

RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA RELIABILITY

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Abstract. The current article analyses social media reliability. The conducted research focused on people's beliefs about the information reliability of social networks/social media. In order to find out why the respondents claim to be able to distinguish between reliable and unreliable information, they were asked to state their motives. To sum up, it turned out that it is possible to group arguments into certain categories that determine the recognition of reliable and unreliable information. The arguments of those who claim to be able to recognize reliable information: emphasize self-analysis; use of common sense; enabling critical thinking; trust their abilities; believe in intuition. The arguments of those who cannot recognize reliable information: that it is impossible to understand the reliability of information; they admitted that the information may be biased; they missed the consistency of the research process, they simply do not trust themselves. The majority of respondents do not share news articles on their personal social media. The data of the conducted research revealed the differences in opinion when choosing both social media channels and the means of information dissemination, the possibilities of separating the truth and uncertainty of information, and the further use of such information with the label of reliable or unreliable information. The conducted research will allow an overview of the spread and impact of real and fake information on social networks. The information obtained in this research will be useful for individuals who want to build online businesses, and will also provide advice to social media managers on how to create platforms that contain reliable information and generally reduce the harm of misinformation itself.

Key words: social media, information, social network, social media reliability.

JEL code: M30, M31

Introduction

In order to develop conscious and responsible users of media information, it is important that social network users understand the importance of considering the target audience, quality, authenticity, credibility, and potential impact of the message. They need to know where to find relevant information, how the media shapes popular culture and opinion, influences individual choices, shape public opinion, how to navigate the Internet, and how to ensure personal privacy in the cyber world.

A scientific issue. In modern times, social networks and their reliability are a particularly relevant topic. The same as in other countries, the use of social networks has been encouraged in Lithuania, especially during and after the pandemic. Nevertheless, the question that often arises is: is all the information currently displayed on social networks reliable?

The aim. The authors of the article aim to investigate the reliability of social networks.

Research methods. The article is based on the review of scientific literature and data from the questionnaire survey.

1. Theoretical aspects of social media reliability

1.1. Social media

Social media includes both content creation and community management - social media administration issues and social media advertising issues. Social media marketing is distinguished by the fact that it must react extremely quickly to changes –public opinion, current events, or topics. These platforms make it easy to share messages. The social aspect and human factors are extremely important for both content and advertising optimization. Social media marketing and the value of the content you create on your account depends on all the elements, i.e. attractiveness, interest, and relevance.

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Constantinides (2014) observes that companies classify social media marketing activities according to their relevance to marketing objectives. According to Constantinides (2014), companies have two main approaches to their social media activities as part of their marketing strategy: passive and active.

Gregoire et al. (2015) mentioned that social media (SM) is changing the way customers interact with businesses after service failures. Ananda et al. (2016) noticed that social media in marketing has only recently gained attention from the academic world.

Baccarella et al. (2018) analysed whether social media poses enormous risks to individuals, communities, businesses, and even society as a whole. Examples of this "dark side" of social media include cyberbullying, addiction exploitation, trolling, online witch-hunting, fake news, and abuse of privacy. Baccarella et al. (2018) illustrated various undesirable effects associated with it.

Aleksandrova et al. (2019) identified that with the new opportunities of various social networks, such as social networking sites, collaborative projects, blogs, wikis, communities, forums, content platforms etc., young people can not only communicate freely but also create and share their feelings, opinions, and emotions.

Bernetti et al. (2020) mentioned that each social media platform tends to specialize in some features, hence the selection media based. Gori et al. (2020) noticed that social media are applications based on digital technologies and have developed in the context of the Web 2.0 thus allowing users to create and share content through many different networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and YouTube.

Duffett et al. (2020) stated that YouTube (YT) is the largest online digital video channel with over 2 billion subscribers, and more than a billion hours of YT videos are viewed daily, especially among young users. Mpandare (2020) stated that the academic literature is rich in research on social media, and many scholars have extensively studied publicly available social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and explored how organizations use them for their marketing, crowdsourcing, and open innovation. Recently, however, scholars have begun to take an interest in emerging organizational social media platforms that are being implemented for use within organizations. Kao et al. (2020) noticed that social media is becoming increasingly important for communication and information sharing SE (SE-social enterprises) in recent years. Since many SEs have limited resources, they use free social media for external purposes and communications. This is why Twitter is an important tool for trend analysis. Social networks are often the source of big data. Among all social networks, Twitter is one of the best. Twitter has surpassed traditional media in its effectiveness and timeliness of message delivery. Liu et al. (2022) found out that due to the rapid development of technology, there is a growing number of social networks creating and launching websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Weibo, WeChat, etc. They help users to stay in touch with others, avoid data caches as well as provide users with convenient sharing of their lives and discovering the environment.

Kross et al. (2021) mentioned that social media is a kind of disruptive technology that comes around once a generation. Over the past 15 years, science has done an amazing job of improving what we do understand, the impact these media have on our well-being.

Di Domenico et al. (2021) noticed that social media channels have seen a dramatic spread of misinformation, widely described as "fake news". The creation and dissemination of false information is not a new phenomenon.

Taylor-Jacksona et al. (2021) stated that social media allows users to explore, manipulate, and maintain their online identities, which can allow individuals to easily adjust their sense of worth. Several researchers have expressed caution about the potential implications for mental health with concerns that people may less value their "real-world" identities, leaving individuals more vulnerable to depression-related symptoms.

Oncioiu et al. (2021) stated that communication in social networks is often accompanied by the hope of being able to communicate with equal rights. Accordingly, companies hope that social networks will not only increase sales but also attention and customer loyalty. Masa'deh et al. (2021) mentioned that social media nowadays overcomes the constraints of time and space thus encouraging businesses to communicate with potential users and increase their proximity.

Ozkent (2022) noticed that social networks help to see the connections of other users. Casero-Ripollés (2022) mentioned that social media has radically changed citizens' access to and consumption of the news. In this environment, fake news proliferates. Therefore, it is very important to understand why people consume, believe, and share fake news.

Rosen et al. (2022) analysed several individuals who used social media as an innovative way to get healthier and learn new skills during lockdown. Several participants made use of their videos and fitness accounts as ways to stay healthy and active during the period when gym and fitness centres were closed due to COVID-19 regulations.

Consequently, the analysis of the scientific literature gives evidence that social media poses a huge risk to individuals, communities, businesses, and even society as a whole. Examples of this "dark side" of social media include cyberbullying, addiction exploitation, trolling, online witch-hunting, fake news, and abuse of privacy. Social networks help not only to communicate freely but also to create and share your feelings, opinions, and emotions. Social media allows users to explore, manipulate, and maintain their online identities, which can allow individuals to easily adjust their sense of worth. Since individuals can display and hide information to influence others' perceptions and manage impressions, users can project an ideal version of themselves that is yet not achievable in real life. Several researchers have expressed caution about the potential implications for mental health, concerned that people may thus underestimate their "real" identity.

1.2. Social media reliability

The characteristics of customer communication are changing rapidly, so social networks are at the same level as traditional marketing tools. Social networks together with traditional marketing tools complement each other and create an effective communication system. Social networks, as one of the marketing tools, have expanded the boundaries of business opportunities on the Internet. Large companies use social media to maintain daily contact with customers and monitor the market. Social networks are gaining popularity in the 21st century. Millions of users around the world visit social networks every day. Currently, more and more threats are appearing in social networks, and the problem of safe use of the Internet is emphasized. In the scientific literature, preventive options are distinguished. In order to reduce the threats related to online social networks, preventive activities are important.

Ismail et al. (2013) noticed that social media has led to a paradigm shift in how people work and do business, communicate, learn, and acquire knowledge. Another issue raised is the credibility of the message/content and source. A particularly important issue is also the quality of knowledge shared.

Brody et al. (2018) noticed that fake news is information that contradicts reality. This information is originating from a fake news "sender", transmitted through a communication channel, and then received by the general public.

Prakapienė et al. (2018) stated that in order to reduce the negative impact of social networks, it is necessary to learn how to use them safely. It is unequivocally important that social networks provide a good place to share personal (mostly success) stories, and the latest knowledge, enable collaboration, etc. According to Prakapienė et al. (2018), social networks allow people to communicate directly: geographical

borders seem to be erased and the communication process is relatively cheap (internet connection services are inexpensive, and the prices of devices for communication are also very diverse).

Keshavarz (2020) mentioned that the relative importance of reliability criteria varied between studies depending on the characteristics, type of participants' source, type of information, and other conditions. Depending on the SM type, purpose, and environment, the use of SM varies. Some researchers have argued, however, that communication on SM such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram can affect perceived credibility because the platform acts as a gateway to Internet quality information.

Sun (2021) proposes a method for assessing the reliability of social network information based on user perception.

Gurler et al. (2022) provided data that can be used to improvement the usability and medical quality of the videos included in the scan results. Despite the fact that Instagram and Twitter can be accessed quickly and many people like their short videos, their medical quality has turned out to be very low.

Dantas et al. (2022) mentioned that using social media in the workplace has improved employee performance. For example, the use of social networks for work and social purposes has a significant impact on companies' cost reduction, innovation, and competitive advantage in marketing activities, procedures, and works.

Majerczak et al. (2022) found out that fake news is not only a widespread phenomenon; it is also problematic and dangerous for society. The study used structural equation modelling to determine how the Polish public perceives the problem of fake news and to assess the extent to which it trusts the content published online. The main objective was to determine which factors have the greatest influence on the verification of information viewed on the Internet. The strongest positive effect on information-checking behavior was found for knowledge of fake news, followed by the intent to share information. This study extends the available literature related to fake news by identifying the effects of fake news on information verification behavior, news awareness, and the intention to share data. Obadă et al. (2022) results show that social media has an effect on the sharing of fake news about green brands.

The analysis of the scientific literature showed that more and more threats are appearing in social networks, thus emphasizing the problem of safe use of the Internet. Preventive options are distinguished in the scientific literature. In order to reduce the threats experienced in online social networks, preventive activities are important in these networks. The credibility of the message/content and source becomes very important. Social networks allow people to communicate instantly: geographical boundaries seem to be erased, and the communication process is relatively cheap (internet connection services are inexpensive, and the prices of communication devices are also very diverse).

2. Research methodology and methods

Research problem

Over the past two decades, social media has evolved from simple chat rooms and forums to an important everyday tool for keeping up with current events, from posts of friends and family to socio-political news and even scientific breakthroughs.

Social media gives people the ability to instantly access, publish and share information, but with all this power comes great responsibility as misinformation, also known as fake news, has been rampant for years. Precisely for this reason, assessing the credibility of online sources is a complex task that cannot be performed solely by computer algorithms. There is a difference between what people share online and what they actually believe in.

The research objective is to learn how social media users can identify fake information from the real news.

The research tasks are:

- 1) to analyse the sociodemographic data of respondents;
- 2) to find out the respondents' preferred sources of information;
- 3) to identify the factors promoting the reliability of the information in social networks;
- 4) to present the research results and general conclusions.

Investigation method

The quantitative research - questionnaire survey method was used to conduct the empirical/exploratory research.

Research rationale

After choosing a quantitative method of data collection - a survey, the respondents were described: according to the content, these are people who use social networks from 18 years to 80 years and older; by location, these are residents who have the opportunity to use social networks, by time, these are social network users during the selected research week.

222 respondents participated in the study, selected according to the principle of convenient sampling (Availability Sampling) based on the selection of the most convenient, closest, and most easily accessible elements of the research population.

The investigation was carried out for 7 days, from 11/16/2022 to 11/22/2022.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, distinguishing demographic data, the data on the respondents' preferred sources of information, and the factors promoting the reliability of the information.

The survey included demographic questions, age group, and gender. The questions were related to the choice of social networks, and the reliability of the information in them. The interval scale, nominal scale, semi-closed type questions, closed type questions, and open type questions ending with an answer were used for the wording of the questions. The questions collected data on respondents' engagement with social media, their ability to spot misinformation, and primary sources of information.

The questionnaire was placed online using Google Forms and the link was shared with acquaintances, and friends who were asked to share it with people around them.

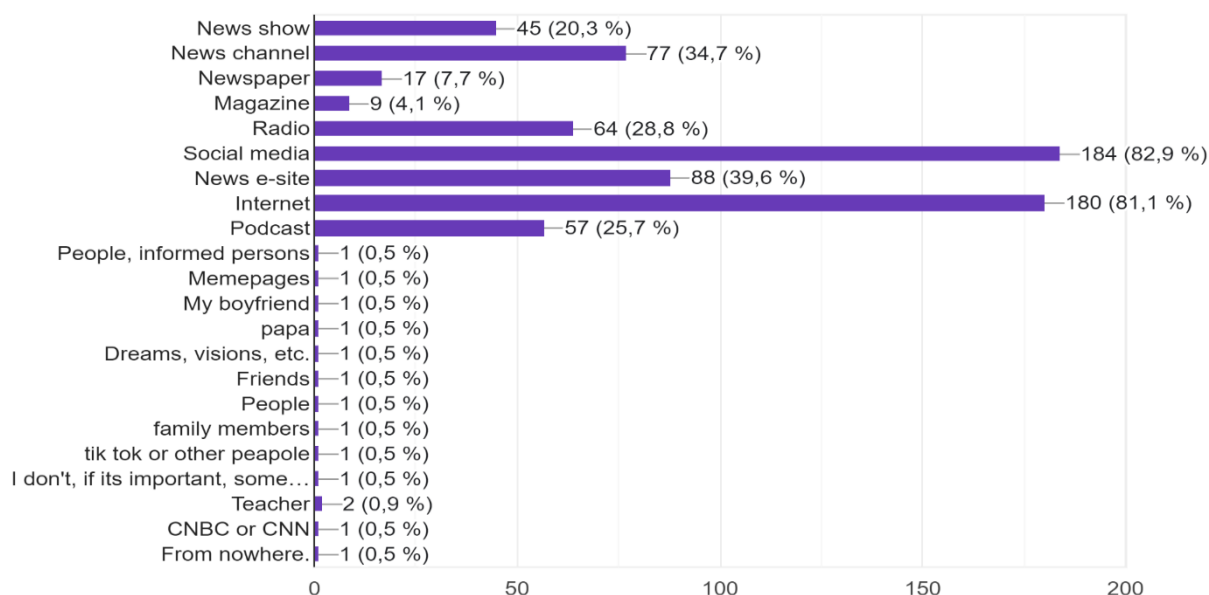
The conducted research allowed us to get a picture of the spread and impact of real and fake/misleading information in social media. This information will be useful for individuals who want to build an online business, as well as advise social media managers on how to create platforms that contain reliable information and generally reduce the harm of misinformation itself.

The principle of the right to receive accurate information has been implemented by providing the purpose and relevance of the research to the respondents before filling out the questionnaire.

3. Results and discussion

The conducted research was based on people's beliefs about the informational credibility of social networks/social media. During the research, sociodemographic data were collected from respondents using social networks by means of the questionnaire survey.

While finding out the reliability of social networks, it was observed that respondents get most of their news from social media and the Internet. Part of the respondents looks for information on news channels or news websites.



Source: made by the authors

Fig. 1. Respondents' news search location, in numbers, %

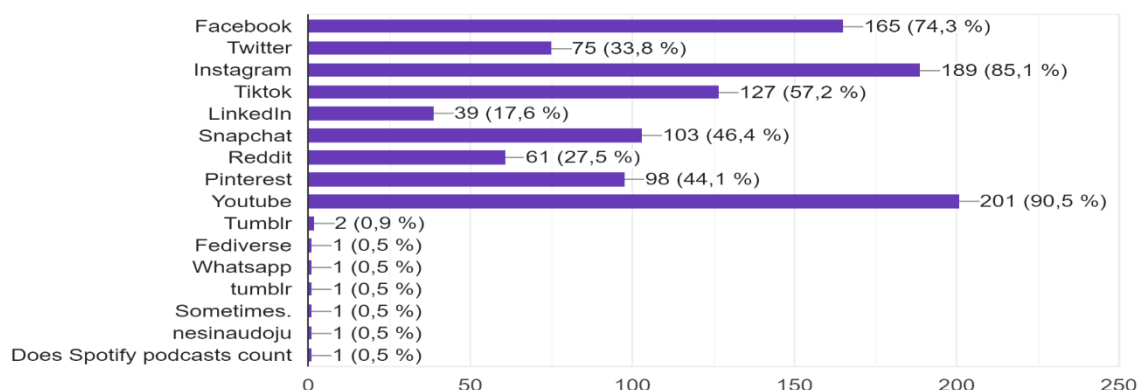
Brody et al. (2018) noticed that fake news is information that contradicts reality. Our research data shows that a greater part of the respondents checks the information, but still, there is a part of the respondents who do not do it. 118 respondents (53.2%) check themselves, 24 respondents (10.8%) check sometimes, but 49 (22.1%) respondents do not check at all. The unverified information can be both real and fake and it can spread objective or subjective information, which can be reliable or unreliable.



Source: made by the authors

Fig. 2. Verification of respondents' information obtained from different sources, %

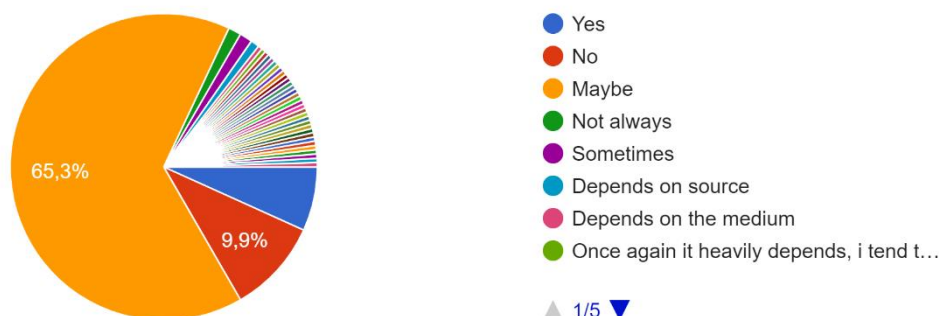
The sources of information most often chosen by the respondents are the following social media: YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok.



Source: made by the authors

Fig. 3. Social media chose by respondents, in numbers, %

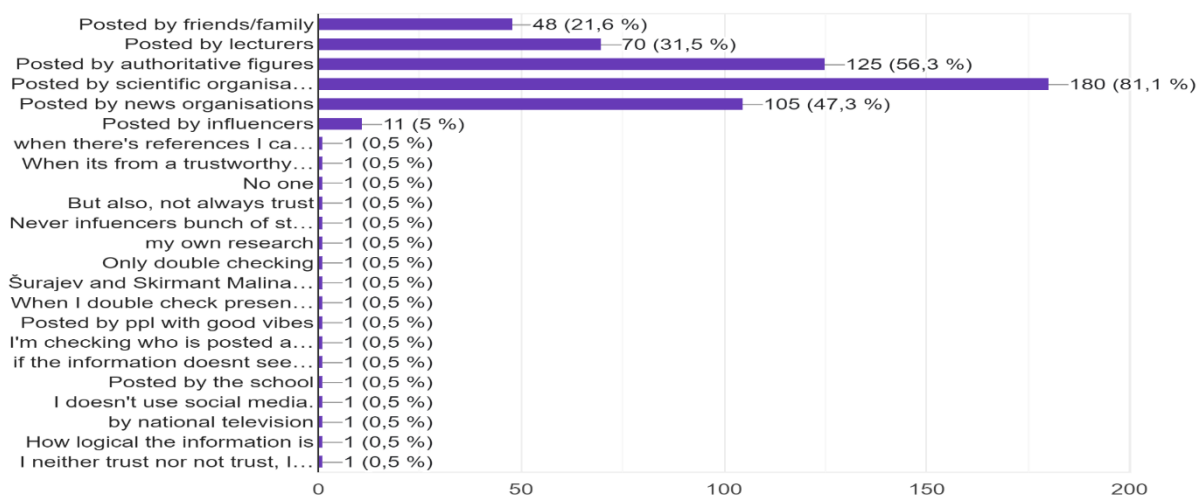
Keshavarz (2020) mentioned that the criteria of the relative importance of reliability are types of information and other conditions. The information received on social media is mostly accepted as reliable by the respondents. Although only 15 respondents (6.8%) really trust it, and 22 respondents (9.9%) do not trust it. Most of the respondents - 145 (65.3%) say that they may trust the information provided on social media.



Source: made by the authors

Fig. 4. Respondents' trust in information provided on social media, %

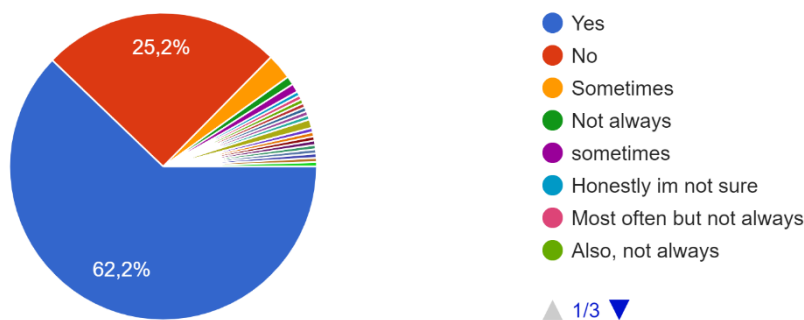
Trust in information published on social media is associated with the source publishing the information. The information published by scientific organizations is considered the most reliable source. Additionally, the information is considered reliable if it is published by famous people, news organizations, as well as teachers, friends, and family members.



Source: made by the authors

Fig. 5. Respondents' trust in sources providing information, numbers, %

Majerczak et al. (2022) noted that the strongest positive effect on the information verification behavior was found for knowledge of fake news, followed by intentions to share the information. Our respondents tend to believe that they can distinguish reliable information from unreliable information, as many as 138 respondents (62.2%) say so. 56 respondents (25.2%) say that they cannot distinguish when the information is reliable and when it is not. 6 respondents (2.7%) sometimes think that the information is reliable, and sometimes are able to distinguish reliable and unreliable information. The opinion of the remaining 20 respondents made up a small percentage (9.9%) of the overall assessment of the ability to distinguish between reliable and unreliable information.



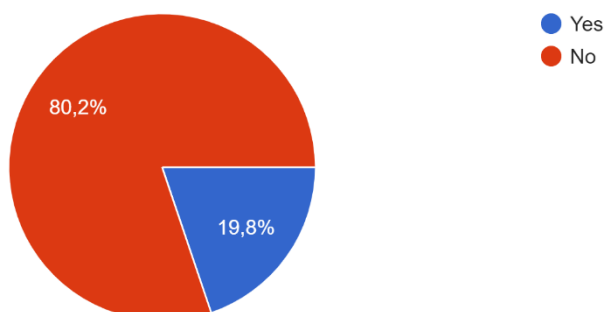
Source: made by the authors

Fig. 6. Respondents' ability to distinguish reliable from unreliable information, %

In order to find out why respondents claim to be able to distinguish between reliable and unreliable information, they were asked to state their reasoning. After summarizing answers, it became clear that it is possible to group arguments into certain categories that determine the recognition of reliable and unreliable information. The arguments of those who claim that they can recognize reliable information: 33% of respondents emphasize self-analysis, 23% - use common sense, 17% - enable critical thinking, 13% - are confident in their skills, only 7% believe in intuition and the remaining 7% are not sure about their decision. The arguments of those who cannot recognize reliable information: 45% of respondents said that it is impossible to understand the reliability of the information, 33% - admitted that the information can be biased, 15% - missed the consistency of the research process, and 7% - simply do not trust themselves.

After presenting the information about the ability to distinguish the information-determining factors, the respondents were also asked why it is believed that the information presented on social media is unreliable. The answer options were divided into four groups. 49% of respondents believe that it is the lack of authoritative sources and links that form the opinion that this is unreliable information. 21% simply perform self-analysis of information. 19% noted that there is no clear source of the information provided and this raises doubts about the reliability of the information. 11% drew attention to the bad aesthetic presentation of information when unreliable information is presented.

After finding out the opinions of the respondents regarding the information dissemination channels and the recognisability and reliability of the information, it was interesting to find out if the respondents share news on their social media channels. The survey data shows that the majority of 178 respondents (80.2%) do not share news articles on their personal social media. However, 44 respondents (19.8%) do share.

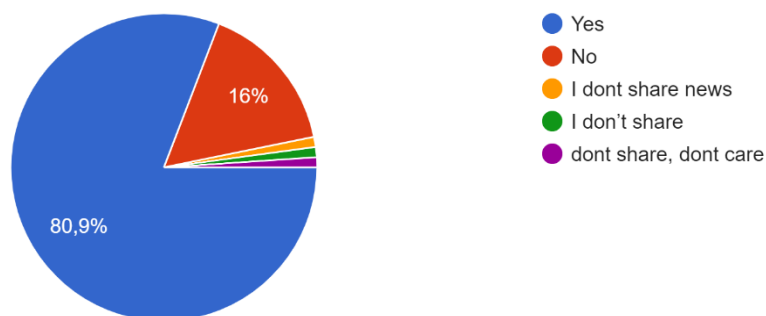


Source: made by the authors

Fig. 7. Respondents' sharing of news on personal social media channels, %

Prakapienē et al. (2018) stated that in order to reduce the negative effects of social networks, it is necessary to learn how to use them safely. The respondents evaluate the information responsibly enough

and the majority (80.9%) of the respondents check the reliability of the information before making it public. Some respondents (16%) do not check the information. The rest of the information is simply not shared.



Source: made by the authors

Fig. 8. Checking the reliability of respondents' information before sharing information, %

The data of the conducted research revealed the differences of opinion when choosing both social media channels and the means of disseminating information, the possibilities of distinguishing the truth and uncertainty of information, and the further use of such information with the label of reliable or unreliable information.

The conducted research will provide an overview of the spread and impact of real and fake information in social media. This information will be useful for individuals who want to build online business, as well as advise social media managers on how to create platforms that contain reliable information and generally reduce the harm of misinformation itself.

Conclusions

- 1) The analysis of scientific literature showed that social media is an effective means of influencing. The information collected about the user during establishing his social media operations shows what kind of environment surrounds him, and what he and his environment do in their free time, so it is possible to choose the most effective impact mechanisms. Social media not only take our time, attract attention, emotions, and data but also adjust the opinion and behavior of users. Social networks can become an extremely powerful propaganda tool. Currently, more and more threats are appearing in social networks, and the problem of safe use of the Internet is emphasized. In order to reduce the threats experienced in online social networks, preventive activities are important in networks. Another scientific issue raised is the credibility of the message/content and sources and sharing knowledge.
- 2) The data of the conducted research revealed the differences of opinion when choosing both social media channels and the means of information dissemination, the possibilities of separating the truth and uncertainty of information, and the further use of such information with the label of reliable or unreliable information. The conducted research will allow an overview of the spread and impact of real and fake information on social networks. The information from this research will be useful for individuals who want to build online business, and will also provide advice to social media managers on how to create platforms that contain reliable information and generally reduce the harm of misinformation itself.

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