

**Publisher**<http://jssidoi.org/esc/home>**PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION IN THE SLOVAK AND CZECH REPUBLIC\*****Miroslav Gombár<sup>1</sup>, Stanislav Šišulák<sup>2</sup>, Martina CíCHOVÁ<sup>3</sup>, Patrícia Krásná<sup>4</sup>, Vladimír Malíček<sup>5</sup>**<sup>1</sup>University of Prešov in Prešov, Ul. 17. Novembra č. 15, 080 01 Prešov, Slovak Republic.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>Academy of the Police Force in Bratislava, Sklabinská 1, 835 17 Bratislava, Slovak Republic.E-mails: <sup>1</sup>[miroslav.gombar@unipo.sk](mailto:miroslav.gombar@unipo.sk); <sup>2</sup>[stanislav.sisulak@akademiapz.sk](mailto:stanislav.sisulak@akademiapz.sk); <sup>3</sup>[martina.cichova@akademiapz.sk](mailto:martina.cichova@akademiapz.sk); <sup>4</sup>[patricia.krasna@akademiapz.sk](mailto:patricia.krasna@akademiapz.sk); <sup>5</sup>[vladimir.malicek@akademiapz.sk](mailto:vladimir.malicek@akademiapz.sk)

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**Abstract.** Propaganda and credibility of information are two concepts that are broadly intertwined, as both are closely linked to communication and dissemination of information. On the one hand is propaganda, which often uses manipulative and one-sided information to influence public opinion or convince people of a particular perspective. On the other side is the credibility of information, which refers to the truthfulness, accuracy and objectivity of the data transmitted. This article describes and evaluates the main disinformation actions in recent years in Slovak and the Czech Republic. Information manipulation campaigns are multifaceted, and many factors are at play simultaneously. As topical causes with a wide range of consequences, these campaigns are also political and highly politicized. The analytical part of the paper is based on the research that was conducted, which involved 964 respondents from the Slovak and Czech Republic, mainly university students. The research was conducted based on the authors' research instrument. Within the research itself, we surveyed the answers and opinions of respondents as a way of assessing the relevance of information separately for respondents from the Slovak Republic and individually from the Czech Republic according to the age of the respondent in terms of the respondent's assessment of the truthfulness of the information or the importance of the credibility of the information.

**Keywords:** propaganda; disinformation; Slovak Republic; Czech Republic; credibility of information; manipulative information

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**JEL Classifications:** D73, F50, J28**Additional disciplines:** law; political sciences; sociology; psychology.**1. Introduction and theoretical background**

A long history of states and non-state actors taking disinformation actions against domestic groups exists. The Oxford Internet Institute has found that authoritarian regimes target their populations with social media campaigns. In contrast, in democratic states, information campaigns are used by non-state, e.g., partisan groups that target domestic populations (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017). A well-known example is China's "50 Cent Army", which has existed since at least 2010 and was recently revealed to post 448 million comments on social media annually (King, Pan & Roberts, 2017). This study found that, unlike previous reports, most posts do not aggressively push pro-government messages. Instead, they take over the conversation with positive posts about

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China. Another case worth mentioning is Turkey, where, following the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the ruling AKP party recruited 6,000 people to carry out a disinformation campaign against its population. "The 'AK trolls' are particularly active on Twitter, where they spread pro-government messages, drown out critical voices -often with the help of bots and abuse dissidents (Freedom on the net, 2017). The IRA also targets the domestic population, favouring the government line. In these authoritarian regimes, the government also tightly controls the mainstream media.

Politically motivated disinformation can be carried out by states and non-state groups or individuals. It should be noted that attribution in online disinformation campaigns is complicated, so it is only partially possible to define the source, the funding of the disinformation campaign, or whether it had a domestic or international effect. Disinformation affects almost all EU Member States and many countries around the world.

Content analyses have identified different categories of online fake news. It shows that the reconfiguration of accurate and false claims and their context prevailed over wholly fabricated claims about the COVID-19 pandemic (Brennen et al., 2020; Navickas et al., 2022).

Recognize similar trends in news about polarizing events, such as the 2016 EU migration crisis, and report other standard manipulative techniques besides fabrication, such as blaming, labelling, and appealing to fear in their study of Czech disinformation websites (Gregor & Mlejnková, 2021).

Alternative and mainstream media are also the subject of intense academic discourse. Data from 10 countries examined describe the dynamics in the relationship between misinformation and distrust of the news media (Hameleers et al., 2022). Several authors investigate how the alternative media stack up against the mainstream media, highlighting criticisms of content and objectivity in both directions. Horne points to the substantial homogeneity of a tightly formed community across social media and the sharing of content only with similar news sources. Meanwhile, alternative and mainstream news media often report on the same events but with competing and contradictory narratives (Mayerhöffer, 2021).

Regarding propaganda and disinformation campaigns, point to empirical evidence of a Russian government media apparatus with its political and military objectives integrated into the alternative media ecosystem (Starbird et al., 2017). The academic discussion also addresses ideological polarization and its relation to specific characteristics of online communication, such as the influence of filter bubbles on social media as crucial tools for amplifying fabricated news (Spohr, 2017; Soares, Gruzd & Mai, 2023).

A growing body of research has been devoted to so-called hybrid warfare. Clear evidence of 'master narratives' concerning the political and economic weaknesses of the European Union and Western liberal ideology can be identified in various forms and adapted to specific events and situations in individual countries (Levinger, 2018; Reddi, Kuo & Kreiss, 2023). Despite a growing body of literature on the topic, more research must be done on specific countries' peculiarities (Akram, Nasar, & Arshad-Ayaz, 2022). We address this gap partly by focusing on two countries.

### 1.1. Slovak Republic and Czech Republic

In the wake of the global pandemic COVID-19 and during the military conflict in Europe, the fight against disinformation appears to be an urgent matter at both the state and personal level. As the European Commission acknowledges, the public harm caused by deception includes "*threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as the health of Union citizens, the environment or security*" (European Commission 2018). Following the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, the dangers of mass dissemination of deceptive content became apparent (Radu 2020). This phenomenon, called 'infodemic', has shown its potential to 'hinder an effective public health response and create confusion and mistrust among people' (UN.ORG 2020).

It is in the interest of the public authorities to prevent the dissemination of inaccurate information among citizens without hindering freedom of expression. The central role in disseminating fake news is played by social networking services and the public's expectation that measures will be taken in this regard, communicated internationally. However, the production of controversial content also occurs 'within a diverse, alternative' news ecosystem', which is increasingly dominated by hyper-partisan, anti-systemic and conspiratorial news websites". It is crucial to recognise the owners, contributors and business models of online media to recognise the right strategy to prevent the negative impacts of this information environment (Štětka, Hajek 2021).

Before the pandemic, personal experience with disinformation related to the Slovak region proved relatively weak. According to the 2020 Eurobarometer survey, Slovaks had less personal experience with fake news than the EU average (Eurobarometer 2020). But comparisons with previous periods showed a clear upward trend. The Slovak Republic recorded the second-highest increase in the proportion of citizens who frequently encounter fabricated news in the media. Subsequent public health concerns after the pandemic have changed the perspective on the state's role in preventing the spread of fake news. Police and state officials sought to challenge online content that promoted the denial of viruses and mass violations of social distancing or other health regulations. Intelligence services continued monitoring and reporting on the main disinformation channels that outwardly presented themselves as an alternative ecosystem (BIS.CZ 2021). Nevertheless, some parliamentarians have personally dealt with websites known for publishing manipulative articles (Krátka, Špalková, Činčerová 2021).

## 1.2. Online disinformation ecosystem in the Slovak Republic

The global financial crisis of 2008-2010 represented a pivotal moment for media systems in Central Europe after their post-communist transformation. As a result of the severe economic downturn, which affected the costs and advertising expenditure of most commercial media, most foreign investors sold their assets in key publishing houses to local entrepreneurs. It refers to this period as the third media ownership transformation, characterized by the deglobalization and oligarchization of the media sector (Štětka, 2015).

In the Slovak Republic, a model of "business parallelism" (Štětka, 2015). can be identified, characterised by local media tycoons operating in different business areas, where the presence of foreign investors has been practically reduced to Ringier Axel Springer, a Swiss-German publishing house (Dragomir, 2020). Media concentration and the long-standing lack of transparency in media ownership pose a high risk to regional market pluralism (Sampor, 2021).

The strong involvement of local oligarchs has been one of the factors behind the rise in public distrust of the country's older media brands. The 2021 Digital News Report confirmed a decline in trust scores for most of the brands surveyed in the Slovak Republic - with overall trust in news from domestic audiences at 30 per cent - compared to 36 per cent in the Czech Republic, for example, where the trend has improved slightly after several years of decline (Štětka & Hajek, 2021).

The problems of concentration and oligarch-dominated ownership of established media brands have also been fully exploited by the country's "alternative media". A network of print media and fringe websites has emerged primarily as a reaction to the pro-European and pro-NATO narratives adopted in the mainstream media following the expansion of the two international organisations into Central Europe. Combined with outlets related to public health issues, such as the fight against vaccination and the COVID-19 pandemic, these sites formed the core of the disinformation ecosystem in the region (Klingová, Hajdu & Sawiris, 2021). In addition to purely ideological and propaganda objectives, economic interests also played an important role. According to a conservative estimate, USD 76 million in advertising revenue flows annually to disinformation sites in Europe, with the most significant number of disinformation domains supported by Google, mainly through Google advertising (GDI, 2020).

### 1.3. Disinformation campaigns and their major actors

In the context of "master narratives" concerning the political and economic weaknesses of the European Union and Western liberal ideology, several alternative websites have emerged in the Slovak Republic that are now considered part of the disinformation media space, initially enjoying more comprehensive support from conservative groups and pro-life organisations. They were valued for their defence of traditional cultural values. These online platforms emphasised the same supportive stance towards Russian President Vladimir Putin and his criticism of modern liberal ideology.

The same "alternative news" ecosystem in the Slovak Republic produced misleading online content about the migration crisis and the influx of Muslims in 2016, which was reinforced through polarising discussions on social media (Šuplata, Nič 2016). Finally, during the COVID-19 crisis in 2021, new websites focused exclusively on public health issues emerged and contributed to the disinformation network with the same manipulation techniques, such as:

- Reconfiguration of texts produced by established media,
- translations of foreign videos,
- links to experts in unrelated fields of expertise.

The aim is to increase readers' trust and to interlink content addressed to pro-Russian and anti-vaccine COVID-19 vaccination doubters/questioners. State security authorities have confirmed the existing links between the actors behind the platforms with manipulative content and protest movements against social distancing and hygiene regulations.

As the mainstream media debunks fake news and exposes the actors behind alternative platforms, legacy brands have also become the target of verbal attacks by disinformation media and their discrediting campaigns in the country. Cross-border media reports, such as the Pandora Papers exposed by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, are also presented as orchestrated operations to undermine Slovak sovereignty by the EU, Washington, or George Soros and the Open Society Foundation (Pandora Papers 2022). On the other hand, politicians engage with websites from the alternative ecosystem in different ways. While the mainstream of the political spectrum in the country has warned citizens against propaganda and false news, especially on issues related to COVID-19, political parties and their members facing criticism from the mainstream media have resorted to alternative media to speak to their audiences. In several cases, politicians or officials in government positions refused to interact with older brands of newspapers or public media and instead responded to alternative media (Šnidl 2018).

The presidential election in the Slovak Republic took place in March 2019, and disinformation was used to undermine voter confidence in the integrity of the election (Sawiris, Klingová 2019).

### 1.4. Databases of disinformation websites

The increased volume of fabricated and manipulated content has sparked interest in fact-checking and investigating fake news sources. One of the first coordinated initiatives across the region was advertising, with a clear motivation to disrupt the business model of untrustworthy Internet portals. More importantly, the project aimed to protect companies from the potentially damaging association of their brands with controversial content on the Internet. In 2016, researchers, journalists and marketing experts created a database called "Konspiratori" (konspiratori.sk, 2022). The system initially listed 38 websites operating in Slovak and Czech Republic.

The public database is presented by its authors as a collection of platforms for "unserious, deceptive, fraudulent, conspiratorial and propagandistic content". It is the largest database in the country.

The terminology applied to these sites varies from disinformation sites to "conspiracy and anti-system sites", with minor differences in the categorisation used by the various projects (Štětka, Hajek 2020). To achieve a higher reach and engagement of articles on social media, content producers on the websites above use some time-tested tactics such as (Hacek, 2020):

- Copying elements of established online media and news websites,
- mixing commentary with news from subscription services of news agencies,

- providing a web design similar to established online news outlets,
- presenting their news as investigative journalism without crediting the actual authors,
- providing content created by translating articles from non-journalistic sources,
- sharing the same texts on the web,

In addition to promoting a political agenda, some websites mentioned above focus on health and healthy lifestyles, weapons and defence or religious issues.

In a separate analysis of the controversial websites with the most significant impact, proposed a four-tier classification based on the content prevalent in the topics and the motivations of the providers:

- Esotericists.
- Preachers. Ideologically oriented providers are most convinced of their truth.
- Healers. Websites focused on lifestyle and health issues.
- Entrepreneurs. Actual fake news is produced for profit (Syróvátka et al., 2020).

The domestic disinformation scene is mainly based on websites that often pretend to be serious media. Still, their activities mostly speak out against Slovakia's membership in the European Union and NATO and spread various "alternative" facts. A more detailed list of sites spreading disinformation and conspiracies can be found at [konspiratori.sk](http://konspiratori.sk), which has compiled it according to predefined criteria. In particular, *Slobodný vysielač*, *Hlavné zprávy*, *Zem a Vek* and *Bádateľ* are at the top of the list, as they have a high readership. Another strong actor is the personalities of the disinformation scene, mainly politicians, but non-political personalities have also found a place. Such independent personalities include the editor-in-chief of the conspiracy website and magazine *Zem a Vek*, Tibor Eliot Rostas, and Adriana Krajníková, who owes her extreme increase in fans to her vigorous speaking out against government measures related to protection against the coronavirus (Šnidl, 2020).

Before the Czech presidential elections - in January 2018, 118 websites were identified as promoting questionable content - 71 Czech, 41 Slovak and six foreign websites. In the Czech presidential election, the pro-Russian incumbent President Miloš Zeman, the pro-European counter-candidate Jiří Drahoš, was reportedly the subject of extensive disinformation campaigns. Some 30 pro-Russian websites were found to have smeared Drahoš with claims that he had collaborated with the communist secret police, supported unrestricted immigration or was a homosexual paedophile. The study of six popular Czech disinformation websites also found that they paid little attention to the election, and even when they did, they relied on emotive language rather than false information per se.

In the Czech disinformation scene, it is possible to observe an overlap with the Slovak scene. Naturally, it is also thanks to the shared history and linguistic proximity. The similarities can be seen, especially in the type of disinformation spread and the platforms on which it occurs. AMO analyst points to the findings of the think-tank Security Centre of European Values, which states that the Czech disinformation scene consists of approximately forty websites that overwhelm the Czech audience with their unverified, manipulative content, which is often directly related to Russian disinformation narratives (Havlicek, 2020). They aim to question the country's foreign policy anchorage in the West and deepen social divisions and tensions, which can be described as a parallel to the *modus operandi* in Slovakia. Differences can be observed, for example, in China's greater interest in the Czech environment, Russia's interest in the Czech energy sector or the current government's greater susceptibility to these countries.

## 2. Analytical part: propaganda and disinformation in the Slovak and Czech Republic

Propaganda and credibility of information are two concepts that are broadly intertwined, as both are closely linked to communication and dissemination of information. On the one hand, we have propaganda, which often uses manipulative and one-sided information to influence public opinion or convince people of a particular perspective. On the other side is the credibility of information, which concerns the truthfulness, accuracy and objectivity of the data transmitted. Let's consider that propaganda is aimed at mass psychology to manipulate public opinion and influence social behaviour, which is done through selective presentation of facts, emotional appeal and often misleading. The credibility of information in scientific discourse is measured by criteria such



as objectivity, accuracy, verifiability and validity. These destabilizing moments can be used in all critical areas such as safety, corporate governance (Brečka, Korauš, 2016; Mihalčová et al., 2021) and many others. Based on an understanding of the nature of the meaning of the phenomena under study, the following influences and relationships between propaganda and information credibility can then be defined:

1. Public trust: propaganda can erode public confidence in information sources by casting doubt on their impartiality and objectivity. Conversely, credible information requires high transparency and verifiability, which can increase public trust.
2. Education and information: High-quality, credible information is vital to informing citizens and educating society, while propaganda often leads to misconceptions and distorted reality images.
3. Political and social influence: Propaganda can considerably impact political and social events by manipulating public opinion. At the same time, credible information is essential for democratic decision-making and an informed civil society.
4. Cognitive impact: Propaganda and misinformation can affect the cognitive processing of information, leading to the formation of prejudices, stereotypes, and false beliefs.

The analytical part of the paper is based on the research conducted with 964 respondents from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, mainly university students. The study was carried out based on the author's research instrument. In terms of structure, the research population consists of 521 - 54.046% males and 443 - 45.954% females from the two countries. The total number of respondents from the Slovak Republic was 580 - 60.166%, and from the Czech Republic, 384 - 39.834%. The mean age of the respondent was  $26.03 \pm 0.51$  years, with a standard deviation of 8.145 years. The minimum age of the respondent is 19 years, and the maximum is 63 years. The age of the respondent was also analysed as an ordinal variable, with respondents younger than 25 years 669 - 69.398% in total, respondents aged 26-35 were 156 - 16.183%, respondents aged 36-45 were 95 - 9.855%, respondents aged 46-55 were 41 - 4.253% and respondents aged 55 and over were three - 0.311%. Out of the total 964 respondents, 321 - 33.299% are studying at the bachelor's degree level, 591 - 61.307% are studying at the master's degree level, 52 - 5.394% are at the Doctoral degree level, and 592 - 61.411% respondents are studying full time, and 372 - 38.589% respondents are studying at the part-time level.

Within the research itself, we surveyed the answers and opinions of respondents on the way of assessing the relevance of information separately for respondents from the Slovak Republic and separately from the Czech Republic according to the age of the respondent in terms of the respondent's assessment of the truthfulness of the information or the importance of the credibility of the information. The primary area of assessing the relevance of information is the respondent's assessment of the information, with a subsequent subjective evaluation of whether the information is true. For this purpose, the research instrument item "I do not judge the credibility of the information, I read the report and judge for myself whether it is true" was used, which was rated on a 5-point Likert scale - strongly disagree - ...- strongly agree. The basic analysis shows that for respondents from Slovakia, there is a significant relationship,  $p=0.0009$ , between the respondent's age and the opinion that the respondent can subjectively judge the truthfulness of the information at the chosen significance level  $\alpha=0.05$ . A more detailed analysis of the respondents' answers shows that in the age category of respondents under 25 years of age, a total of 19.744% expressed complete disagreement with the question, which means that this group of respondents does not rely only on their judgment regarding the truthfulness of the information. Still, also the credibility of the information is essential to them.

This conclusion is also shared by 28.205% of respondents who disagree with the question. 25.128% of the respondents have an indifferent attitude to the issue of the credibility of information. On the other hand, 26.923% of the respondents, 17.949%, agree, and 8.874% strongly agree, rely only on their judgment to judge the veracity of the information, and do not address the credibility of the information. For the 26-35 age group, the overall percentage of respondents for whom the credibility of the information is important decreases slightly - 43.243%, while at the same time, the proportion of those expressing a neutral attitude towards the question asked increases - 36.937%. The proportion of respondents who rely solely on their assessment of the veracity of the information is 19.820% in this age group. For respondents aged 36 to 45, the proportion of respondents for whom the question of the credibility of the information is important is again decreasing - 37.097%, with a concomitant significant decrease in the proportion of respondents with a neutral attitude - 14.516%.

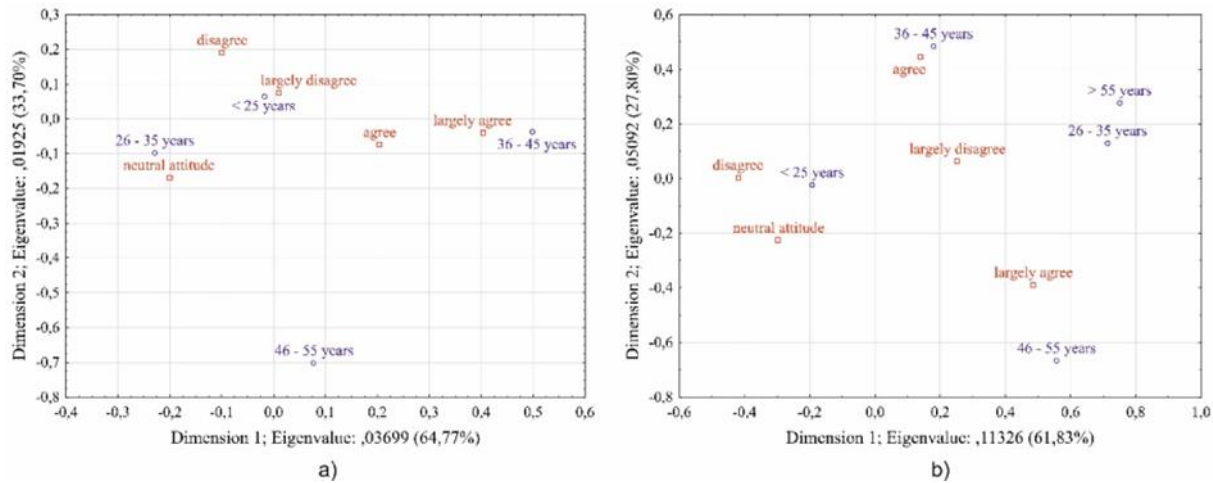
On the contrary, in this age group, we observe the most significant share of respondents for whom the credibility of information is unimportant, and they rely only on their own judgement to decide on its veracity - 48.387%. The last age group, namely 46–55-year-olds, has the lowest proportion of respondents for whom the credibility of information is important (11.765%), with the highest proportion of respondents with a neutral attitude - 29.412. The % of respondents in this age group who rely on their own judgement to define the veracity of information is 41.176%.

Based on the above results for Slovak respondents, it can be deduced that the Younger Generation, under 25, tends to disagree that they would somehow not address the credibility of information. This trend may result from the greater media education and information literacy they encounter in schools or on the Internet. The 26-35 age category shows strong neutrality, which could indicate non-commitment or uncertainty. Conversely, the 36-45 age group shows greater agreement with the statement, which may be related to greater confidence in evaluating information or a different approach to media. Neutral attitudes are also strongly present in the older age group, 46-55. We may also see a form of apathy, resignation, or a belief that their ability to judge information is sufficient or that this age group is less concerned about the potential impact of incorrect information or more confident in their ability to evaluate information.

Let's analyse the answers to the same question for the respondents from the Czech Republic as well as for the respondents from Slovakia. There is a significant relationship,  $p < 0.0000$ , between the respondent's age and the opinion that the respondent can subjectively assess the truthfulness of the information at the chosen significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ . In the group of respondents under 25 years, 63.441% of those who chose the answers completely disagree - 29.032% and disagree (34.409%). Thus, the credibility of the information is important to them. A total of 17.024% have a neutral attitude towards dealing with the credibility of the information, and 19.335% rely on their judgment to decide on the veracity of the information. In the age group of 26-35 years, 53.333% of the respondents agree with the question, which leads us to conclude that for more than half of the research participants, the credibility of the information is very important. In this age category, only 6.667% of respondents take a neutral stance, and at the same time, 40.000% of respondents rely on their judgement to assess the veracity of the information. In the age group 36 to 45 years old, the credibility of the information is significant for 63.636% of respondents overall - strongly disagree 36.364%, disagree 27.273%. At the same time, 36.364% of respondents in this age category rely only on their assessment of the veracity of the information, and its credibility is not important to them. Not a single respondent of this age category indicates a neutral attitude towards the question asked. In the 46-55 age group, the credibility of the information is important to 50,000% of respondents overall. A neutral attitude is expressed by 12,500%, and 37,500% of research participants in this age group rely on their own judgement as to the veracity of the information. The last age group of respondents over 55 years, fully 100.000%, attaches importance to the credibility of information. The following conclusions can be drawn from the results of the respondents.

The younger generation - under 25, used to accessing information via the internet and social media, maybe more sceptical about the information they get their hands on. Most of them disagree with the claim, which could mean that they have adopted specific mechanisms to verify the veracity of the information. In the 26-35 age group, we see a large proportion of complete disagreement. People at this age may have already encountered more false information and prefer to verify information from multiple sources. The 36-45 age group has mixed views. Some of them still trust what they read, while others are sceptical. The absence of neutral responses suggests that people in this age group have strong opinions. The 46-55 age group is split between those who trust what they read and those who do not. This may mean that some are more conservative in their approach to information, while others are more open to new sources of information. Over 55: the absolute disagreement suggests that the older generation is very cautious in receiving information and has its methods of verifying its veracity. The results indicate that age may influence the way people access information. Younger generations may be more prone to scepticism and validation of information, while older generations may be either more conservative or more cautious in their approach to information.

The graphical distribution of responses in relation to the age of the respondents is presented in the form of a correspondence map in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Correspondence map of the distribution of respondents' answers on the importance of the relevance of information according to their age (a) Slovak Republic, b) Czech Republic)

Source: own processing

Based on Figure 1 and the results of the correspondence analysis, it is possible to say that the respondents under 25 years of age from Slovakia preferentially lean towards the option of completely disagreeing and partially disagreeing, which implies that for this group of respondents, the credibility of the information itself is critical, while respondents from the Czech Republic in this age group lean more towards the option of disagree or express a neutral attitude to the question. Thus, the credibility of information is also crucial for the Czech respondents, but to a lesser extent than for the Slovak respondents. Respondents aged 26-35 from Slovakia tend to give a neutral answer, which may imply some middle ground between the importance of the credibility of the information and, at the same time, relying on their judgement in assessing its truthfulness. For respondents from the Czech Republic aged 25-36, we observe a looser relationship to the answer completely disagree, which leads us to conclude that the credibility of the information is essential for this group. Respondents aged 36-45 from both countries relied on their judgement to identify the truthfulness of information. Still, respondents from Slovakia preferentially chose the option completely agree and respondents from the Czech Republic the option agree.

## Conclusions

The role of modern propaganda is, above all, to manipulate public opinion. Often, manipulation consists of deepening or sharpening opinions. Propaganda today is no longer just about spreading lies; it tends to be very creative. It works with the truth, but where it may add different accents or subtle lies, sometimes a different sound or subtext, often a slightly manipulated photo, and then the half-truth or lie cannot be detected so easily. Propaganda can take many forms from outright lying and manipulation of facts to selective presentation of information, to the use of speculative and conspiracy theories. Propaganda can also be a tool to support authoritarian and undemocratic regimes.

The research confirmed the previous findings (e.g., Šimberová et al., 2022) that propaganda is increasingly becoming predominantly digital and often used on the Internet, especially social networks. This channel allows misinformation and unverified information to be disseminated quickly and widely.



Disinformation operations are inherently covert; they are just the tip of the iceberg; they cannot be proven. Foreign countries accused of influence deny the accusations.

The findings are compatible with former ones, claiming that financial links are challenging to establish except in rare cases (Koraus, Stefko & Dobrovic, 2015; Dobrovič, Rajnoha & Korauš, 2018) when Facebook discloses relevant advertising information about purchases. Causal links to specific real-world events are also notoriously difficult to establish, making it complicated to assess the effects.

Various evasive manipulation methods aim to divide the group with distracting or divisive comments - making detection even more difficult. Identifying the target or targets may also be questionable in politically loaded cases.

Countering the spread of propaganda and disinformation is a complex problem that requires different approaches and measures. It is important to stress that countering propaganda and disinformation is a long-term process involving the cooperation of different actors and the synergy of society.

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