Resilience to online disinformation
Vulnerabilities of the Romanian public
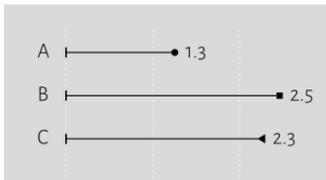
Flavia Durach, PhD

National University of Political Studies and Public
Administration, Bucharest

Macro-level conditions that can weaken the resilience of countries to problems of online disinformation

- **Polarization of Society (ideological, affective polarisation)**
  - deviating representations of the reality
- **Populist Communication**
  - "we" are right and truthful and "they" are wrong and fake
- **Factors of the Media Environment Limiting Resilience**
  - Low Trust in News
  - level of hard news in a society
  - More Fragmented, Less Overlapping Audiences
- **Factors of the Economic Environment Limiting Resilience**
  - Large Ad Market Size
  - High Social Media Use

- Humprecht, E., Esser, F., & Van Aelst, P. (2020). Resilience to online disinformation: A framework for cross-national comparative research. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *25*(3), 493-516.

- http://prismua.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/DRI_CEE_2018.pdf

- Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" and the Eurasian States in Transition research center

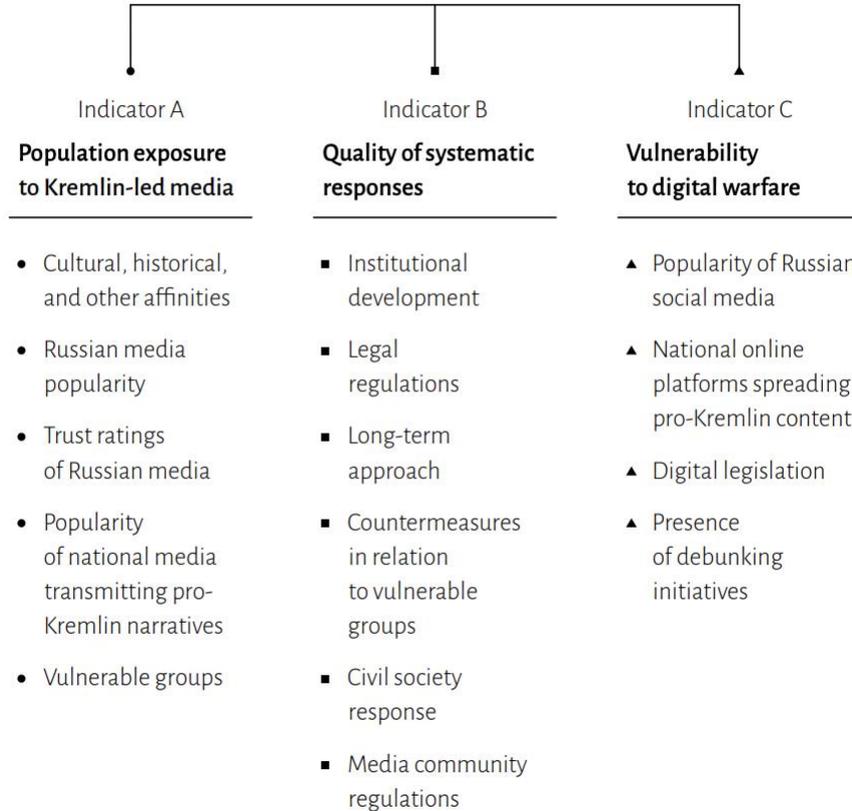Romania in 2018

Disinformation Resilience Index

Indicator A	Indicator B	Indicator C
Population exposure to Kremlin-led media	**Quality of systematic responses**	**Vulnerability to digital warfare**
• Cultural, historical, and other affinities	▪ Institutional development	▲ Popularity of Russian social media
• Russian media popularity	▪ Legal regulations	▲ National online platforms spreading pro-Kremlin content
• Trust ratings of Russian media	▪ Long-term approach	▲ Digital legislation
• Popularity of national media transmitting pro-Kremlin narratives	▪ Countermeasures in relation to vulnerable groups	▲ Presence of debunking initiatives
• Vulnerable groups	▪ Civil society response	
	▪ Media community regulations	

Figure: The DRI structure

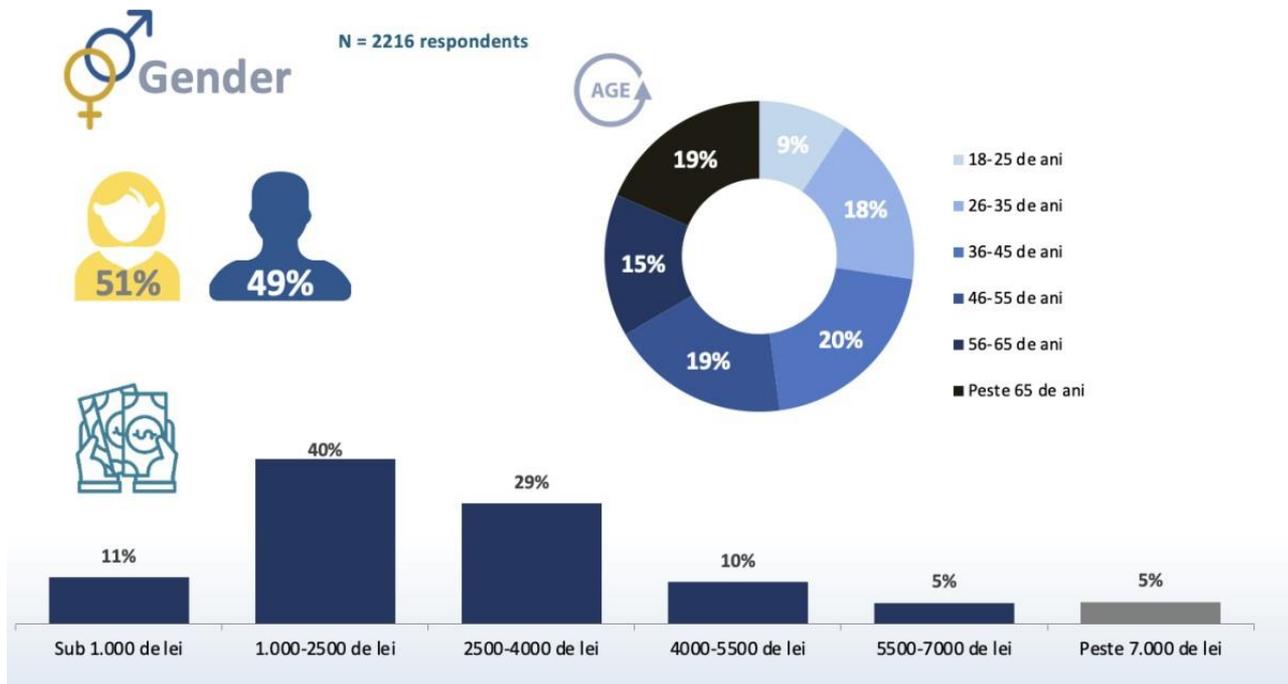# DISINFORMATION, SOCIETAL RESILIENCE AND COVID-19

December 2021

Flavia Durach, PhD , Associate Professor, National University for Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest

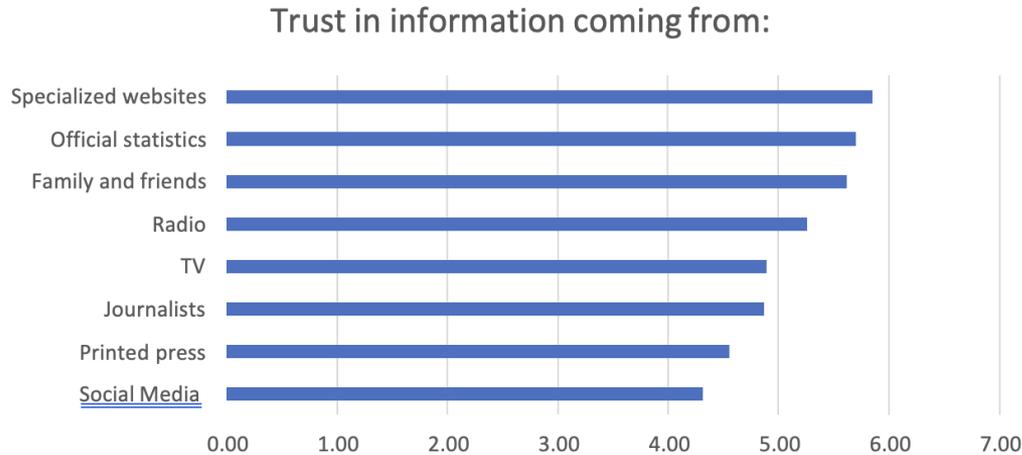**Clara Volintiru, PhD,** Associate Professor, Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE)

Method

- representative population survey applied in Romania, in December 2021 by Reveal Marketing Research

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- Sources of information (1)

Figure 2. Trust in Sources of Information in Romania (0=low, 10=high)
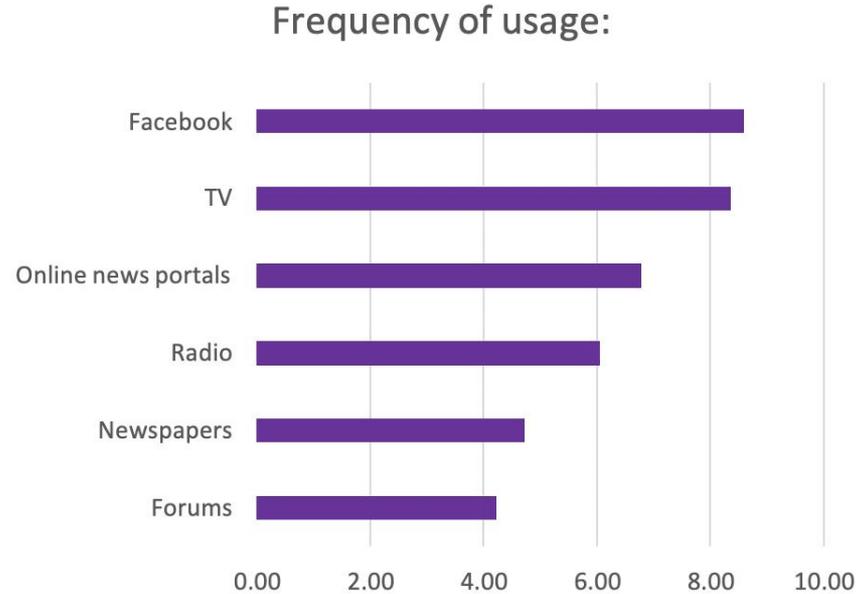
Trust in information coming from:

Source: NATO PDD Survey, December 2021

STAGE 1: (DIS)INFORMATION RECEPTION

● Sources of information (2)

Figure 5. Frequency of usage for information purposes (0=never,

Frequency of usage:

Source: NATO PDD Survey, December 2021

Smart Diaspora 2023

● Checking information

Figure 6. Fact-checking activities (0=never, 10=always)

Fact-checking:

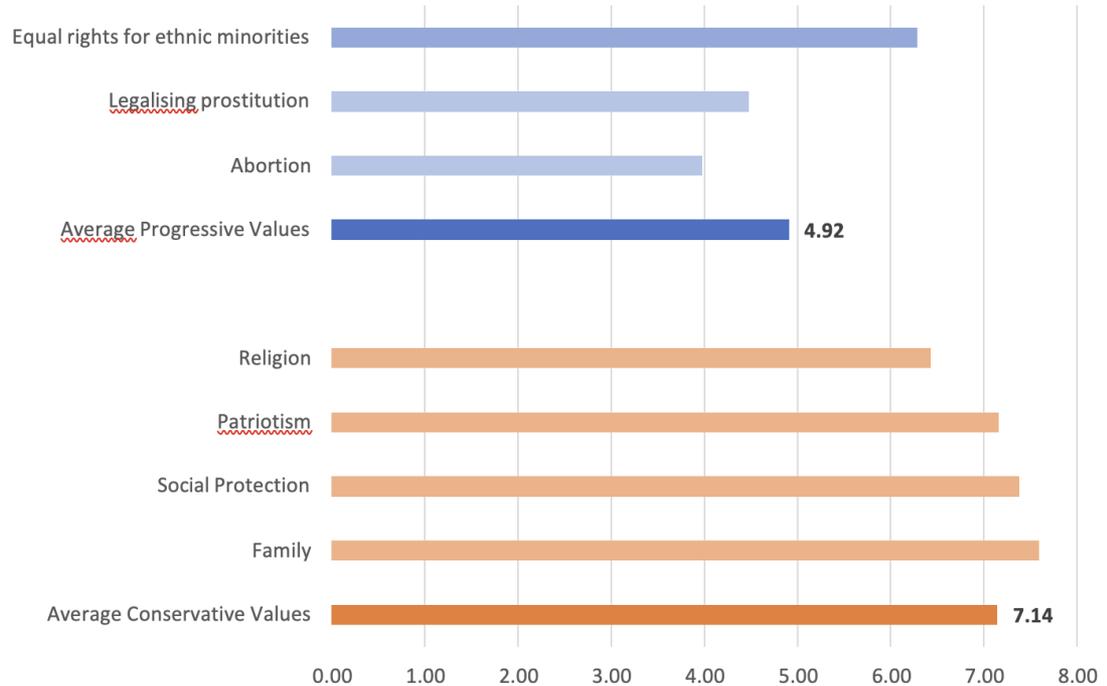| Activity	Value
Relied exclusively on your own expertise	~6.5
Compared the information from multiple sources	~6.2
Checked with friends and family	~5.9
Checked what other opinion leaders are saying on the issue	~5.5
Checked official website to validate the information	~5.4
Checked the source of the information	~5.4
Relied on the journalist or the source reputation	~4.9

Source: NATO PDD Survey, December 2021

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● Potential biases

Figure 8. Values in Romania (0=low, 10=high Issue Support)

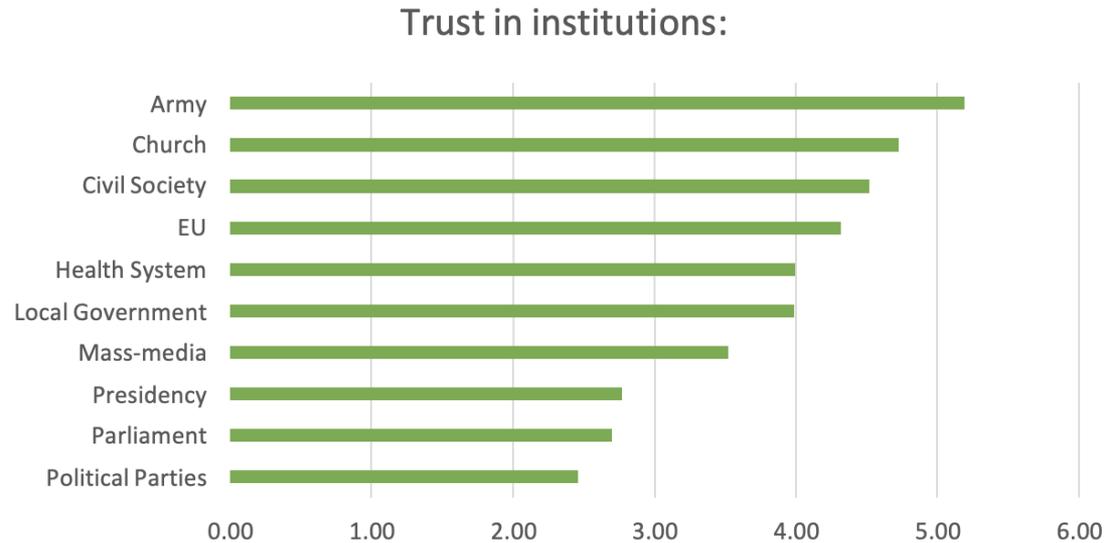Source: NATO PDD Survey, December 2021

Figure 3. Trust in Institutions in Romania (0=low, 10=high)

- The role of trust

Trust in institutions:
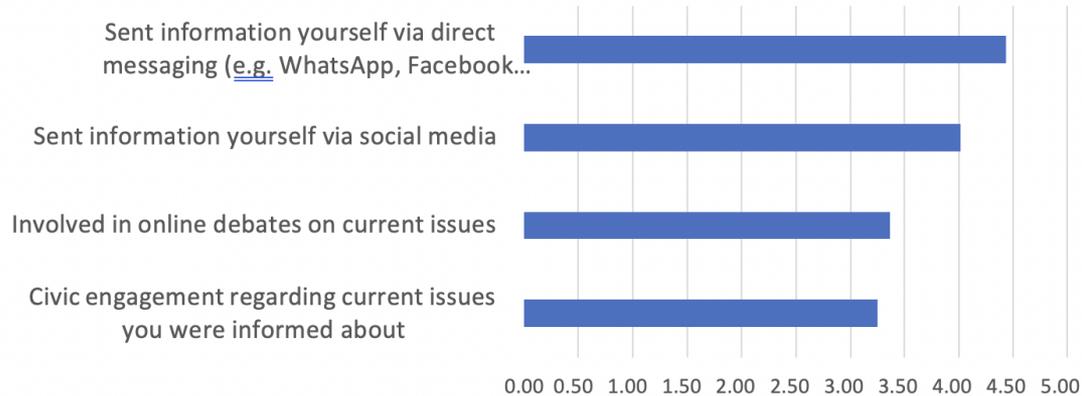

Source: NATO PDD Survey, December 2021

STAGE 3: (DIS)INFORMATION DISEMINATION

Figure 10. Acting Upon Information (Over the past year, how often did you? 0=never, 10=very frequent)

Source: NATO PDD Survey, December 2021

3D Threat Matrix: Disinformation, Dilettantism, Distrust

- **STAGE 1: (DIS)INFORMATION RECEPTION**
- Romanian's media diet easily exposes them to disinformation
- excessive reliance on social media

- **STAGE 2: (DIS)INFORMATION PROCESSING**
- threat of dilettantism, with higher reliance for receiving information from family and friends rather than experts
- much higher support for conservative policy items – can be exploited by disinformation narratives // echochambers
- distrust in media and national institutions

- **STAGE 3: (DIS)INFORMATION DISEMINATION**
- Reactions and actions based on information input are very low in Romania overall
- react to the information they gather or receive by sending information via direct messaging, or via social media platforms (potentially problematic)

Policy recommendations

Key Vulnerability: Disinformation → Proposed Actions: Transparency and Data

- **Key Stakeholder: International Organisations (IOs)**
- development and implementation of new metrics of societal resilience
- evidence-based policymaking

- **Key Stakeholder: National Authorities**
- wide transparency on public data and public decisions

- **Key Stakeholder: Academics, NGOs, think-tanks and Journalists**
- new tools and measurements for societal resilience and the spread of disinformation
- Situational awareness

Policy recommendations

Key Vulnerability: Dilettantism → *Proposed Actions*: Education and Accountability

- **Key Stakeholder: International Organisations (IOs)**
- communicate across all levels of the public (disinfo narratives target the grassroot)

- Key Stakeholder: National Authorities, NGOs, think tanks and Academia
- **Partnerships**
- Media literacy (educational policies)

Policy recommendations

Key Vulnerability: Distrust ➜ *Proposed Actions*: Truth, Solidarity, Quality ofGovernance

Key Stakeholder: National Authorities
- structural factors that affect resilience – trust
- researching, mapping, and understanding the sources of discontent for their citizens
- a National Strategy for Countering disinformation

Key Stakeholder: Academia

- research on trust-building measures /predictors of trust in institutions

- awareness to the role that access to reliable facts and content play in public conversations.

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THANK YOU!