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Disinformation in Poland and other states in the context of fake news

Dezinformacja w Polsce w kontekście fake newsów

Abstract

The article presents the functioning of disinformation mechanisms, against the background of the analysis of specific cases in the Polish and international political system and attempts to find effective strategies to counteract this harmful phenomenon. The publication includes the levels on which disinformation and fake news are currently used and indicates the basic causes of dissemination. The study uses the historical-legal method related to showing the genesis of the phenomenon, as well as the dogmatic-legal method in the interpretation of legal texts and the theoretical-legal method appropriate for the legal analysis of specific legal institutions. Based on the considerations carried out, conclusions are presented that are related to ideas for counteracting the dissemination of fake news, recognizing it in the mass media and raising the awareness of citizens who use it in the belief that it is true in the mass media and social media.

Keywords: disinformation, fake news, manipulation, mass media

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono funkcjonowanie mechanizmów dezinformacji na tle analizy konkretnych przypadków w polskim i międzynarodowym układzie politycznym oraz podejmowanie prób poszukiwania skutecznych strategii przeciwdziałania temu szkodliwemu zjawisku. W publikacji ujęto płaszczyzny, na jakich stosowana jest współcześnie dezinformacja i fake newsy (fałszywe wiadomości) oraz wskazano na zasadnicze przyczyny ich rozpowszechniania. W opracowaniu korzystano z metody historyczno-prawnej związanej z ukazaniem genezy zjawiska, a także metody dogmatyczno-prawnej przy interpretacji tekstów prawnych oraz teoretyczno-prawnej właściwej dla analizy prawnej określonych instytucji prawnych. Na podstawie przeprowadzonych rozważań przedstawiono wnioski, które wiążą się z pomysłami na przeciwdziałanie rozpowszechnianiu fake newsów, rozpoznawanie ich w środkach masowego przekazu oraz podnoszenie świadomości obywateli, którzy wykorzystują je w przekonaniu o ich prawdziwości w mass mediach oraz social mediach.

Słowa kluczowe: dezinformacja, fake news, manipulacja, mass media

Introduction

In the context of the dynamically changing information landscape, it is becoming important to understand the mechanisms of disinformation and identify ways to combat them to promote the reliable exchange of information and maintain the healthy foundations of developed democratic systems. The Republic of Poland, as a democratic state governed by law, should develop strategies and tools that will help effectively defend information integrity and promote reliable public debate, especially during the election campaign and public debate. It is worth understanding how disinformation affects the environment, what are the mechanisms of its spread, and then seek answers on how to effectively address its negative effects and focus the efforts undertaken on building a more informed and resilient society using inclusive language in media messages.

1. The phenomenon of disinformation in Poland and abroad

Disinformation is an intentional act that usually aims to falsify or distort information to achieve specific political, economic, social, military or other benefits.¹ Manipulation of information and dissemination of messages that are not true are phenomena that have been known for quite a long time. These types of techniques and tactics have been used since ancient times.² Their purpose was to defeat the enemy at the lowest possible cost of using one's own forces and to incur the least possible losses, which made the tactics extremely attractive due to the usually limited own resources in terms of human and material potential. Nowadays, disinformation is a threat that affects extremely important values of modern society and state, such as the sense of security of citizens, diplomatic relations, political and economic situation.³ The catalog

¹ https://cyberprofilaktyka.pl/blog/dezinformacja---czym-jest-i-jak-ja-zweryfikowac_i23.html [date of access: 23.09.2023].

² T. Aleksandrowicz, *War as a policy tool in the 21st century. Old concepts – new connotations*, [in:] *Strength in contemporary international relations*, eds. W. Kostecki, K. Smogorzewski, Warsaw 2017, pp. 85 et seq.

³ T. Aleksandrowicz, *Infosphere as a state security environment. An attempt to conceptualize the problem*, [in:] *Science and practice of security. Commemorative book of Leszek Fryderyk Korzeniowski, professor at the Pedagogical University of Commission of National Education in Kraków*, eds. A. Kozera, E. Sadowska, Kraków 2019, pp. 308 et seq.

of those affected by fake news is extremely wide and includes almost the entire society, those in power, i.e. the political class, corporations and organizations that do not have sufficient resources to control the spread of information in the mass media and social media, and whose activities have a huge impact on the everyday lives of all. However, ordinary recipients are particularly susceptible to disinformation, as they usually do not verify information obtained from the mass media or the Internet due to lack of easy access to the source. The modern digital era has brought with it new challenges that society must meet. One of these challenges is disinformation, which has become a global phenomenon with the development of the Internet and social media.⁴ Poland, like many other countries, is no exception in this context. In recent years, fake news and understood disinformation have influenced various aspects of social life, including education, politics, and ethics.⁵ Both in Poland and abroad, disinformation and fake news play an increasingly significant role, mostly a negative one. Exposure to disinformation and fake news is more common than in previous years and in the age of the Internet, information spreads rapidly. Content shared online is inconsistent with reality and at the same time gives the impression of being true which may have serious social, political and ethical consequences. In the context of education, disinformation may lead to false transmission of knowledge and the formation of false beliefs and views among young people, which may have significant, long-term effects related to, among others, future political choices or the way of shaping one's own life, environment, and future generations. In the world of politics, fake news can influence social moods, intensify ideological disputes, antagonize social groups, strengthen negative emotions, which may have a direct impact on the results of general elections and the dynamics of socio-political changes in a democratic country. The above applies especially to the period of change of power, ruling party and internal and external policy, tough times related to

⁴ <https://cyberpolicy.nask.pl/fake-news-dezinformacja-w-swiecie-nowych-mediow/> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

⁵ P. Pogorzelski, *The threat of Russian disinformation in Poland and forms of counteraction*, pp. 10-13.

the crisis, e.g., migration, economic⁶, or tension in relations with neighboring countries (Germany, Ukraine, Belarus). In the ethical context, disinformation negatively affects the trust we put in the media, authorities, and institutions of public trust. This may affect the efficient functioning of a democratic state of law, as well as official information channels, and may weaken their credibility.

Disinformation in Poland, with particular emphasis on fake news, constitutes a significant challenge in terms of legal regulations. The legislator is expected to take appropriate actions that would reduce the prevalence and risks associated with this phenomenon. Disinformation affects many aspects of social life, therefore creating the need to develop appropriate legal frameworks and regulations, both at the national level and internal regulations, e.g., those governing the most popular social networking sites.

The theory of disinformation was described, for example, by Vladimir Volkoff. The researcher elevates disinformation to the rank of a doctrine, while calling misleading only a technique.⁷ The term disinformation itself was used in a publication in the London monthly "The Whitehall Gazette & St James's Review" in 1926.⁸ Examples of disinformation operations (conducted, among others, by the Eastern Bloc) were described, for example, by Anatoly Golitsyn and Ion Mihai Pacepa, who defined disinformation (by which he meant the strategic disinformation of the USSR, mainly since 1958) as systematic efforts aimed at spreading false information and falsifying or blocking information regarding the actual situation and policy of the communist world. Therefore, disinformation practices were intended to confuse, mislead, and bias the non-communist world, to undermine its policies and to induce the Western adversary to unknowingly contribute to the achievement of communism's goals.⁹ According to the above theory, the aim of a disinformation campaign is to create a specific view on a given topic in the target group, as well as to discredit the arguments of the "client's" opponents. Disinformation methods used during the Cold War have

⁶ M. Wrzosek, *The phenomenon of disinformation in the era of digital revolution*, Warsaw 2019, p. 12.

⁷ V. Volkoff, *Disinformation – a weapon of war*, Warsaw 1991, pp. 6-9.

⁸ R. Brzeski, *Information war - new generation war*, Komorów 2014, pp. 104-105.

⁹ A. Golicyn, *New lies in place of old ones, Military Counterintelligence Service Library*, Warsaw 2007, p. 5.

been transformed due to the development of digital society. The methods of disinformation used during the Cold War were transformed by the development of the information society, the beginnings of which were observed in the 1960s and 1970s with the development of information technologies. For the completely new society, knowledge and information became strategic resources, not labor and capital as before.¹⁰ In addition, there was a transformation of traditional media into new media conducive to the dissemination of conspiracy theories, in which disinformation messages spread quite easily. Currently, disinformation is having an increasingly negative impact on society and democratic processes across the EU, and a coordinated, long-term approach is needed to counter it comprehensively.¹¹ In March 2015, the European Union created a special unit to analyze disinformation - EUvsDisinfo. By March 2020, the EUvsDisinfo team had identified over 7,500 cases of disinformation.¹² Moreover, in 2018, an announcement was made (Andrus Ansip - Vice-President of the European Commission) of increasing the EU budget to fight disinformation, creating an early warning system for all European countries and new obligations for popular social networking sites. In France, a law on combating the manipulation of information was passed, according to which, during the election period, operators of online platforms must provide users with loyal, clear and transparent information about the entities that remunerate the platform for promoting content that is the subject of public debate and information on the use of personal data user in promoting such content. Such platforms are also obliged to make public the amount of remuneration received for promoting them if it exceeds the equivalent of EUR 100.¹³ The French regulatory authority may, among other things: reject

¹⁰ <https://cyberpolicy.nask.pl/spoleczenstwo-informacyjne-w-czasach-cyfrowej-rewolucji-o-zjawisku-banki-informacyjnej-i-jego-nastepstwach/> [date of access: 25.09.2023].

¹¹ *Is the EU prepared to fight disinformation?* - European Commission (europa.eu) [date of access: 25.09.2023].

¹² <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/pl/> [date of access: 25.09.2023].

¹³ Fake news - online disinformation, attempts to counteract these phenomena from the perspective of international institutions and selected EU countries, including Poland, prepared by the Department of Strategy and Office of the National Broadcasting Council, Warsaw 2020, file:///C:/Users/kgora/Downloads/Observator_KRRiT_Fake_news_-_dezinformacja_online.pdf [date of access: 23.09.2023].

an application for a license if it considers that the planned media service may constitute a serious threat to such values as human dignity, freedom of thought and opinion, but also to the basic interests of the Nation, including the proper functioning of its institutions. French legal regulations in this respect are also related to the new law on transparency, combating corruption and modernization of the economy (so-called Sapin II), which establishes a new agency – the French Anti-Corruption Agency, authorized to control and impose penalties on the so-called whistleblowers.¹⁴ In Germany, a law was adopted under which content sharing platforms must, among other things, offer users easy-to-use access to submit and resolve complaints, remove content that is clearly illegal within 24 hours, remove fake news within 7 days, and provide complainants with information on the outcome of their complaints and publish a semi-annual report with information on the number of complaints and how they are handled.¹⁵

Legally, foreign disinformation is a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Fighting disinformation abroad often requires international cooperation. Countries can exchange information, act together to identify sources of disinformation, and create an international legal framework. As part of actions against disinformation, states often conduct information campaigns through social organizations aimed at educating the public on how to recognize disinformation and think critically.¹⁶ It is worth noting that the fight against disinformation abroad is difficult due to cultural, linguistic, and political differences. It is also an area that is constantly changing due to the development of modern technologies and ways of disseminating information via the Internet. Due to the above, including differences in legal cultures, attitudes towards disinformation in different countries may vary significantly, but it is an issue that remains an important challenge for many governments around the world. To summarize the arguments in this part, it should be noted that disinformation and fake news in Poland constitute a significant legal challenge that requires

¹⁴ <https://www.rp.pl/prawo-w-firmie/art2582941-przepisy-antykorupcyjne-we-francji-compliance-we-francji> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶ *Report: The phenomenon of disinformation in the era of digital revolution*, State Society Politics Business, NASK, Warsaw 2019.

attention from legislators, legal institutions, and civil society. Developing appropriate legal regulations and promoting legal awareness may be helpful in effectively counteracting this phenomenon and maintaining the value of information integrity in society.

2. Fake news

The spread of disinformation results from the development of modern media, including social media, and is therefore also related to the phenomenon of information noise caused by the multitude of information that reaches the user from numerous and various communication channels. The popular term fake news is used both when talking about false or untrue news, and when we are dealing with a more complex phenomenon of disinformation. In a narrower sense, this concept usually means false content, a message that can be verified based on reliable and credible sources of information. In a broader sense, it means a full range of information warfare mechanisms used to distort news and create specific behaviors and social attitudes.¹⁷ Fake news can also be defined as intentional false information or disinformation spread to mislead readers and manipulate public opinion.¹⁸ According to the Council of Europe, other false information is also disseminated as part of the so-called information disorder.¹⁹ These include false information created without the intention of causing harm (*disinformation*) and information based on facts, but created to cause harm or damage, most often affecting the private sphere of life (*malinformation*). There are many types of fake news, including those referred to as political disinformation, social disinformation, health disinformation, religious disinformation, etc. The most frequently cited criterion

¹⁷ M. Kowalska-Chrzanowska, P. Krysiński, *Fake news about the war in Ukraine in the light of the "Report a Troll" project*, "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" 2023, vol. 66, no. 1(253), p. 12.

¹⁸ P. Brzóska, B. Nowak, *Falsehood in the era of social media, i.e. individual differences, information bubbles and susceptibility to fake news*, [in:] *Research and Development of Young Scientists in Poland. Humanities and social sciences. Part V*, ed. J. Leśny, Poznań 2019, p. 23.

¹⁹ C. Wardle, H. Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*, Council of Europe report, DGI(2017)09, <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

for dividing fake news is the content criterion.²⁰ The following types of content are distinguished: satirical or parody, the purpose of which is to present false information in a funny and mocking way for the recipient; false connections containing a combination of an image with false content in order to obtain the so-called click bytes; containing false context, describing a true event in a false context; containing misleading content, misleading the recipient; containing false content (*imposter content*), consisting in impersonating real sources of information; containing manipulated, distorted content, containing fabricated content. As practice shows, the so-called fake news tends to spread faster than dependable, verifiable, and credible information. The speed of spreading fake news and its reach may serve as a feature that distinguishes it from ordinary, i.e., classic news, which can be simply defined as current, most up-to-date information. Fake news can spread faster, farther, and wider than true news. Due to the ease of its communication, it can become a powerful weapon in political or market competition. The spread of disinformation is also facilitated by the fact that it usually evokes extreme emotions among the people to whom it is addressed, because they most often concern issues that are sensitive to society or the most popular at a given moment, such as the political situation, elections, crises, etc.²¹ There the structure is extremely attractive to potential recipients, and the headline itself is supposed to arouse interest. Often, its task is to arouse dissatisfaction or indignation, which additionally causes it to spread very easily among people who are its intended or unintended recipients. In this context, the motivation of people sharing fake news is also important, as they often do not believe in these reports, but believe that it is something that their friends in the social network would like to read, get acquainted with the content, which is supposed to arouse surprise and interest or joy and spread false information. This is how, for example, the satirical website ASZdziennik.pl works, which consciously publishes fake news prepared in an appropriate way, along with the description that the above "news" is made up.²²

²⁰ M. Kowalska-Chrzanowska, P. Krysiński, *Fake news...*, op. cit., p. 12.

²¹ E. Baron-Polańczyk, *Bots, trolls, and fake news – be careful who teaches you!*, "Education – Technology – Computer Science" 2019, no. 2, p. 223.

²² <https://aszdziennik.pl/> [date of access: 26.09.2023].

The problem with this type of portals, however, is that the information about the inaccuracy of the shared content is usually placed at the bottom of the page, in smaller print, where many users, especially those less aware, will not reach it while browsing the Internet. The most frequently read on such portals are page headlines that²³ mislead recipients in a clickbait manner.²⁴ Further transmission of false information once implemented is one of the main goals of people spreading fake news and creates a presumption of its truthfulness. Often, this type of information influences recipients to such an extent that they do not even seek the truth and are satisfied with the false information they obtain, which in turn is consistent with their worldview. This concept was the word of the year for 2017 in the United States and Belgium. Today we encounter it more often - fake news is becoming an everyday occurrence.²⁵

Referring to the phenomenon of fake news in technical and substantive terms, it should be pointed that its principle of operation is based on three components that create the so-called fake news triangle.²⁶ It consists of tools or services, social platforms, and motivation. The first one is used to manipulate and spread false content on social media platforms, most often by promoting among portal users, including: through “followers” or, for example, Internet polls. In the legal aspect the use of marketing tools, such as advertising or sponsored texts, by a person spreading fake news would require compliance with the law. The creator’s reliance on the anonymity of the authors causes them to spread much faster on the Internet and reduces the risk of falsehoods being detected. The second element of fake news are social media platforms on which the use of the above tools is possible. Users who use them often browse information from the world, politics, etc. shared by their friends - other users of a given portal, but

²³ *Click and bait literally meaning click bait*, <https://nano.komputronik.pl/n/clickbait-co-to-jest/> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

²⁴ J. Kralka, *Attention, Polish Internet users discovered the word clickbait*, <https://www.spiderweb.pl/2017/03/clickbait-coto.html> [date of access: 27.09.2023].

²⁵ <https://fundacja.orange.pl/strefa-wiedzy/post/fake-news-czem-jest-i-jak-go-rozpoznać> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

²⁶ L. Gu, V. Kropotov, F. Yarochkin, *The fake news machine. How propagandists abuse the internet and manipulate the public*, https://documents.trendmicro.com/assets/white_papers/wp-fake-news-machine-howpropagandists-abuse-the-internet.pdf [date of access: 20.09.2023].

also by the websites of the news websites themselves that enable the use of the mentioned tools. To examine and match appropriate content to a given user, IT systems are commonly used to detect and analyze the user in terms of his or her online activity and to match him or her to the appropriate target group, examining his or her preferences, views, etc. This type of personalization of the content of the displayed data is not most often shown to the user, because he only sees its effect in the form of encouraging him to watch various content (including fake news), without separating them into true and false, by displaying posts, photos or entries of other users of social media platforms with similar views, observations, preferences. The last component of fake news is motivation. Flashy newspaper headlines and tabloid announcements of news websites attract the attention of the mass recipient, regardless of the content itself. The main goal is very often viewership and displaying related advertisements, and thus, in a sense, creating reality. Claire Wardle proposes a classification of fake news based on content criteria. Within this division, types such as satire or parody are distinguished. Here, the recipient is most often aware that the information provided is not true and the content conveyed is mocking and merely entertaining. The so-called false connection involves the use of a headline, image or signature that does not correspond directly to the content, thus somehow attracting the recipient to itself. Misleading content is defined as the use of information to make an entity or person believe something. The recipient is aware that they are reading real news because its verification is possible, but the presenter's goal is not to convey knowledge, but to evoke specific, most often negative feelings. This type is to some extent characterized by content relating to the opposition in the so-called public media, in which the content and selection of information is aimed at showing other political parties as evil and dangerous people for the country. Another type of fake news is its false context, in which truthful information is presented in a false context, giving the impression that the information itself is true, while the changed context affects its reception and changes the position of objectivity and truth. False content within the above division is characterized by some of the most dangerous types of fake news. These items are based on impersonating real sources of information and give the impression that the information is dependable and worth sharing, e.g., among friends or directly on the Internet. This

type of information particularly influences the spread of fake news and extends its negative impact on numerous aspects of social life and the ideas professed in contemporary democratic society. This type of fake news can also be considered as directly fabricated content, which is false, but is accepted by the recipient as true. Fabricated content involves completely falsifying content. The recipient does not know that he is receiving false information. For example, the most famous fake news in 2021 was undoubtedly information related to the pandemic, including: disseminated theses that vaccinations cause infertility in women, or those that indicated that the vaccination campaign led to mutations of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, including those containing information that mRNA vaccines change human DNA. High-profile actions concerned not only the COVID-19 pandemic but also information about natural disasters (floods, fires) in various regions of the world or those denying that global warming is not caused by irresponsible human actions but is a natural process.²⁷ In 2023, fake news, along with negative user comments and online trolling, became one of the factors that could cause an online crisis for companies, institutions, and public figures.²⁸ Quite often repeated fake news in 2023 was the information that telecommunications infrastructure (masts, antennas, etc.) poses a threat to human health and may cause cancer.²⁹ Contrary to these claims, according to the position of the World Health Organization (WHO), “current evidence does not support the existence of any health consequences resulting from exposure to low-level electromagnetic fields”, i.e., the kind we are dealing with due to radiation generated by mobile network antennas. Internet websites can be found that deny similar fake news and statements and deal with their alleged “truthfulness”, which is often reproduced without understanding or the minimum diligence required from the recipient of the message.³⁰ Since Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, more false news related to the so-called

²⁷ <https://www.dw.com/pl/fake-news-i-manipulacje-roku-2021/a-60297579> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

²⁸ <https://cyberdefence24.pl/social-media/kryzysy-w-sieci-w-2023-zagrozenie-fake-news-i-fale-negatywnych-komentarzy-i-trolling> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

²⁹ https://demagog.org.pl/fake_news/anteny-i-niebezpieczne-napromieniowanie-ludzi-to-fake-news/ [date of access: 23.09.2023].

³⁰ E.g., https://demagog.org.pl/fake_news/ [date of access: 23.09.2023].

Russian propaganda in Poland. Authors of the report related to the project entitled "Report a troll"³¹ categorized them and pointed to anti-Ukrainian content and views; pro-Russian/anti-Western/anti-NATO content and views; nationalist content and views about Poland; false reports (false alarm); monitoring accounts that remove false content; content and views related to the anti-vaccination movement.³²

3. Areas of use of disinformation

The issue of disinformation and fake news can be analyzed in terms of specific categories.³³ Science distinguishes their tactical nature, e.g. striving to induce a specific reaction in one or several issues in a short period of time, and strategic nature, i.e. long-term action carried out by the central management bodies of the state, aimed at causing lasting changes in the psyche of public opinion on a given topic (disinformation propaganda). Another aspect refers to the understanding of the described concept in the strict sense, i.e., as intentional misleading, and in the largo sense as a full range of techniques undertaken by a team of people, institutions and organizations that are part of counterintelligence. The aspect of the country's security in the international arena, not only the political one, i.e., the internal one, is also noticeable here. Disinformation and fake news can be used on various levels, both social, political, and economic. There is no doubt that it is a harmful and unethical set of activities that uses various tools, such as microtargeting, the so-called "troll factories", i.e., mass-employed people who spread comments or false information to have a destructive impact on state security.³⁴ The purpose of spreading disinformation and fake news is also to disrupt democratic processes, polarize society, undermine its position in the international arena and inflame relations between the ruling group and citizens. Activities of this type have been undertaken particularly frequently in recent years especially by the Russian Federation. Created by Yevgeny Prigozhin,

³¹ M. Kowalska-Chrzanowska, P. Krysiński, *Fake news...*, op. cit., pp. 11-32.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 15-16.

³³ A. Jupowicz-Ginalska, *Media Marketing*, Warsaw 2010, p. 56.

³⁴ <https://www.dw.com/pl/co-dalej-z-fabryk%C4%85-trolli-prigo%C5%BCyna-wcale-nie-przesta%C5%82a%C4%87/a-66204281> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

the so-called Russian troll factory (Internet Studies Agency) was extremely active during the US presidential election.³⁵

Political disinformation aims to create desired attitudes among society and a positive position of the state in the international arena. During political campaigns, fake news can be used to spread disinformation about candidates, political parties, or political issues to influence election results. Governments or political groups may spread disinformation to weaken the opposition, gain support or increase their power. Russia under Vladimir Putin's foreign policy uses the so-called "raw strength". For a long time, however, it has been accompanied by numerous propaganda and manipulation measures intended to add credibility to the goals and means that Russia uses to conduct its foreign and domestic policy.³⁶ The addressees of these actions are Ukrainians, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, as well as understood Western societies and Russians themselves. Among the various means used by the Russian services is the creation and use of the so-called fake news for your own needs. Another media measure that the Russian Federation successfully uses is, for example, the so-called disinformation infotainment, i.e., combining information with entertainment and culture to strengthen and sometimes even sacralize the Russian view of international politics. The disinformation spread by contemporary Russia is intended to create an appropriate public perception of its actions by spreading and strengthening such values as confusion, doubt, discouraging citizens from the government and tilting the scales of public opinion in an appropriate direction. The danger of such actions is that most recipients do not verify false messages and accept them uncritically as the truth, thus building false beliefs about erroneous policies, promoted values, or positions developed on critical issues for the state and its citizens.

In the economic sphere, disinformation involves conscious and intentional misleading as to the proper state of the country's economic level to increase

³⁵ <https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/11095837/to-jewgienij-prigozyn-spowiedzl-rosyjska-fabryke-trolli-ingerowala-w-wybory-w-usa.html> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

³⁶ M. Drzazga, *The whole truth about fake news, or how to recognize fake news?*, <https://www.legalnie.wsieci.pl/aktualnosci/cala-prawda-o-fake-news-niczy-jak-rozpoznać-falszywe-wiadomosci> [date of access: 25.09.2023].

the protection of its resources. In the scientific and technological sphere, disinformation aims to hide the progress made in science and technological development from the opponent, especially when the progress relates to the level of defense and military capabilities of the country. In the military sphere, it is intended to confuse the enemy and keep him in the belief that he has valuable information about the foreign military.³⁷ The use of fake news is most often aimed at influencing the politics, economy of a given country or geopolitical regions, education, and social mood.³⁸

Fake news can influence opinions on social issues such as migration, ethnic minorities, or social movements, leading to tensions and conflicts, which in the opinion of hostile countries is an extremely important goal.³⁹ Planning an information attack includes several stages, including the selection of goals that the attacker wants to achieve. They most often result directly from the political strategy adopted by the attacker. As an example, Russia's desire to reduce the level of unity of the West (European Union) in the matter of economic sanctions imposed after the aggression against Ukraine to make it easier to establish relations with individual countries and conduct trade with them (Hungary, Austria). The next step is to identify elements in the political/social situation of the attacked person that can be used to conduct hostile information activities. As a rule, these are true situations, because relying on lies to identify the situation in the attacked country may bring short-term results. Such popular topics for fake news were quite often repeated during the election campaign in Poland lasting until October 14, 2024, including elections to the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland, the threads of the migration crisis in Europe, support for Ukraine in the war with Russia, the increase in the unemployment rate, corruption scandals at the top of government or dissatisfaction with excessive

³⁷ R. Bielawski, A. Ziółkowska, *Social media and shaping state security*, [in:] *Man and digital technology - a review of current reports*, eds. P. Szymczyk, K. Maciąg, Lublin 2018, pp. 90-91.

³⁸ Disinformation and propaganda - impact on the functioning of the rule of law in the EU and its Member States, LIBE Commission, EU Parliament 2029, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/pl/document/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608864](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/pl/document/IPOL_STU(2019)608864) [date of access: 23.09.2023].

³⁹ R. Bielawski, B. Grenda, P. Majdan, *Multi-aspect evaluation of the use of social media for the purposes of managing SBN RP (evaluation of the risk of BN cyber threats)*, typescript, pp. 64-65.

regulations introduced by the European Union, i.e. bureaucracy. The last step is to recognize the information profile of the recipients, which is to enable the credibility of the targeted information message. The above is served by the so-called *data mining*, i.e., obtaining information about individual people and combining them into clusters of data located in various databases (discovering knowledge in databases), with only some of it being legally available.⁴⁰ Using the above-mentioned techniques, you can obtain two types of results - those describing the data you have or enabling the formulation of forecasts for the future. In the economic and financial markets, disinformation about companies, products or financial markets can lead to manipulation of stock prices and influence investors.⁴¹ Competitive companies may spread disinformation about competitors to gain a market advantage. The media provide almost live reports regarding the pandemic, but these messages are not always verified, true and complete. In real time, as a society, we are observing historical changes; the sense of relative existential and social security that prevailed until the outbreak of the pandemic is collapsing, which has so far been affected by turmoil, most often in the form of economic crises, but the suspension of subsequent sectors of the economy, the disruption of global supply chains and the transition of almost the entire population to a state of isolation had never been seen before in modern times and was a novelty for almost the entire society, which gave a wide field of activity to individuals or groups of people who aimed to cause disinformation. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed significantly to the intensification of activities in cyberspace of anti-vaccination and altmed movements, strengthening reluctance to vaccines, fear of vaccination, and distrust of medical procedures and methods of treating infectious diseases.⁴²

⁴⁰ https://www.trendmicro.com/pl_pl/what-is/machine-learning/data-mining.html [date of access: 23.09. 2023].

⁴¹ M. Mrozowski, *Mass media. Power, Entertainment and Business*, Warsaw 2001, p. 394.

⁴² K. Konopka, *Pandemic of disinformation - Legal and psychological point of view towards online anti-vaccination and altmed movements*, [in:] *Disinformation - Inspiration - Society. Social CyberSecurity*, eds. D. Boćkowski, E. Dąbrowska-Prokopowska, P. Goryń, K. Gorynia, Białystok 2022, pp. 121-141.

Internationally, countries or interest groups may use disinformation to achieve goals in international conflicts, destabilize other countries or gain a strategic advantage. In international relations, fake news can influence relations between countries, leading to diplomatic tensions. Fake news can also cause disinformation in science and research, which threatens the process of developing knowledge and scientific achievement. False information can influence education through disinformation in textbooks, educational materials, or teaching.

Disinformation and fake news pose a serious threat on many social and political levels. Their impact can be long-lasting and difficult to neutralize, which emphasizes the need for effective countermeasures and for society to think critically about the information that is presented to them. Disinformation and fake news pose a challenge to modern society and ethics. They violate public trust, lead to polarization, affect political processes, health risks and the ethics of journalism. Fighting these phenomena requires a comprehensive approach, which should include education, content control, public awareness, and regulatory activities to maintain a healthy and reliable information environment of society. At the same time, maintaining ethical principles in the media and public life is crucial to counteract the spread of disinformation and fake news.⁴³

4. Impact on society

Influence on society (social influence) is a concept introduced to psychology by B. Latane in 1981.⁴⁴ This term describes any change in feelings, thoughts or behavior caused by the real or imagined presence of other people.⁴⁵ So why can fake news have such a significant impact on society? Reports from around the world are not selected by journalists, but are selected by the recipients themselves, who then share selected information on their profiles - those

⁴³ For more on this issue, see: T. Aleksandrowicz, *Mechanisms of information attack. Effectiveness of countermeasures*, [in:] *Disinformation – Inspiration – Society. Social CyberSecurity*, eds. D. Boćkowski, E. Dąbrowska-Prokopowska, P. Goryń, K. Gorynia, Białystok 2022, pp. 11-33.

⁴⁴ B. Latané, *The psychology of social impact*, "American Psychologist" 1981, no. 36(4), pp. 343-356. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.36.4.343> .

⁴⁵ P. Zegarow, *Why do we believe in disinformation? Analysis of psychological mechanisms*, https://cyberpolicy.nask.pl/1577-2/#_ftn7 [date of access: 23.09.2023].

previously shared by their friends, i.e., people they trust. In this way, they often fall into a trap set by someone who, in the fight for views that will increase their advertising revenues, uses tabloid titles, duplicates other people's content, or prepares false information. Conformism, fear of rejection by the group, exclusion by the community, and stigmatization favor the attitude of accepting information that has not been verified by the recipient. Sometimes an individual believes in a message uncritically when he or she does not have sufficient knowledge to verify the information or is subject to imitation and treats the activity of other people in cyberspace as a reliable source of information. Information that is inconsistent with reality is easier to believe not only because it is provided by friends, but also because it often fits the recipient's preferences or beliefs, which brings satisfaction in the reception of information, e.g., messages that slander a disliked political option. The result of the above is that recipients lock themselves in the so-called information bubbles and are not open to verifying information they consider likely. An important impetus for the spread of disinformation is the fact that false information usually evokes extreme emotions. They are most often constructed so that the recipients like them very much, the headline itself arouses interest, or they cause dissatisfaction or outrage. They become another confirmation of what a given recipient thinks about a given topic, which causes them to be trapped in an information bubble and not willing to verify the information obtained. It also turns out that people do not have a well-developed ability to distinguish or detect false information after reading it. People's minds tend to quickly process information, receive it from the environment and recognize it as truth.⁴⁶ An additional factor that influences the consolidation of this information are strong emotions that deepen the belief in a false message and the recipient's reluctance to verify the content of the message through cognitive effort to save time. Therefore, it is easier to uncritically accept information available on the Internet, recognize it as the truth and disseminate it, than to verify it, learn the truth, and expose untruths. The unfavorable situation is also intensified by the so-called information stress, which is related to the

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

exponential increase in information along with the development of the Internet. The recipient is unable to process this information without making increased cognitive effort. Too much information causes confusion and frustration in the recipient. A specific example of disinformation manipulation of content may be the phenomenon called deepfake, which is increasingly appearing in the public space. It involves combining and superimposing still or moving images on source images using learning computer systems. The confusingly realistic film messages obtained in this way create the possibility of deep manipulation, for example by changing the faces of the presented characters.⁴⁷

Disturbing is the phenomenon of financing fake news by advertisers and technology companies, which results from the currently operating advertising model, which allows, among others, to easily monetize space on websites, without properly checking the context in which the message of a specific advertiser appears. However, the most common source of fake news are social media and their users sharing prepared information. The content of shared fake news does not matter what aspect of life it concerns. The topic must only be current, "hot", e.g., related to armed struggle or an epidemic. Accusations based on false information on the Internet are easily created and digested in environments where harmful stereotypes and prejudices are deeply entrenched, additionally reinforced by stations, programs, or websites. The essence of disinformation in this respect is to present such arguments and evoke such emotions that the recipient believes what he wants to believe. Convincing them to a different view rarely works and is sometimes even impossible. However, strengthening the opinion by adding further information to confirm even false knowledge is a much easier task. This role is played not only by the mass media (public, private), which can strengthen the adherence to a given system of values but will not change people's beliefs or it will be a significant challenge to overcome. Forums and social networking sites also bring together like-minded users, which contribute to strengthening the values of group members and can significantly influence public opinion.

⁴⁷ An example is W. Zelensky calling for the surrender of Ukrainian soldiers fighting Russian soldiers, <https://cyberdefence24.pl/cyberbezpieczenstwo/jak-rozpoznac-deepfake> [date of access: 23.09.2023].

In the era of increasing digitization and access to information, disinformation and fake news have become a significant and dangerous phenomenon that influences modern society and poses ethical challenges to us. They are not only false or misleading information, but also tools of influence that can lead to harmful social and moral consequences.

The first key aspect of the impact of disinformation and fake news is the violation of public trust. Society is based on trust in institutions, media, and other sources of information. When disinformation and fake news become widespread, this trust is undermined. People lose confidence in who and what they can believe, which leads to the breakdown of basic social bonds, and reliable sources of information and journalists who want to convey true information are not heard by the mass audience, and their message is lost in the thicket of false information. Moreover, the spread of disinformation often leads to the polarization of society. Fake news is used to strengthen divisions between various social, ethnic, and political groups. People exposed to disinformation often choose versions of information that confirm their own beliefs, which deepens social divisions and creates an atmosphere of conflict. This is how power is often exercised in autocratic states, including the Russian Federation or Belarus. Extreme polarization of society reduces the chance of rebellion, mass protests and other types of actions against corrupt, dishonest, or anti-patriotic authorities. In a political context, fake news has the potential to cause serious problems. It is often used in election campaigns to manipulate public opinion, influence election results, and weaken democratic processes that should be standard in a modern, democratic state of law. Introducing disinformation about candidates, political parties or political issues has an extremely negative impact on the functioning of democratic systems.

Health disinformation is another area that influences modern society. False information about treatment, vaccinations or health threats may lead to inappropriate political, social, and economic decisions and pose a threat to public health. People exposed to disinformation may reject scientifically proven methods of treatment or prevention, which threatens the health and lives of many people.

In turn, in relation to ethics, the use of fake news violates the principles of dependable and ethical action. Resolute journalists and media have an obligation to provide reliable information and comply with ethical standards such as truth and honesty. However, the pressure to increase profits may lead some media to publish controversial or unverified content, which undermines the ethics of journalism and the credibility of the media. An important aspect of the impact of disinformation and fake news is also their influence on decision-making processes in society. People are increasingly exposed to disinformation, which may lead to making inappropriate decisions in various spheres of life, from health to politics and economics. The impact of disinformation on the decisions of individuals and society can lead to financial losses, health risks and even community destabilization. In the context of ethics, the fight against disinformation and fake news requires considering values such as truth, honesty, and responsibility. Media, journalists, and Internet users must be guided by ethical standards, ensuring the reliability of information, and avoiding the spread of false content. Additionally, educating the public on how to recognize disinformation and think critically is crucial to enable people to effectively deal with this challenge⁴⁸. It is therefore justified to create educational campaigns on methods of analytical thinking and learning all aspects of disinformation. Attention should also be paid to the ethical implications, especially in the context of social media. Online platforms are often used to spread disinformation, and algorithms adapt content to users' preferences, which leads to the creation of the previously mentioned information bubbles⁴⁹.

It is also worth emphasizing that disinformation and fake news can be used by governments or interest groups to manipulate and control society⁵⁰. The use of disinformation for political or economic purposes may lead to violations of civil liberties, undermining democratic institutions and destabilization of society.

⁴⁸ W. Sokała, *Contemporary education - a shield against BMM (Weapons of Mass Manipulation)?*, [in:] *Network-centric security. War, peace and terrorism in the information age*, eds. K. Liedel, P. Piasecka, T. Aleksandrowicz, Warsaw 2014, p. 48.

⁴⁹ K. Pałka-Suchojad, *The war on tweets, or the weaponization of social media*, [in:] *Words like stones. Hate speech, lies, aggression online. Compendium of knowledge about language in public life*, eds. A. Kasińska-Metryka, R. Dudała, T. Gajewski, Kraków–Nowy Targ 2019, pp. 95-108.

⁵⁰ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, J. Frasz, B. Ociepka, *Theory and practice of propaganda*, Wrocław 1999, p. 207.

Overall, the impact of disinformation and fake news on contemporary society and ethics is significant and negative. They violate public trust, lead to polarization, influence political processes, pose health risks, and pose ethical challenges in the media. Fighting these phenomena requires social involvement, education, awareness, and consistent compliance with the principles of ethics and reliable journalism. Only then can we effectively counteract the impact of disinformation and fake news on our society, remembering that humans remain social creatures also in cyberspace.

5. Preventing disinformation

In the legal context, it is possible to identify several key aspects related to disinformation and fake news in Poland. Disinformation often violates the personal rights of individuals, such as good name, privacy, or human dignity. Polish law contains regulations regarding media activities, including the principles of reliable journalism. An important value is presenting information truthfully and respecting the principles of journalistic ethics. Violation of these rules may lead to legal liability under criminal or civil law. There are provisions in Polish law that allow for claims for the protection of personal rights in the event of publication of false information that may damage reputation or violate privacy. In some cases, disinformation may constitute a crime, such as fraud or defamation. Polish criminal law provides for the application of sanctions against persons responsible for disseminating false information in order to obtain financial benefits or cause damage to others (Article 286 of the Penal Code, Art. 212 § 1 of the Penal Code) or in the form of offenses, e.g. misleading an authority or institution (Article 65 of the Code of Civil Procedure), triggering a false alarm (Article 66 of the Code of Civil Procedure). In terms of regulations regarding social media, the Polish legislator has introduced provisions regarding the activities of the online platforms that operate them, which oblige these entities to effectively combat disinformation. The introduction of such regulations is an attempt to limit the spread of fake news in the online environment. As part of the fight against disinformation, it is also important to shape legal awareness in society. Legal education can help citizens recognize fake news and understand its legal implications. There is no doubt that to effectively fight disinformation

in Poland, systemic solutions are needed covering various areas of public life, including a new legal framework. The integrated approach assumes expanding the competences of, for example, the National Electoral Commission, which could control political election advertising or electioneering outside the electoral committees, which could influence citizens' electoral preferences. Disinformation in Poland develops in a highly polarized society (e.g. political division into supporters of the Civic Coalition and the United Right), in radicalizing groups and protests (e.g. protests of farmers, supporters and opponents of the so-called green deal or aid for Ukraine, in the EU), movements fueled by the propaganda of foreign countries (e.g. anti-Polish speeches by the leaders of Russia and Belarus, destabilization of the situation on the eastern border), rooted in distrust of the state and the weakness of its organs.⁵¹ The currently applicable Act of 18 July 2002 on the provision of electronic services⁵² in section 1 art. 14 provides for the exclusion of criminal liability of an entity (service provider) which, while making the resources of an IT system available for the purpose of storing data by a service recipient, does not know about the unlawful nature of the data or the activities related to them, and in the event of receiving an official notification or obtaining reliable information about the unlawful nature of the data or activities related to them, activity will immediately prevent access to this data. A service provider who has received an official notification about the unlawful nature of stored data provided to him by a service recipient and has prevented access to this data, shall not be liable to this service recipient for any damage resulting from preventing access to this data (section 2 of Article 14 of the Act). In turn, a service provider who has received reliable information about the unlawful nature of the stored data provided by the service recipient and has prevented him from accessing these data is not liable to the service recipient for any damage resulting from preventing access to these data, if he immediately notified the service recipient of his intention to prevent access to them (section 3 of article 14 of the Act). These provisions refer to the exclusion of liability of entities that provide services involving the provision of IT system

⁵¹ <https://publicystyka.ngo.pl/jak-systemowo-powiedzdzialac-dezinformacji-w-polsce-raport-niezaleznych-ekspertow-juz-wkrotce> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

⁵² "Journal of Laws" 2020.344, i.e. of March 2020.

resources for the purpose of storing data (so-called hosting) and constitute the implementation of Art. 14 of Directive 2000/31/EC on electronic commerce⁵³, while the doctrine holds that the exclusion of liability provided for in Art. 14 section 1 quote of the Act for the so-called *a hosting provider*, which offers service recipients space in the memory of an ICT system (e.g. server) for storing data, covers only responsibility for the data that is stored in the ICT system, but not for the data made available on websites⁵⁴, which does not seem to be consistent with the essence of the hosting, which does not only include storing and sharing data on servers, but also throughout the Internet or telecommunications network.⁵⁵ The report on counteracting disinformation in Poland, developed in 2023 by the Forum Security Foundation⁵⁶, contains systemic recommendations for the state and its institutions regarding legal regulations, national security, education and upbringing, information space and the sociology and psychology of disinformation, the introduction of which should contribute to weakening disinformation and the impact of fake news on society. For example, in legal regulations, it is proposed to introduce EU rules related to digital services, blocking the possibility of obtaining financial benefits from disinformation online and equipping the National Electoral Commission with tools to fight disinformation. In the area of education and upbringing, it is necessary to recognize disinformation as a social threat, and in relation to the psychology of disinformation, constant social dialogue based on long-term campaigns building public awareness of disinformation. In turn, in information space, it is postulated to develop standards for dealing with information - including rules for verification - in the media, including limiting the impact of network

⁵³ Directive 2000/31/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the internal market (Directive on electronic commerce), OJ EU.L.2000.178.1 of 2000/07/17.

⁵⁴ P. Sadowski, *Making the work available on the Internet, with particular emphasis on making it available on a website*, "Przegląd Prawa Handlowego" 2009, no. 3, p. 52; P. Sadowski, *Exclusion of liability in the provision of hosting services - polemics*, "Monitor Polski" 2009, no. 16, p. 885.

⁵⁵ *Commentary on the Act on the provision of electronic services*, eds. D. Lubasz, M. Namysłowska, Warszawa 2011.

⁵⁶ <https://ffb.org.pl/2023/02/23/powiedzdzialanie-dezinformacji-w-polsce-raport/> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

traffic on the financial situation of the media. In the current political situation, with the ever-increasing tone in the political debate, especially during election periods, and the ongoing war in Ukraine fueled by Kremlin propaganda which points to the inevitable confrontation of Russia with NATO forces, disinformation has a particularly destructive impact on democratic states that must strategically and fight this phenomenon in the long term. There are many examples of disinformation from Russia. The cyberattack on the Polish Press Agency, which transmitted false messages about alleged mobilization in Poland twice on May 31, 2024, was widely reported in the media.⁵⁷ In April 2020, the GovTech Polska team operating at the Ministry of Digitization launched an application created together with PAP called “#FakeHunter”, which aims to fight this type of disinformation on the Internet.⁵⁸ Thanks to it, anyone can report “questionable” content to the verification team via the Internet. You can send a report from your browser - by downloading the browser plug-in from the Fake Hunter website or from the #FakeHunter mobile application, or by sending a message to #FakeHunter on Facebook.⁵⁹ Preventing disinformation is a phenomenon that requires cooperation between all EU countries. An example of a set of tools to combat the spread of disinformation is the European Commission’s communication⁶⁰ from April 2018 on this issue and the Action Plan against Disinformation⁶¹, as well as the Code of Practice on Disinformation signed on 16 June 2022, in which EU member states have agreed on voluntary self-regulation standards.⁶² The Action Plan against Disinformation highlights the need to take action to improve the detection, analysis and disclosure of disinformation, to strengthen cooperation and a joint response to this phenomenon,

⁵⁷ <https://sekurak.pl/cyberatak-na-pap-i-falszywa-depesza-wiadomo-juz-w-jaki-osob-doszlo-do-ataku/> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

⁵⁸ <https://app.fakehunter.pap.pl/> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

⁵⁹ <https://www.gov.pl/web/govtech/mija-rok-od-uruchomienia-serwisu-fakehunter> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

⁶⁰ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/communication-tackling-online-disinformation-european-approach> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

⁶¹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/54866_en [date of access: 31.05.2024].

⁶² <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2018-code-practice-disinformation> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

to mobilize the private sector to combat disinformation and to raise awareness and increase societal resilience.⁶³ The aforementioned Code of Conduct on Disinformation contains five core sets of commitments, namely: 1) restricting the ability to place advertisements and economic incentives for actors spreading disinformation online; 2) increasing the transparency of political advertising by labelling political advertisements and providing searchable repositories of such advertisements; 3) countering and disclosing the use of manipulative techniques on platform services by malicious actors to artificially increase the dissemination of information online and enable the rapid spread of false narratives; 4) creating technological features that give priority to trustworthy information so that users have more instruments and tools to critically assess the content they access online; 5) undertaking joint activities with fact-checkers and the scientific community, including media literacy initiatives.⁶⁴ In February 2020, the European Commission adopted a document entitled “Strategy for Shaping Europe’s Digital Future”, in which it announces a few new regulatory and policy initiatives with the aim of creating a model of a digital society for other regions of the world to follow.⁶⁵

Conclusions

The fight against disinformation requires combined efforts and intensive cooperation of all interested parties, in particular the state, institutions, and citizens. The conclusions drawn from the analysis of numerous reports and studies confirm that activities should be conducted simultaneously at many levels and in many areas. A huge role in the fight against the mass dissemination of false content, while deriving a great deal of benefits from this practice, is also assigned to the understood world of science. Research on the

⁶³ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Action Plan against disinformation. Brussels, 5.12.2018 JOIN(2018) 36 final.

⁶⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/code-practice-disinformat> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

⁶⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future> [date of access: 31.05.2024].

phenomenon of disinformation must have the values of objectivity, transparency, and rationality. Any other reactions to these practices, devoid of the above ideas, will involve their politicization and will arouse emotional reactions from the community, which is extremely sensitive to actions related to limiting its access to information. On the other hand, without the activity of civil society, the fight against fake news is doomed to failure. The first line of resistance to the spread of disinformation is to inform recipients and media users to whom these messages are directed. Building awareness of the true intentions of disinformation creators and the ways in which they spread increasingly widely, influencing collective and individual decisions, is the primary task of all responsible parties in the process of combating this phenomenon. The above can be achieved through extensive media education for children and young people, which should occupy a significant place in the education system; for adults, educational processes should be conducted by non-governmental organizations. This means there is a need for changes in both the public and higher education systems. The ability of the recipient to verify the source of information should be one of the learning outcomes of information analysis. The spread of false information in the field of education may lead to disinformation among the younger generation, which may have long-term consequences for society. It is necessary to strengthen educational programs that teach critical thinking, recognize disinformation, and promote the ability to verify information sources. Another element of counteracting the phenomenon should be striving to increase the level of credibility of official messages from the authorities and the so-called mainstream media. In Poland, as in other countries, disinformation was used in political campaigns and to destabilize democratic processes. It is worth understanding that the fight against disinformation in politics is not only a matter of awareness, but also of effective regulatory actions and monitoring of political content. Only transparent and objective messages will reduce the number of conspiracy theories and increase citizens' trust in the government apparatus. This is certainly not served by subordinating public media channels to the only political option in power. Ethics in the media and journalism are becoming a key aspect in the context of disinformation. Journalists and media have a huge role in providing reliable information and play a significant role

in debunking fake news. However, political demand, pressure for profits and page views sometimes lead to unethical practices. An important value in this aspect would be to promote and reward journalists and media that comply with the principles of professional ethics related to the reliability, verifiability and neutrality of information provided to the public. In turn, at the level of the state apparatus, efforts should be made to create institutions dealing with the fight against disinformation and the creation of fake news. To prevent the mass dissemination of fake news, there should also be permanent communication elements of content sharing platforms for their users. No actions against such a global and universal phenomenon will be effective if they are left solely to social initiatives.

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