otherwise, when there is misinformation, the informational value degenerates. Then, a problem arises and that problem must be addressed.

Against this background, the issue of information as an essential resource for the implementation of European public policies takes on particular significance. It constitutes a major concern for governments, in particular, for countries in the process of integrating into the European Union and firmly assimilating its values [17; 28].

At the forefront of these public policies is currently the problem of countering risks related, especially to the danger of disinformation. Is widely recognized: „the exposure of citizens to large scale Disinformation, including misleading or outright false information, is a major challenge for Europe,|| and that „our open democratic societies depend on public debates that allow well-informed citizens to express their will through free and fair political processes|| result, advancing before society the major task of the fight against Disinformation [9]. The topicality of the subject is also determined by the real existence of contradictions in the

interpretation of the phenomenon. For example, between the widespread prevalence of fake news and the scientific community's insufficient attention to identifying it in the media environment; between society's desire for reliable, high-quality information and its reliance on emotional, sensational, and manipulative stories, "fakes," and hoaxes.

The purpose and the objectives of the thesis. The leading purpose of the present PhD work is to explore the theoretical and practical framework of disinformation, understand how it disseminates in practical level inside the public sphere, if it impacts public opinion, what its existence situation is today (mainly in political level – is disinformation existent and impactful to political life?), what are the public policies implemented to combat this problem by some developed countries around the world and based on the conclusions, what suggestions we can make to help the process of overcoming it, protecting individual liberties and maintaining a healthy democratic regime.

In order to reach this goal of the research the following *objectives* were drafted:

- Historiography review about disinformation on public affairs.
- Analysis of the modern concept of information falseness and its subdivision into branches.
- Overview of different types and transformations of disinformation in today's public sphere, as well as the disinformation tactics aimed to influence behavior.
- In depth and comprehensive analysis of the role of digital technology on the contemporary dissemination of disinformation.
- Ascertainment of existence of disinformation through a looming conspiracy theory in the public agenda and its impact on public opinion.
- Identification of motives behind the diffusion of disinformation.
- Analysis of the problematic and the relevance of disinformation phenomenon in recent political life in multiple countries of the globe, in order to underline its universal characteristic.
- Examination of public policies to counter disinformation in various States of the world.
- Form an aggregation and perform also a quantitative approach of those policies, in order to extract some additional conclusions through a statistical format.

The degree of approach to the subject is characterized by *neutrality*. The author in this work does not take sides in political, social or economical debates and does not adopt ideological colorings. Through the literature reviews and published news sources we appose

statements and opinions of scientists, researchers, state officials, politicians, journalists, et al. in our try to analyze the problematic of information falseness in the public sphere. We do that by staying neutral and we do not have certain (positive or negative) attitude or intentions towards public actors examined in the research. Also, our point of view could be described as *constructive observer*, because firstly we are trying to observe (not criticize) the current situation in the domain of the researched issue and secondly we aim to make useful conclusions based on our findings. **The examination of the phenomenon according to scientific sources** shows that in the last decade (at least) the phenomenon of *disinformation* rises to surface of public life, especially with the mainstream term of *fake news*. Of course in the research we examine *information falseness* (as a term that includes disinformation and fake news) and its subcategories in order to make a deeper and more spherical analysis of the subject.

In the first place, at the historiography part of the topic, we meet researchers as Cass Sunstein & Adrian Vermeule, Lee McIntyre, Chris Bolman, Eve MacDonald, Julie Posetti & Alice Matthews, Joanna M. Burkhardt, Steven Poole who contributed in portraying the presence and some motives of disinformation in different historical eras.

Among other prominent researchers we read from are Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakhshan, Caroline Jack, Mihai Pacepa & Ronald J. Rychlak, Alice Marwick & Rebecca Lewis, Luciano Floridi, Robert McNamara, Brian G. Southwell, Emiliy A. Thorson, Laura Sheble, Don Fallis, Brian Skyrms, Srihan Kumar et al., Jon Bateman et al., Samantha Bradshaw, Bogooan Kim et al., Jennifer Jerit & Yangzi Zhao, Jennifer Hochschild & Katherine Einstein, Camille Ryan et al., Tim Hwang, Judit Szakacs, Rareş Obada, who have advanced research in the field through their work on defining the different forms of information falseness as also the inner motives that lead to this phenomenon.

In the field of modern style, digital space propaganda and its examination, as also its impact to public opinion, several authors contribute to the process such as Yazan Boshmaf et al., Chengcheng Shao et al., Massimo Stella et al., Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon & Manlio De Domenico, Clodagh O'Brien, Anjana Susarla et al., Jeannette Paschen, Xiao Liu et al., Priscilla Borges & Renira Gambarato, Shoshana Zuboff, Daniel Arnaudo et al., Samuel Woolley & Philip Howard, Renée DiResta, Alessandro Bessi & Emilio Ferrara, Fabian Schafer.

In addition, we should highlight the work of researchers who were busy recording the recent political routine and portrayed the existence of election disinformation in some cases

in countries such as the USA, France and Nigeria, as well as some of the side effects it causes in the public life of these societies. Among them are Hunt Allcott & Matthew Gentzkow, Jayeon Lee & Weiai Xu, Stephan Lewandowsky et al., Richard Gunther et al., Robert S. Mueller, Richard Rogers, James W. Dearing, Everette Bengani, Yochai Benkler et al., Charles Homans, Gordon Pennycook & Davide G. Rand, Jean-Baptiste Vilmer, Gérald Bronner, Umaru A. Pate & Adamcolo M. Ibrahim, Koblwe Obono & Kariman Diyo, Wahab Aboyade, Wisdom Madu et al.

The specific hypothesis of the dissertation is that information falseness (including disinformation, misinformation, malinformation as different forms) carries an impact on public life, because it has a potential to affect public opinion (in many cases against the common good). This constitutes the phenomenon a public problem and emerges the need of State intervention as lawful protector of its citizens. The Public Policies recruited against disinformation act as a systemic tool to counter and limit the problem, thus further studying, development and deployment of such official practices should be prompted.

Methodology of scientific research. In order to materialize our work, our analysis centers on the use value of information, that is, the fact that various actors within the public sphere try to possibly exploit information and use it with the aim of having an effect on public opinion. The study examines public policies related to combating disinformation. We will mainly focus on events and government actions that have taken place in the last decade, so that they are recent, contemporary and not in the distant past.

Our research methodology includes a systematic desk-review of the existing literature on disinformation, fake news, democracy and human rights, relying on types of sources: official documents, communication from stakeholders, scholarly literature and press articles. The bibliography comes from both books, studies, articles and online sources, which are very useful, because we will need government documents with decisions of states that are posted on their official websites. The bibliography is in English, which it's also the language in which the paper is written, while there are also some sources from French, as also from Greek, in the chapter that analyzes the policies of Greece and some sources in the romanian relating to Republic of Moldova in the chapter of its policies.

The work is divided into three parts. In the first part, based on the literature review, we deal with the analysis of the misinformation phenomenon. We first see disinformation's timelessness in history and then we proceed to analyze its concept today. We distinguish the three forms of misinformation, dis-information, mis-information and mal-information. These

three categories include fake news, content bubbles and echo chambers, deepfakes, framing and priming, false connection, et. al. that we will see next in the second chapter. We also look at the causes/incentives that lead to misinformation and its spread mechanisms. In addition, we use case studies and we list some political events that were characterized by a strong presence of fake news, such as the election of President Trump in 2016 or the Nigerian elections in 2019. The third part of the work comes as an answer to the previous parts, in order to bring balance to our study. In the third part of the paper we investigate the policies at the level of states and at the level of the European Union, which deal with the limitation of disinformation and the fight against the phenomenon. We do not limit ourselves to fake news. We examine policies that include each type of information falseness (mis-, dis-, mal-information) by doing a case study in each chosen country separately. Among the countries to be examined are the European Union (as a wider administrative formation), USA, Greece and Moldova. Finally, the conclusions that will arise from our findings and the proposals of the author of the paper will be presented, regarding what more can be done to limit the phenomenon. We hope that the work will be a tool for the reader to get to know misinformation in depth and how to protect himself as much as possible from it, to guide future studies, as well as a tool to enrich the public debate at the state level, regarding the policies applied in other states of the world.

The parameters of the investigation were related to methodological guidelines, drawn from a number of research studies in the field. The study was based on the postulates and reasoned findings contained in the works of such well-known authors as Manuel Castells, Edward Bernays, Shanto Iyengar, Lucian Floridi, John B. Thompson, Ken Herold, Miroslav Tudjman, Carlos Diaz Ruiz, Cailin O'Connor and others. The research used the scientific methodology specific to the social sciences.

Analysis and synthesis were the two research methods categorized under general methods. Understood as opposing mental operations of decomposing the whole into its component parts and vice versa, of studying the structure of objects or processes, phenomena, analysis and synthesis were applied in the given thesis to present the situation and the latest research in the field. In another vein, the theoretical approach to the notion of misinformation was accompanied by the method of analysis to investigate the complex processes and the changes caused by the presentation of elements necessary to understand them in essence.

From this situation stems the innovative character of research in the field of communication sciences. We believe that our research, which started from the need to verify

the formulated working hypotheses, as well as to achieve the concrete goals and objectives, oriented towards systematization of the studies undertaken in the field, the identification of certain trends, the analysis of particular media forms and the identification of the main features of the development of modern communication, including its reprehensible forms, is also part of the same investigative approach. In this connection, we note the importance of such basic research methods as historical analysis, comparative analysis and the use of case study elements.

An extended methodology analysis of the paper is held in the first chapter, in dedicated subchapter *“The Dissertation’s Methodology of Researching Information Falseness and Public Policies to counter it”*.

The important scientific problem, solved in the thesis, resides in elucidating the phenomenon of disinformation, especially in public affairs sphere, offering the possibility to conceptualize it more distinctly as a public problem and to present an updated picture of the state of fact of its spread and amplification in the context of recent circumstances. The research aims to demonstrate that disinformation has dangerous and negative effects on public interests. The research determined that as a part of the process of this research for potential solutions, is the scrutiny of public policies of several States to counter information falseness. The achieved results also consist in the systematization and generalization of existing approaches to tackling the phenomenon of disinformation.

The scientific novelty of the work resides in the conceptualization of disinformation as a perceptible problem with the potential to undermine and threaten public security and the smooth functioning of democratic polity. Moreover, it tries to contribute to the limitation process of this problem within the public sphere, under the perspective of the response authorized by the official law. Thus, the paper deals exclusively with State responses against disinformation (including the various forms of information falseness), under the scope that the state is the official and lawful protector of the safety and the rights of its citizens.

The theoretical significance and practical value of the dissertation yields the investigation and conceptualization of disinformation phenomenon, mainly focusing on its impacts to the decision-making process of socio-political life. In addition, results of the study support the concentration of public governance tactics that serve the task of answer against information falseness. We make conclusions regarding the issue of disinformation nowadays, as also proposals about actions that can be taken in order to further limit the phenomenon. So, through our research, we record public policies and we are able to gather and aggregate

practices from around the world so that then everyone, either as a citizen or as a state, can be informed, select or even combine policies for optimal dealing with disinformation and false news. With the studying of government innovations and legislation from different regions of the globe, we explore how officials approach the subject, we create a marquetry of initiatives, a pool of ideas that could benefit other States, civil society or public sphere conversation.

Approval of results was accomplished through examination and communications of them at national and international Conferences (including conferences of USM), as also through publications of scientific articles.

Publications on the thesis topic. On the topic of the doctoral dissertation, 7 scientific papers have been published.

Volume and structure of the thesis. The content of thesis includes: annotation, list of tables, list of abbreviations, introduction, three chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography consisting of 504 sources, a total of 147 pages of basic text that construct the main body of the research paper.

Keywords: disinformation, misinformation, democracy, elections, fake news, deep fake, influence, public policies, governance, public security.

CONTENT OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1, entitled Historiography, theoretical categorization and contemporary approach of information falseness, includes the methodological steps followed in the research, a familiarization with the issue of information falseness through a historiographic recursion, a contemporary analysis of the phenomenon and a clear distinction in disinformation categories. It serves the role of introducing, understanding and analyzing the researched issue, regarding its presence among historical time, its contemporary status in society and approaching it under the distinction of disinformation into different theoretical branches and the scope of an active or potential threat to democratic values and public security. For this reason, after the methodology analysis of the paper in the first subchapter, the second subchapter does a recursion to history of misinformation in public life and then follows with the analysis of the phenomenon in modern times and its distinction to categories: disinformation, misinformation, malinformation. Then it proceeds to answer to the question

of why disinformation is produced or disseminated, so there is a review of political, financial and social motives behind the existence of information falseness.

In subchapter (1.1 *The Dissertation's Methodology of Researching Information Falseness and Public Policies to counter it*), beyond the reference to methodological benchmarks established within the general framework of social sciences, the methodological tools employed in the thesis are positioned:

1. The dissertation employs a blend of *macrotheory* and *microtheory* to analyze disinformation, focusing on both individual behavior (micro) and broader social trends (macro).
2. *Methodological Goals*: The study aims to explore, describe, and explain the complexities of information falseness, addressing its historical context and underlying motives.
3. *Operationalization*: Clearly defining key terms like misinformation, fake news, and computational propaganda is essential for conducting meaningful contextual analysis.
4. *Conceptualization of Terms*: Vague concepts related to information falseness are clarified through precise definitions, distinguishing between disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation.
5. *Importance of Observation*: Systematic observation of sources and data is crucial for drawing reliable conclusions and informing research inferences.
6. *Longitudinal Study Approach*: The research observes the evolution of disinformation over time, analyzing events from multiple time periods to identify patterns and changes.
7. *Real-World Theory Application*: The research incorporates real-life examples of disinformation from various political contexts, avoiding hypothetical scenarios.
8. *Commitment to Objectivity*: The paper adheres to research ethics by striving for neutrality and avoiding biases, with a focus on diverse perspectives and collective insights.
9. *Public Policy Focus*: The research examines state responses to disinformation, including public policies aimed at countering its impacts on society and politics.
10. *Research Quality Assurance*: Content reliability is emphasized, with official government documents serving as the primary source of data for public policy analysis.
11. *Case Study and Cross-Case Analysis*: Multiple case studies are employed to understand the phenomenon of disinformation and to identify common patterns across different contexts.

12. *Quantitative Analysis Integration*: The study incorporates quantitative methods to analyze qualitative data, converting findings into numerical formats for statistical evaluation of public policies regarding disinformation.

In subchapter (1.2. *The timelessness, the modern scheme of the phenomenon and the contemporary motives that lead to disinformation. Concept and analysis*) examines that throughout history, misinformation and propaganda have been prevalent, from ancient times to the modern era. Historical figures like Themistocles and Octavian exploited false news to manipulate public perception and achieve military and political victories. The invention of the printing press in the 15th century further accelerated the spread of misinformation, exemplified by the „Great Moon Hoax“ of 1835. In the 20th century, the term „disinformation“ emerged, particularly as a tool in warfare during the Cold War. Today, the internet amplifies misinformation, categorized into malinformation, misinformation, and disinformation, necessitating a deeper understanding to effectively combat its spread and influence on society. Disinformation is driven by various *motives*, primarily political, financial, and social. Politically, it aims to influence public opinion, sway voter behavior, and undermine democratic processes, often using both traditional media and social platforms. Financially, disinformation thrives in the "attention economy," where creating sensational content can lead to significant profits through advertising and increased web traffic. Socially, individuals may share misinformation to gain status or acceptance within their communities, leading to polarization and potential social unrest. Overall, disinformation poses serious risks to democracy, societal cohesion, and public trust.

The phenomenon of disinformation is often interpreted as Informational disorder and can be divided into three categories:

- Mal-information: Genuine/true/reality-based information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.
- Mis-information: Information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm.
- Dis-information: Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country.

In subchapter (1.3 *Fake news, deepfakes, echo chambers and media priming as forms or multipliers of information falseness with potential affect to opinion making*) the these discusses various forms of misinformation, including fake news, deepfakes, and the influence of filter bubbles and echo chambers on public perception. Fake news is made-up stuff,

masterfully manipulated to look like credible journalistic reports that are easily spread online to large audiences willing to believe the fictions and spread the word. In general, fake news is defined as false headlines and narratives that are written and published on an online website, designed to appear newsworthy and with the goal of spreading that fake news further on Social Media. In short, fake news is impressive headlines that appear to be true and shared without further research. Fake news is characterized by its intentional falsehoods designed to mislead audiences, while deepfakes leverage AI to create deceptive audio-visual content. Deepfakes, for example, is a worrying application of new technologies to the public sphere, as it could affect public opinion. Westerlund [33] reports that deepfakes are a major threat to our society, political system, and business because they 1) put pressure on journalists struggling to filter real from fake news, 2) threaten national security by disseminating propaganda and interfering in elections, 3) hamper citizen trust toward information by authorities, and, 4) raise cybersecurity issues for people and organizations. Veerasamy & Pieterse [32] report that the creators/source of Deepfakes mainly seek to achieve misconstruction of truth, spread of fake news, mislead, creation of shock, discredit high profile individuals, entertainment, fraud, manipulation of events like elections, intimidation/blackmail or damage to stability. Experts emphasize that the constant advances on fake content generation fostered the ill use of multimedia for illegal and public opinion manipulation, an ever-growing concern of several legislative and regulatory authorities worldwide. Identifying deepfake content is becoming increasingly difficult every day, as technology advances rapidly and the relevant institutions are unable to develop specific methods, techniques, programs, and applications [31].

Filter bubbles isolate users within like-minded communities, amplifying polarization by reinforcing existing beliefs. Media priming amplifies disinformation (although later debunked), as seen in the case study of Pizzagate scandal, where exaggerated media coverage led part of the public to associate false narratives with political figures, particularly during elections.

This is perhaps also a lesson that we must look every news with critical thinking, without considering everything as *de facto*. Tirunch et al. [30] write that critical thinking is the ability to analyze and evaluate arguments according to their soundness and credibility, respond to arguments and reach conclusions through deduction from given information. With critical thinking we can be more flexible in certain situations and more easily perceive satire without being misinformed.

Chapter 2, entitled **Disinformation and opinion influence. An issue for democracy**, examines modern schemes of information falseness and its dissemination, such as digital propaganda, the potential power of disinformation to affect opinion making and its constant presence in political life, especially in pre-election periods as a new normality.

In subchapter 2.1 (*Disinformation tactics for behavior influence*) Disinformation tactics aimed at influencing behavior encompass various methods employed by individuals or organizations to disseminate false information and manipulate public perception. This overview distinguishes between disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation, while also exploring various tactics such as anti-communication strategies, astroturfing, and the sleeper effect. These tactics are systematically designed to enhance the credibility of disinformation and manipulate audiences to achieve specific goals, often causing confusion and disrupting communication channels, particularly during crises or politically charged environments. Anti-communication strategies aim to disrupt the flow of information, often through methods like cyberattacks or bombing key media outlets to hinder opposing narratives. Similarly, astroturfing creates the illusion of widespread support for a particular agenda through fake online personas, manipulating public opinion by flooding digital spaces with curated content. The sleeper effect further illustrates how repeated exposure to misleading information can increase its perceived credibility over time, challenging individuals' ability to discern truth from falsehood. These tactics foster an environment where misinformation thrives, particularly in times of uncertainty when trust in credible sources is fragile. The prevalence of disinformation tactics highlights the ongoing battle for control over narratives in the digital age. The rise of social media and the ease of access to information have only amplified these tactics, making the public more susceptible to falsehoods. Understanding the mechanisms behind these strategies is crucial for individuals and communities to build resilience against the manipulation of information, ensuring informed public discourse and safeguarding democratic processes.

In subchapter 2.2. (*Examining computational propaganda and the role of technology and artificial intelligence as a “playmaker” at disinformation dissemination today. Profit and control?*) is examined the influence of technology and automation on the internet and social media which has become increasingly significant, particularly regarding misinformation.

Bots, which can be categorized as "good" or "bad," play a crucial role in this dynamic. While some bots gather information and facilitate interactions, others spread malware or manipulate narratives. This duality is evident in social media, where bots can be designed for

positive tasks yet still serve harmful agendas, such as disseminating propaganda. Experts from Twitter emphasize the need to combat malicious automation tactics that disrupt public discourse, suggesting that the intentions behind bot usage heavily dictate their impact on political communication. Social bots, often powered by artificial intelligence, mimic human behavior on social platforms to manipulate public opinion and influence conversations. Research highlights their deceptive nature, as they engage users through comments and interactions. Bots are particularly adept at promoting misinformation early in its lifecycle, targeting influential users, and hiding their origins. In events like the 2017 Catalonia Referendum, bots exacerbated social tensions by amplifying inflammatory sentiments. The ability of individuals or organizations to create networks of bots for strategic manipulation raises concerns about the integrity of online discourse and the potential for misinformation to shape public perception. As digital landscapes evolve, the challenges posed by algorithms and cookies in facilitating disinformation become apparent.

Algorithms curate user experiences but can inadvertently promote misleading content, creating echo chambers that reinforce biases. The commercialization of attention through advertising incentivizes platforms to prioritize engagement over accuracy, further complicating the fight against misinformation. Calls for regulatory frameworks, likened to an "FDA for algorithms," seek to address these issues. As a result, the intersection of technology, misinformation, and public opinion necessitates a critical examination of how digital tools are utilized and regulated to safeguard democratic processes and promote truthful discourse. Automation used for manipulative tactics urges the need to strengthen the measures against information falseness, in order to protect free decision-making and democratic values.

In subchapter 2.3. (*Disinformation in recent political life. An established normality?*), we examine the role of misinformation in elections which has increasingly become a focal point of concern, particularly evident in the U.S. elections of 2016 and 2020, culminating in the Capitol riots. The 2016 elections marked a significant rise in the spread of "fake news," which was notably amplified by social media platforms. Research indicated that many voters were exposed to false narratives, often favoring Donald Trump, which shaped public opinion and voter engagement. Trump's rhetoric on media being "fake" further fueled this phenomenon, suggesting that misinformation became a staple of political discourse and strategy during this election cycle. Additionally, the Mueller Report confirmed Russian interference aimed at sowing discord and supporting Trump, although it did not implicate his campaign in direct conspiracy.

The 2020 elections mirrored these issues, with false narratives about election fraud gaining traction, particularly in response to mail-in voting due to the pandemic. Studies showed that misinformation was primarily driven by elite sources, with social media acting as a secondary platform for dissemination. The Election Integrity Partnership documented various misleading narratives that contributed to the unrest culminating in the Capitol riots, highlighting the significant impact of disinformation on public perception and political polarization. Subsequent assessments by intelligence agencies dismissed claims of widespread fraud while noting foreign influence operations designed to undermine confidence in the electoral process.

Misinformation's effects are not limited to the U.S.; similar trends are seen in global contexts, such as France, Moldova, and Nigeria. In France, disinformation campaigns targeted candidates in both elections, with foreign actors exploiting local vulnerabilities. In Moldova, the political landscape is polarized by misinformation, often exacerbated by external influences, while Nigeria's elections were marred by widespread fake news and propaganda that incited violence and mistrust. These cases reflect a broader pattern where misinformation undermines democratic institutions and societal cohesion, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to combat disinformation and restore public trust in electoral processes worldwide.

Chapter 3, entitled **Public policies to counter disinformation**, focuses on the state responses against the researched problem from several selected countries and performs a case study in each one of them. We examine possible solutions, namely possible ways of dealing with disinformation, misinformation or malinformation at the level of public policies, through the research of government innovations and legislation from different regions of the globe. It also comprises a quantitative analysis approach of the legislation examined.

In subchapter 3.1. (*European Union policies*), we examine the European action plan against information falseness, starting with the East Stratcom Task Force, which was established by the European Union as part of its broader Energy Union strategy, aimed at enhancing energy security and fostering regional cooperation with neighboring countries. Its primary mission is to combat disinformation campaigns, particularly those originating from Russia, that threaten the integrity of the EU and its member states. The Task Force not only promotes EU policies in Eastern neighborhoods like Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine but also seeks to improve media environments and facilitate democratic reforms. Through initiatives like the weekly Disinformation Review, the Task Force works to build positive relationships and provide technical support to enhance media literacy and public understanding of EU benefits. In response to rising disinformation challenges, the European Commission formed a

High-Level Expert Group (HLEG) in 2018 to develop strategies for combating misinformation. The HLEG identified critical areas for action, including transparency in media ownership, enhancing media literacy, and empowering users and journalists with tools for verification and critical analysis. Key proposals include requiring media platforms to disclose funding sources, providing educational resources for media literacy, and ensuring diverse and independent media ecosystems. The emphasis is on collaboration between public and private sectors to create a robust framework for addressing disinformation. The introduction of the Code of Practice on Disinformation (CoPD) [9] marked a significant step in the EU's efforts to address this issue systematically. This self-regulatory framework encourages stakeholders to commit to transparency, ethical advertising practices, and the removal of harmful automated accounts. By fostering an environment of accountability and collaboration, the Code aims to safeguard democratic processes and enhance public resilience against disinformation. Continuous evaluation and research are integral to this effort, ensuring that measures evolve to effectively combat misinformation while respecting fundamental rights. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation emerged as a significant threat, leading to widespread fear and undermining public health efforts. The EU and WHO recognized the dangers posed by misleading information, which could lead to harmful behaviors and distrust in health authorities. In response, the European Commission implemented a strategic plan [28] to combat this "infodemic" through strengthened communication, partnerships with member states, and collaboration with international partners. Key actions included enhancing factchecking capacities, promoting media literacy, and regulating online platforms to prevent the spread of false information. This comprehensive approach aimed to safeguard public health, maintain trust in institutions, and uphold democratic values. The research highlights how misinformation undermines democracy, particularly during elections, by eroding trust in electoral systems through digital platforms. In response, the European Union launched the European Democracy Action Plan [6], which aims to promote fair elections, support independent media, and combat disinformation. Key initiatives include enforcing GDPR for transparency in political advertising, enhancing media freedom, protecting journalists from legal harassment, and implementing sanctions against foreign interference. The plan promotes cooperation among member states to ensure election integrity and aims to increase public awareness of media ownership to foster critical thinking and informed citizenship. The European Parliament and Council established Directive 2000/31/EC [8] to create a legal framework for electronic commerce across the EU, promoting free movement of goods and services. This directive aimed to eliminate barriers to online commerce, defining responsibilities for service providers regarding information sharing, commercial communications, and liability. However, the rapid evolution of digital media and

the rise of social platforms introduced new challenges. To address these, the EU enacted the Digital Services Act (DSA) [19] in October 2022, which updates regulations for intermediary services and aims to combat illegal content and disinformation effectively. The DSA categorizes intermediary services into three types: mere conduit, caching, and hosting, each with specific responsibilities regarding content management. It emphasizes the accountability of digital service providers in removing illegal content and includes mechanisms like "trusted flaggers" to assist in identifying such content. Moreover, the DSA enhances transparency in advertising, requiring platforms to disclose details about ad sponsors and prevent manipulative targeting. The legislation also introduces crisis protocols for large platforms to disseminate crucial information during emergencies, reinforcing their role in public communication. The DSA includes enforcement measures, imposing fines up to 6% of a company's annual global turnover for noncompliance, which can significantly impact large tech firms. The regulation also establishes the European Board for Digital Services to ensure consistent application and facilitate ongoing evaluations every five years. Additionally, the Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation, introduced in 2022, builds on earlier efforts to tackle online misinformation by enhancing commitments from various stakeholders, including tech companies. This collaborative approach aims to deepen the fight against disinformation while promoting user awareness and accountability across digital platforms. The cooperation between the Commission, the Signatories and other involved stakeholders in order to confirm the respect of both the Code and fundamental rights, has a continual character and it is aimed at strengthening the integration of the CoPD into the DSA. The adoption, in 2025, of a Code of Conduct under the DSA [9] marked the firm continuation of European policies to combat disinformation and a relevant benchmark for determining compliance with the DSA with regard to disinformation risks for digital service providers.

In subchapter 3.2. (*United States of America policies*) we research law enforcement measures and federal bodies against disinformation. The U.S. government has established various agencies to combat disinformation and enhance cybersecurity across multiple sectors. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) plays a crucial role in protecting infrastructure and providing cybersecurity guidance through initiatives like Shields Up and media literacy programs aimed at different age groups. The FBI's Foreign Influence Task Force collaborates with various partners to counter foreign influence operations, while the Customs and Border Protection agency runs campaigns to warn migrants against deceitful smugglers. Additionally, FEMA addresses misinformation related to natural disasters and aids recovery efforts, demonstrating a multi-faceted federal approach to safeguarding the public from digital and real-world threats. In recent years, Americans have increasingly called for government action to combat misinformation, with a 2021 survey showing 48% support for

restricting false information, up from 39% in 2018. This demand is split along party lines; 70% of Republicans favor maintaining freedom of information, while 65% of Democrats support stronger measures against misinformation. Legislative responses are being implemented, such as the Honest Ads Act of 2022 [13], which aims to enhance transparency in political advertising by mandating that online platforms disclose funding sources and advertisement details to the public. The Honest Ads Act represents a significant step towards adapting political communication regulations to the digital age. It expands previous definitions of public communication to include various online formats and ensures that political advertisements are not influenced by foreign entities. By requiring online platforms to maintain accessible records of political ad purchases and to identify sponsors, the Act seeks to build trust between citizens and media, while also addressing concerns about foreign interference in the electoral process. Moreover, various states, like Colorado and California, are enacting privacy laws and regulations to protect consumer data and govern social media practices, recognizing the impact these platforms have on public discourse. Legislation addressing misinformation extends beyond political ads, encompassing efforts to enhance data privacy and regulate social media interactions. California's Assembly Bill 587 [2] mandates transparency from social media companies regarding their terms of service and user interactions. Additionally, the Covid-19 Disinformation Research and Reporting Act of 2021 [25] highlights the importance of scientific research in addressing misinformation related to public health. However, the challenge remains in effectively defining misinformation and balancing regulatory measures with constitutional rights, particularly freedom of speech, as seen in the controversy surrounding California's Assembly Bill 2098 [1], which aimed to penalize misinformation disseminated by medical professionals.

In subchapter 3.3. (*Greece policies*) we examine governmental efforts against information falseness through public sector digitization. In Greece, the issue of misinformation poses a significant challenge to public trust in media, particularly as part of the European Union framework. A Eurobarometer survey [26] from winter 2020-21 revealed that an overwhelming 94% of Greek respondents view misinformation as a national problem, with 90% frequently encountering false information. To address the issue, Greek authorities are implementing a Digital Transformation strategy [7] aimed at enhancing media literacy and cybersecurity. Initiatives include the establishment of the National Academy of Digital Skills, which offers free educational content focused on digital citizenship, aiming to empower citizens in navigating the digital landscape. Additionally, the country's participation in the Open Government Partnership aims to foster transparency, accountability, and active citizen participation in decision-making processes. These efforts are designed to counter misinformation and enhance public engagement in governance. Greece's approach to

combating misinformation emphasizes the importance of digital literacy and robust public engagement strategies. By improving educational resources, enhancing cybersecurity measures, and promoting open governance, the country seeks to build trust in its media landscape and empower citizens. These initiatives not only aim to address immediate concerns regarding misinformation but also set a foundation for a more informed and engaged citizenry, ultimately strengthening democratic values and public integrity. Greece also enacted legislation to criminalize the dissemination of false news that causes public fear or undermines trust in the economy or health system, though the enactment caused severe criticism. Initially, the law [14] imposed penalties for merely spreading such news, which raised concerns about potential violations of free speech and media freedom. Critics argued that vague definitions could lead to censorship. Following public backlash, the law was amended to require that misinformation must result in actual fear-induced actions before it can be penalized, indicating a shift towards a more lenient approach while still criminalizing disinformation. However, the implications for freedom of expression remain a concern.

In subchapter 3.4. (*Policies in the Republic of Moldova*) we examine that the country is actively addressing the challenge of disinformation while strengthening its ties with the European Union (EU) in recent years. The focus on disinformation is part of a broader strategy aimed at aligning with EU policies, particularly in the realm of strategic communications in Eastern Europe. In 2022, the EU committed €150 million in macro-financial assistance [16] to Moldova to bolster its economic stability amid crises related to energy and the pandemic. This financial support is contingent upon the country implementing structural reforms across various sectors, including public governance, financial integrity, and anti-corruption measures. These reforms are essential for aligning Moldova's legislation with European standards and enhancing international cooperation in combating corruption and misinformation. The Moldovan government has established a legislative framework to combat disinformation, notably through the Code of Audiovisual Media Services [5], which was enacted in 2018 and updated in 2023. This Code includes provisions to protect journalists from external pressures, restrict broadcasting that promotes hate or discrimination, and ensure that media content is factual and impartial. Moreover, it prohibits the distribution of information from non-EU countries that may threaten national security. The aim is to create a media environment that is both free and responsible, reflecting Moldova's aspiration to align with European values and standards. Additionally, the Law on Freedom of Expression [15] supports media independence and prohibits censorship, thereby fostering a more trustworthy press landscape. Moldova's efforts to modernize its governance and media landscape are further contextualized by its "Digital Transformation Strategy 2023-2030" [20], which aims to align national policies with European and global trends. This strategy emphasizes

developing a digital society and enhancing the ICT environment, with the goal of preparing Moldova for EU membership. The strategy outlines key objectives such as building a competitive digital economy and ensuring inclusive access to digital services. This comprehensive approach is reflective of broader trends among candidate and member states of the EU, indicating a collective movement toward modernizing public services and strengthening information security. The impact of these efforts is already visible in country's improved rankings in various international indices, such as the Press Freedom Index, Global Peace Index, and Corruption Perceptions Index. Between 2020 and 2023, Moldova has made significant strides in these areas, indicating a positive trajectory in public governance and reforms aimed at creating a more transparent and accountable society. These improvements suggest that the country's legislative measures and alignment with EU standards are yielding tangible results, fostering a more resilient democracy. Moldova continues its path toward EU integration, the focus on combating disinformation and enhancing public governance is critical. The legislative initiatives and strategic frameworks in place are designed to ensure a more transparent, accountable, and informed society.

Continued dialogue with the EU demonstrates commitment to these goals and highlights the importance of international cooperation in addressing the challenges of disinformation and fostering sustainable development.

In subchapter 3.5 (*Accumulation of quantitative results regarding the enactments examined*), we converted our findings into a numerical report and made a quantitative analysis approach (objective: form an aggregation and perform also a quantitative approach of those policies, in order to extract some additional conclusions through a statistical format).

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ultimately, we meet some conclusions in our thesis that satisfy the *objectives* of the research. In the thesis we made a little journey on the phenomenon of information falseness by seeing examples of disinformation through history (subchapter 1.2) (objective: *historiography overview in relation with public affairs*). The main aim of the study is to portray current public policies countering the problem, so, first of all, we had to portray the value role of information to society and that's why we talked about the importance of reliable information with its two uses, a) the usage value of information, meaning the cognitive use of information (effectiveness, usability etc.) and b) the commercial use, meaning the commercial value of info. Under the scope that well-informed citizens contribute to smooth functioning

of democracy, we focused on the first one, the usage value of information, how people reclaim facts and proceed on a more healthy decision making. Thus, we had a literature review and examined the bibliography that supports the opinion that disinformation is considered a public problem (f.e. manipulating public discourse through agenda-setting) (subchapters 1.3, 2.2 & 2.3). In order to address a problem, we have to understand it better (objective: *analysis of the modern concept of information falseness and its subdivision into branches*), so to analyze disinformation in full scale, we examined its three branches: a) disinformation, false information deliberately created to harm (the pure falseness as we like to call it), b) misinformation, false information but not created to harm, c) malinformation, reality-based information shared to cause harm (subchapter 1.2). Except those branches, we examined elements, forms of information falseness and its dissemination tactics, such as fake news, echo chambers, computational propaganda, bots and algorithms (subchapter 1.3, 2.1 & 2.2) (objective: *analysis of the role of digital technology on the contemporary dissemination of disinformation*). We analyzed disinformation tactics directed to impact opinion-making, we observed the role of media priming in expanding rumors or conspiracy theories inside public sphere (in the case of Pizzagate events) and how information manipulation is used by domestic or external actors to make influence operations and capitalize profits from impacting public opinion (subchapter 1.3) (objective: *overview of different types and transformations of disinformation in today's public sphere, as well as the disinformation tactics aimed to influence behavior and also study the existence of disinformation through a looming conspiracy theory in the public agenda and its impact on public opinion*). Furthermore, we met *the motives* of producing „fakeness” (subchapter 1.2), meaning the political, financial and social motivations *behind the dissemination of disinformation*. We stuck more on political motives, because as we saw in the study, political level disinformation tries to give a communicative advantage against an opponent and to affect beliefs or behavior, which is later interpreted in votes and election influence. Of course, political or geopolitical power can produce economical profits and vice versa, but we chose to focus more on the field of politics because in our opinion it's a genesis field of other powers such as social, economical etc.

That's why we examined information falseness in recent political life in multiple regions (America, Europe, Africa), observing major events in US, French and Nigerian presidential elections in the last few years starting from 2016 and beyond (subchapter 2.3) (objective: *analysis of the problematic and the relevance of disinformation phenomenon in recent political life in multiple countries of the globe*). In order to answer the basic question

of our research, we had to find what are the State policies implemented or planned to be implemented, aiming to counter disinformation and limit its negative impacts on public sphere (chapter 3) (objective: *study of public policies to counter disinformation in various States of the world, with particular attention to European public policies implemented to counter disinformation*). In the same time, we converted our findings into a numerical report and made a quantitative analysis approach (subchapter 3.5) (objective: *form an aggregation and perform also a quantitative approach of those policies, in order to extract some additional conclusions through a statistical format*). We examined policies in European Union level as long as policies of United States, Greece and Moldova. Thus, we covered areas from Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, Europe as a whole and America. In EU we met important actions such as the strategy of communication task forces or the Code of Practice against disinformation, a set of measures that was monitored and later reworked to the new Strengthened Code of Practice of 2022 and confirmed by the recent 2025 Code of Conduct on Disinformation.

Another interesting part was the protective strategy against infodemic during the covid19 crisis, which also revealed the extension of impact of disinformation to public health and the need to protect public security. The EU provision of asking online platforms Signatories to make progress reports gave quantitative results on the case of countering disinformation and showed at least that the measures have a certain level of effectiveness. Furthermore, we saw the formation of a framework to support democracies, through the European Democracy Action Plan, as also the DSA to make digital world regulations. In United States we separated the policies into three categories: a) the federal bodies that are employed also to counter disinformation, b) the law enforcement enactments, c) the actions focused on media literacy. In Greece we saw efforts to digitize services of the Public Sector in order to be bulletproof from disinformation, as also the legislation that penalized fake news and caused discussion and criticism. Moldova, in the process of coming closer to EU, makes legislation against disinformation and we saw enactments regarding the freedom of expression, the ban on media censorship, the distinction between presenting facts and opinions. The creation of a new regional center of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), aimed at supporting Moldova and Ukraine in combating disinformation, according to European Union representatives, will bring together efforts to detect and analyze manipulation and disinformation campaigns, particularly disinformation from Russia and the establishment, at the initiative of the President of the Republic of Moldova Maia Sandu, of the Center for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, the identification of

the five essential thematic pillars that will guide strategic communication efforts (*European integration, social cohesion, economic resilience, strengthening the defense sector, strengthening national security in a regional context*), these are concrete steps that should lead to the consolidation of the foundation of trust, transparency, and accurate information, making it more difficult for disinformation to infiltrate and spread.

Outcomes

The conducted research showed the viability of the conclusions of the results related to the objectives of the thesis. As we observe:

1. One could characterize disinformation as perennial, contemporary, everchanging, universal and impactful phenomenon. We say perennial because it appears in several ages throughout history, with persistent presence from antiquity to the present day. We say contemporary because of this present presence and because modern technology is employed for its dissemination. We call it ever-changing because except the element of continuity, it is adaptive to the social and technological conditions of each era, for example it could be spread through mouth or script in ancient times, could be spread through typography after 15th century or in digitized form today. We call it universal because it's met in several countries around the world, no matter differential characteristics (region, race, language etc). Finally, we call it impactful because it can produce a plethora of negative effects in the public sphere and it can be considered as a threat to society (public influence, financial frauds, social unrest et al).

2. In addition, in the first two parts of the study, one could say that we can see a underlying sequence which simplifies, describes and outlines the phenomenon in the public life:

Disinformation ➔ communicative advantage (f.e. downgrading opponents, domestic or international) ➔ influence (opinion, behavior etc) ➔ voting/election influence ➔ election result ➔ political power through election results ➔ fulfilling private interests (social, financial, political) and not public interests (satisfying needs of the few/minority and not the many/majority) ➔ democracy pathogenesis and undermine/degradation.

We can see that information falseness can work as a source of effects. It interprets and transforms into something else and then into something else, it starts to get a snowball effect and produces a line of sequence of impacts and eventually in the big picture, a final negative result. Of course we also met cases where disinformation does not directly relate with

elections, but still relates to cases of social unrest, thus it produces negative effects (f.e. riots, demonstrations).

3. In the second part of the study, we could say that we see a reversed sequence, a context that aims to face the threat:

public policies to counter disinformation ➤ decreasing disinformation ➤ limiting malicious influence ➤ protecting public interests ➤ assisting democratic values or protecting public security.

4. We concentrate an aggregate of public policies of different countries and we get a clearer picture of how States try to respond. Several State and governments' reflexes are activated and take measures in order to fight the problem. So, States are considering disinformation indeed as a threat. We met and examined policies trying to set barriers and limit disinformation, plus its various negative effects. This is happening in the general State context of preserving democratic polity norms and protecting public security and public interests. Furthermore, except State level, this is happening also in EU level, as an ultra-regional response, as a strategic pursuit of the Union. The European Commission's tactic to policy monitoring and to ask for progress reports from Signatories, revealed that there are positive results in countering disinformation. We understand that the measures have indeed effectiveness, up to an extent. We say up to an extent because the problem is not yet overcome.

5. As we examined the implemented policies in some States, we realized another emerging problem. Among others, a form of countering disinformation is penalization (through criminal charges). The element of criminal sanctions in this matter could raise concerns about compatibility with the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information.

6. Nevertheless, now let's combine two main facts of the study. The first fact is that disinformation is an *ongoing phenomenon*, it still exists (we saw very recent examples). The second fact is the existence of countering policies on State, Federal and Union level. Consequently, we can extract that no matter the effectiveness of the measures taken, there are still steps to be made, still action field available, there is still the need for extra measures and new policies.

7. Maybe disinformation is intercepted up to an extent, in some places in the world of today, but we are not going to enter in a discussion of quantification. Its negative impacts are present, as we saw in the research. Thus, it is essential to keep producing sentinel measures against it. The battle against disinformation seems to be a procedure that has the

character of *continuity*, so it demands from society, citizens, officials, legislators, governments to be in constant vigilance.

8. Through the completion of the study we can mark the realization of disinformation as a *threat*. This realization of threat derives both from the side of public problem (part one and two of the thesis) and the side of responses-public policies to counter it (part three of the thesis). Consequently, according to the contents of the study, disinformation can be considered as a threat:

a) To national security: we saw examples of potential foreign influence operations and in other countries as also national security reports regarding foreign interference, as a try of these States to organize and be protected from possible actions of third parties.

b) To public security: disinformation can be hazardous for public safety, we saw cases of social unrest and public dangers due to fake news or conspiracy theories, such as the infodemic (covid-related disinformation), the gunfires due to Pizzagate rumors or the Capitol attack in 2021, but especially misinformation coming from the Russian Federation.

c) To democracy: the influential potential of disinformation in opinion-making can also be translated as influence in decision-making and voting. Thus, we are talking about a danger to democracy, because public decisions are partially taken based on false narratives. Furthermore, the threat can be also turned against the electoral system itself and harm the credibility of democratic procedures such as elections. We observed events where the integrity of elections was questioned due to accusations for election fraud, intervention of shady factors and unreliable election system.

d) To financial security: disinformation is also exploited for economic purposes and can be proved a danger for citizens and a country's economy. As a result, there are enactments examined that concern the building of resilience and security in the digital space against financial frauds, misleading advertising, the protection against the manipulation of financial market, the integrity of capital movements in order to safeguard public, corporate and personal finance.

9. In relation with the quantitative results of the study, we are observing that States seem to understand that preserving national security means also protecting against information falseness, as the majority of enactments (68%) include a reference to that matter. However, the situation is not the same regarding the direction of freedom of expression, as only 36% of the examined enactments include a reference to it. Of course, we are not concluding that enactments do not respect this particular human right but the fact of absence of a single

reference could be accounted as a sign of the direction that public policies aim to follow and as an indicator of legislative priorities. This direction is visible by the fact that all countries (and Union) examined incorporate disinformation penalization in their legislative arsenal. Moreover, some of these bills combine the provision of imprisonment, which is even more severe form of punishment. This tactic may raise concerns about the potential fear effect to citizens in their free opinion stating in the public debate. As for the authority that will monitor information space against disinformation and decide what is false, the enactments in more than three quarters (82%) indicate either a judicial body or a governmental entity. This could raise some concerns regarding the specialization of those authorities in communication science and disinformation matters and also the impartiality and neutrality of some of those entities in taking decisions.

Recommendations

Along with the findings and deductions in our study, it would be fair to make some proposals, which perhaps could contribute in assisting the process of countering disinformation and enriching the toolbox against the phenomenon. The following are suggestions that, in our opinion, could be added up to a constructive dialogue in public discussion, regarding potential policies application.

1. **Governmental actions – Ministry of Digital Governance** (passing from government to state independence): the existence of an *Independent Authority* against Disinformation makes it possible to focus efforts exclusively on this issue, searching for, examining, analyzing, and exposing disinformation. We say *Independent* because there is the purpose to be institutionally shielded from interventions of government at any given time. We mean that there is alternation, political parties take turns in government from time to time. So, the authority should be Independent in order to be objective and neutral and in order to be detached (as much as possible) from the will of different political powers that could possibly want to counter only fake news that affect their storytelling. We say *Authority* because it should have public character and defend public interests. Thus, its aims should be to counter information falseness that affects public interest such as public security or election credibility and not private financial interests (for example a case of corporation branding fake news).

2. It would be quite useful to establish an Independent Authority for Polls. Again, it would be *Independent Authority* for the reasons we explained above. It could counter disinformation in an indirect way. Its field of action would be to conduct and publish polls which measure and express public opinion about sociopolitical and economy issues. By doing

that, it would be revealed the pulse of citizens' opinion on serious matters and we would have a circular process that feeds back public opinion without any sideways interventions. In the study we witnessed the snowball effect of disinformation, so a way to prevent it, is by regularly hearing the majority and by making known the public will and public opinion on certain issues. Of course, this presupposes polls of high credibility and preciseness. To do that, we propose that these polls should be conducted with modern scientific methodology and high number of participants. In addition, the methodology, the research sample and the primary data of each poll would be also available in public, certainly respecting and applying all the laws and rules of GDPR. In plus, the polls would include digital technologies and face to face questionnaires. All these could increase transparency, preciseness and credibility.

3. To combine two of the above proposals, we suggest that the Independent Authority against Disinformation could debunk and present fake news to the public, regularly, in a way that is easy to digest, explanatory, fact-based and not tiring for the most people. The competent authority could make daily news broadcast, a news bulletin of short duration, not more than five minutes, presenting fake news of common interest in the public sphere. This could be launched on State television or on online platforms through videos in its channels (for example on YouTube and social media) or with a column on newspapers.

4. **Law-making philosophy approach – Ministry of Justice:** Having seen that penalization of disinformation is debatable and raises concerns about legal aspects, such as the freedom of expression, we propose not to even reach that point of discussion. We suggest staying away from penalizing disinformation in order to avoid the above discussion or possible insults to fundamental rights and instead focus on other measures. In our opinion, it would be smart to hit disinformation from the inside, by targeting its credibility and its believability. This could happen with debunking fake news and narratives, regularly and methodically. We should highlight and cultivate a culture of fact-based storytelling on public matters. Thus, we should focus on the promotion of facts and not on the punishment of lies (except, of course, in cases where disinformation directly affects state security).

5. **Educational aspect – Ministry of Education:** Finally, in the logic of factbasing and debunking disinformation, we should also utilize fact-checking and debunking by a citizen himself. Therefore, we should invest in media literacy to safeguard the younger generations from information falseness and at the same time, raise better educated mid and older generations of the future. For this reason, information and media literacy courses could be added in the curriculum throughout the educational system, especially from secondary to

high-school level, as also in the universities. For the topic examined, it would be beneficial if youngsters and adults have basic knowledge of Communication Theory and ways to combat disinformation, become familiar with the glossary of disinformation terms, specially developed. These could lead to increased awareness and improved information judgement ability.

Proposals for future research. Our main focus in this research was to examine it by the aspect of public policies trying to counter it. It would be interesting if someone approached disinformation in combination with clearly legal aspect, concerning the level of interfering of legislation to fundamental rights. In our thesis we saw examples of enactments raising discussion about their proximity to violating civil rights, but it is not our purpose to do law analysis to this extent and we cannot make such conclusions. It would be helpful to read a research examining if penalizing disinformation crosses the line and impacts freedom of speech or press freedom. Of course, this better have to be done from specialists in Law, because this is a matter of legal nature. Also, another project that would seem to have promising potential has to do with gathering removed content from online platforms or debunked stories from media outlets. Studying such content could maybe enrich our knowledge about disinformation dissemination tactics, about the sources (transmitters) of false news, what issues or political parties or social groups they prefer to target and to what percentage, what medium they prefer to use in order to perform or what amount of funding is dispended. We saw in our research that providing information about the ownership of a media, the identification of sponsored content, what money are spent on a political advertisement or information about malicious bots and algorithms are a step to increase transparency in media. So, if given, why not to make the best use of such information, study them and make helpful conclusions.

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Articles in scientific journals

2.2. in journals from other databases

- 2.2.1. Marousis, Theofilos, Moraru, Victor. The features of the „automated” disinformation action of the modern era. International Journal of Communication Research** (România, Academy of Romanian Scientists), 2024, vol. 14, Issue 3, pp. 209-215. 0,82 ed. p. ISBN 2246-9265. Available on: https://www.ijcr.eu/articole/685_Victor%20moraru.pdf

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- 2.3.1. Marousis, Theofilos. State Responses to Counter Disinformation in USA, Greece and Republic of Moldova. Studia Universitatis Moldaviae, Economics and Communication Sciences Series**, 2024, nr. 11 (3), pp. 131-137. 0,5 ed. p. ISSN 2587-4446. Available on: https://exact.studiamsu.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SUM_113_2024.pdf.
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3. Articles in conference proceedings

3.3. in the proceedings of scientific events included in the Register of materials published on the basis of scientific events organized in the Republic of Moldova

- 3.3.1. Marousis, Theofilos. Public policies to counter disinformation in Greece and Moldova: comparative analysis. În: Fenomene și tendințe în jurnalism și comunicare**, Conferința națională cu participare internațională prilejuită de împlinirea a 45 de ani de la fondarea *Facultății de Jurnalism și Științe ale Comunicării a Universității de Stat din Moldova*. 4-5 decembrie 2025, Chișinău, Republica Moldova. Chisinau: Centrul Editorial-Poligrafic al Universității de Stat din Moldova, 2025, Materialele Conferinței Științifice Naționale cu participare internațională,
- 3.3.2. Marousis, Theofilos. Exploring the intersection of misinformation and public agenda: a closer look to a looming political scandal. In: Integrare prin cercetare și inovare**. Conferința Științifică Națională cu participare internațională, dedicată Zilei Internaționale a Științei pentru Pace și Dezvoltare, 7-8 noiembrie 2024 / comitetul științific: Igor Șarov [et al.]. Chișinău, Republica Moldova. Chisinau: Centrul Editorial-Poligrafic al Universității de Stat din Moldova, 2024, Materialele Conferinței Științifice Naționale cu participare internațională, Științe Sociale, pp. 155-162. ISBN 978-9975-62-687-3. Available on: https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/155-162_12.pdf

4. Abstracts in the collection of scientific papers

4.1. in the proceedings of international scientific conferences (abroad)

- 4.1.1. Marousis, Theofilos Eforturile statului pentru a contracara dezinformarea în SUA, Grecia și Moldova. În: Conference of Academy of Romanian Scientists.** Book of Abstracts. - București: AOȘR, 2024. vol. 18, Issue 1, pp. 175-176. ISSN 2601-5102. Available on: <https://www.aosr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/VOLUMDE-REZUMATE-PRIMAVARA-2024-SITE-1.pdf>.

ANNOTATION

Theofilos Marousis. Public European policies to counter disinformation. PhD thesis in Communication Sciences, specialty 571.01 – Journalism and media processes, Doctoral School of Social Sciences, Moldova State University. Chişinău, 2026.

Thesis structure. The thesis contains 147 pages of basic text, an annotation in Romanian, English, and Russian, a list of abbreviations, an introduction, three main chapters with subchapters including conclusions for each one, as also general conclusions and recommendations and bibliography consisting of 504 sources (printed sources, electronic sources and official documents), 6 tables and 7 figures.

Key words: disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, democracy, elections, fake news, public policies, governance, public security, propaganda, information warfare, social media.

Research area: Communication Sciences.

The purpose of the research: to explore and understand the theoretical framework of disinformation, its impact to public opinion and its potential threat posing to democracy. Also, its aim is to research and learn if and how States (or the community of the states – the European Union), public officials and authorities respond to the problem apposed, what is the official reaction, meaning what are the public policies implemented to counter disinformation. Ultimately, it is appropriate to draw useful conclusions and suggestions to help overcome it. To achieve this, we highlight several objectives: a historiographical analysis of the phenomenon of disinformation; examination of the modern concept of informational falsehood and its division into ramifications; an overview of the different types and transformations of disinformation in the current public sphere; systematization of some disinformation tactics; highlighting the influence of a conspiracy theory on the public agenda and its impact on public opinion; analysis of the issue and relevance of the disinformation phenomenon in recent political life in several countries; study of public policies to combat disinformation in the European Union, but also in various countries.

The scientific novelty and originality of the work resides in the conceptualization of disinformation as a perceptible public problem with the potential to undermine and threaten public security and the smooth functioning of democratic polity. Furthermore, it is oriented to contribute to the limitation process of the spread of disinformation within the public sphere, under the perspective of the response authorized by the official law. It includes and examines public responses against the disinformation phenomenon.

The important scientific problem, solved in the thesis, resides in elucidating the phenomenon of disinformation, especially in public affairs sphere, offering the possibility to conceptualize it more distinctly as a public problem and to present an updated picture of the state of fact of its spread and amplification in the context of recent circumstances. The research aims to demonstrate that disinformation has dangerous and negative effects on public interests. As a part of the process of this research for potential solutions, is the scrutiny of public policies of several States (and European Union as a whole) to counter information falseness.

The theoretical significance of the thesis derives from the investigation and conceptualization of disinformation phenomenon, mainly focusing on its impacts to the decision-making process of socio-political life. In addition, results of the study support the concentration of public governance tactics that serve the task of answer against information falseness.

The applicative value of the thesis based on the knowledge-action sequence, consists on conclusions of research regarding the issue of disinformation nowadays, as also proposals about actions that could be taken in order to further limit the problem.

Implementation of scientific results was accomplished through examination and communications of them at National and International Conferences (including held at State University of Moldova) Promoting socio-economic values in the context of European integration (Chisinau, USEM), Strengthening resilience in society by capitalizing on human capital in the context of the accession of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine to the European Union (Chisinau, ICJPS), Perspectives and problems of integration into the European space of research and education (Cahul, USC), Republic of Moldova and Ukraine: candidate states of the European Union (Chisinau, ICJPS), Integration through Research and Innovation (Chisinau, USM), Phenomena and trends in journalism and communication, National conference marking the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences at the State University of Moldova, Conference of the Academy of Scientists of Romania (Bucharest, AOŞR), etc. Approval also was achieved through publication of 7 scientific articles in academic journals.

ADNOTARE

Theofilos Marousis. Politici publice europene de combatere a dezinformării.

Teză de doctor în științe ale comunicării, specialitatea 571.01 – Jurnalism și procese mediatice.

Școala doctorală Științe sociale, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova. Chișinău, 2026.

Structura tezei. Teza conține 147 de pagini de text de bază, adnotări în limbile engleză, română și rusă, lista abrevierilor, introducere, trei capitole cu subcapitole, care includ concluzii pentru fiecare, precum și concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografie din 504 surse (surse tipărite, surse electronice și documente oficiale), 6 tabele și 7 figuri.

Cuvinte cheie: dezinformare, democrație, alegeri, știri false, politici publice, guvernanta publică, securitate publică, propaganda, media sociale, război informațional

Domeniul de cercetare: Științe ale comunicării.

Scopul lucrării: explorarea și clarificarea cadrului teoretic și practic al fenomenului dezinformării, impactul acesteia asupra opiniei publice și potențiala amenințare pe care o reprezintă pentru democrație. De asemenea, scopul cercetării este de a cerceta și detecta dacă și cum statele (sau comunitatea statelor - Uniunea Europeană), oficialii publici și autoritățile răspund la problema abordată, care este reacția oficială, adică, în ce anume constau politicile publice implementate pentru a combate dezinformarea. În cele din urmă, este oportun să se tragă concluzii și sugestii utile care să ajute la depășirea acesteia. Pentru a realiza acest lucru, a fost necesară urmărirea câtorva obiective: generalizarea istoriografiei despre dezinformarea în treburile publice; examinarea conceptului modern de falsitate informațională și a divizării acestuia în ramuri; evidențierea diferitelor tipuri de dezinformare în sfera publică actuală; sistematizarea unor tactici de dezinformare; evaluarea gradului de influență a teoriilor conspiraționiste asupra agendei publice și impactul asupra opiniei publice; analiza problematicii și a ponderii fenomenului de dezinformare în viața politică recentă din mai multe țări; studiul politicilor publice de combatere a dezinformării în Uniunea Europeană și în diverse state ale lumii.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică a lucrării rezidă în conceptualizarea și consolidarea dezinformării ca o problemă publică perceptibilă, cu potențialul de a submina și a amenința securitatea publică și buna funcționare a politicii democratice. Teza este orientată la căutarea căilor pentru a limita răspândirea dezinformării în sfera publică, din perspectiva răspunsului autorizat de legea oficială și supunerea unei examinări atente a răspunsurilor publice împotriva fenomenului dezinformării.

Problema științifică importantă rezolvată în teză, rezidă în elucidarea fenomenului dezinformării, în special în sfera afacerilor publice, oferind posibilitatea de a-l conceptualiza mai distinct ca problemă publică și de a prezenta o imagine actualizată a stării de fapt a răspândirii și amplificării acestuia în contextul circumstanțelor recente. Cercetarea urmărește să demonstreze că dezinformarea are efecte periculoase și negative asupra intereselor publice. Ca parte a cercetării pentru potențiale soluții este examinarea politicilor publice ale Uniunii Europene și ale mai multor state pentru a contracara falsul informațional.

Semnificația teoretică a tezei derivă din investigarea și conceptualizarea fenomenului de dezinformare, concentrându-se în principal pe impactul acestuia asupra procesului decizional al vieții socio-politice. În plus, rezultatele studiului susțin concentrarea tacticilor de guvernare publică care servesc sarcinii de răspuns împotriva falsității informației.

Valoarea aplicativă a tezei, bazată pe secvența cunoaștere-acțiune, constă în concluziile cercetării privind problematica dezinformării în zilele noastre, precum și în propuneri despre acțiuni care ar putea fi întreprinse în vederea combaterii acestui pericol.

Implementarea rezultatelor cercetării s-a produs prin prezentarea și discutarea în cadrul mai multor conferințe naționale și internaționale (inclusiv, organizate de Universitatea de Stat din Moldova): „Promovarea valorilor social-economice în contextul integrării europene” (Chișinău, USEM), „Consolidarea rezilienței în societate prin valorificarea capitalului uman în contextul aderării Republicii Moldova și a Ucrainei la Uniunea Europeană” (Chișinău, ICJPS), „Perspectivele și problemele integrării în spațiul european al cercetării și educației” (Cahul, USC), „Republica Moldova și Ucraina: state candidat ale Uniunii Europene” (Chișinău, ICJPS), „Integrare prin Cercetare și Inovare” (Chișinău, USM), „Fenomene și tendințe în jurnalism și comunicare” (Chișinău, FJȘC, USM), „Conferința Științifică a Academiei Oamenilor de Știință din România” (București, AOȘR) ș. a. Aprobarea a fost obținută și prin publicarea a 7 articole științifice în reviste academice.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Теофилос МАРУСИС. Европейская государственная политика по борьбе с дезинформацией. Докторская диссертация по наукам о коммуникации по специальности 571.01 – Журналистика и медиа процессы. Кишинэу, 2026.

Структура диссертации. Диссертация содержит аннотации, введение, три основные главы с подразделами, выводы и рекомендации. Содержание работы представлено на 147 страницах основного текста. Текст диссертации дополнен шестью таблицами и 7 рисунками. Библиография содержит 504 наименований источников (печатных источников, электронных источников и официальных документов).

Ключевые слова: дезинформация, демократия, выборы, фейковые новости, государственная политика, управление, общественная безопасность, пропаганда, влияние, социальные сети.

Область исследования: Науки о коммуникации.

Цель исследования: изучить и прояснить теоретические и практические основы дезинформации, ее влияние на общественное мнение и потенциальную угрозу которую она представляет для демократии. Важной компонентой исследования также является изучение и выявление того, реагируют ли и как государства (или сообщество государств - Европейский союз), государственные служащие и органы власти на рассматриваемую проблему, какова официальная реакция, то есть каковы меры государственной политики, реализуемые для борьбы с дезинформацией. Наконец, целесообразно сделать выводы и полезные предложения, которые помогут ее преодолеть. Для достижения этой цели необходимо было решить следующие задачи: обобщение историографии дезинформации; рассмотрение современной концепции информационной лжи и установление ее главных направлений; выделение различных типов дезинформации в современной публичной сфере; систематизация некоторых тактик дезинформации; оценка степени влияния теорий заговора на общественную повестку дня и воздействия на общественное мнение; анализ проблемы и пропорций явления дезинформации в политической жизни Европейского Союза и ряда стран; изучение государственной политики по борьбе с дезинформацией в Европейском Союзе и различных странах мира.

Научная новизна и оригинальность работы заключаются в концептуализации дезинформации как осязаемой общественной проблемы, способной подорвать общественную безопасность и поставить под угрозу надлежащее функционирование демократической политики. Диссертация направлена на содействие ограничению распространения дезинформации в публичной сфере с точки зрения реагирования, предусмотренного официальным законодательством, и тщательного анализа общественной реакции на явление дезинформации. **Важная научная проблема**, решаемая в диссертации, заключается в объяснении феномена дезинформации, особенно в сфере общественных отношений, что позволяет более четко концептуализировать ее как общественную проблему и представить актуальную картину ситуации с ее распространением и усилением в контексте последних событий. Цель исследования – выявить, что дезинформация оказывает опасное и негативное воздействие на общественные интересы. В рамках исследования потенциальных решений рассматривается государственная политика Европейского Союза и ряда государств по противодействию ложной информации.

Теоретическая значимость диссертации проистекает из исследования и концептуализации феномена дезинформации, с упором на ее влияние на процесс принятия решений в социально- политической жизни. Кроме того, результаты исследования подтверждают необходимость дальнейшей разработки тактик государственного управления, направленных на противодействие ложной информации. **Прикладная ценность диссертации**, основанной на последовательности знание-действие, состоит в выводах исследования, касающихся проблемы дезинформации в наши дни, а также в предложениях о действиях, которые можно предпринять для дальнейшего ограничения дезинформации.

Внедрение научных результатов осуществлялось путем их представления и рассмотрения на национальных и международных конференциях (в том числе в Государственном университете Молдовы): «Продвижение социально-экономических ценностей в контексте европейской интеграции» (Кишинев, USEM), «Укрепление устойчивости общества путем капитализации человеческого капитала в контексте вступления Республики Молдова и Украины в Европейский Союз» (Кишинев, ICJPS), «Перспективы и проблемы интеграции в европейское научно-образовательное пространство» (Кагул, USC), «Республика Молдова и Украина: государства-кандидаты в Европейский Союз» (Кишинев, ICJPS), «Интеграция посредством исследований и инноваций» (Кишинев, USM), «Феномены и тенденции в журналистике и коммуникации» (Кишинев, USM), Конференция Румынской академии деятелей науки (Бухарест, AOSR) и др. Результаты данного исследования нашли свое отражение в 7 научных работах, которые были опубликованы в специализированных изданиях в Республике Молдова и за рубежом.

**UNIVERSITATEA DE STAT DIN MOLDOVA
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ ȘTIINȚE SOCIALE**

**Cu titlu de manuscris
CZU 070.16:659.4:316.776.2(4)(043.3)**

MAROUSIS THEOFILOS

POLITICI PUBLICE EUROPENE DE COMBATERE A DEZINFORMĂRII

SPECIALITATEA 571.01 – JURNALISM ȘI PROCESE MEDIATICE

Rezumatul tezei de doctorat în științe ale comunicării

Aprobat spre tipar: 24.12.2025

Tiraj: 25 ex.

Formatul hârtiei: 60x84 1/16

Coli de tipar: 2,0

Hârtie offset Tipar offset.

Comanda nr.

Centrul Editorial-Poligrafic al USM str.

Al. Mateevici, 60, Chișinău, MD-2009