Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders

BECID

Mitigating (Dis)information Vulnerability With Situational Risk Awareness And Human-Centered Approaches: A Conceptual Model

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The report is one of five literature reviews by BECID aimed at highlighting different aspects of research relevant to the EDMO network. Find all on our website.

Summary

This analysis delves into the concept of **(dis)information vulnerability**, outlining the determining factors according to which individuals and groups are susceptible to the detrimental consequences of the supremacy of online manipulations.

Defining the concept of "(dis)information vulnerability" is a challenging matter because of its multi-dimensionality and particularity, which depend on individual characteristics and contextual conditions. Hence, this paper integrates **human-centred aspects of information processing** by incorporating individual (socio-demographic characteristics, such as age and education) along with socio-psychological capacities like self-efficacy assessments and values, which become particularly crucial in decision-making situations that are prone to conflicts and disagreements. Additionally, the approach incorporates **socio-structural and situational features** prevalent in contemporary media and communications.

The starting point here, specifically, is based on the notion that information manipulations are significantly influenced by digital technology and information accessibility, but, most importantly, also by national contextual specificities, namely the socio-cultural values and traditions in information provision and use. Among those are the defining characteristics of agenda setting and representations within the media, but, most importantly, individual factors, such as individual accessibility to media and digital skills, as well as socio-psychological aspects, including various (cognitive) biases, media awareness and related factors of moral reasoning in decisions making and information processing.

In this context, **universalist policy-making** requires heightened sensitivity and awareness of the risks associated with the spread of manipulative content and individual actor responses to dysfunctional communication situations. It is important to consider that although (dis)information vulnerability has become a part of the media policy debate, it nevertheless remains a domain of expert knowledge. Solutions are generated by taking a perspective "from above", such as proposing media literacy programs or advancing fact-checking by media organisations. Despite these efforts, there is insufficient knowledge and a lack of evidence-based understanding about the scope of effects of detrimental content on **people's reasoning**, thereby influencing societal integrity. Thus, the emphasis lies in assessing conceptual definitions and research findings that illuminate the risks of (dis)information vulnerability. In the end, a conceptual model is proposed, which integrates all these critical aspects.

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Introduction And Background

Despite the numerous scholarly attempts to clarify the fuzziness of the concept of **disruptive communication** (for some best examples of conceptual structurations of disinformation harm, see, for example, Wardle & Derakshan, 2017), also the variety of responses to combat it – ranging from structural cybersecurity solutions and legal protection systems on a governmental level to fact-checking and media literacy efforts implemented by various non-governmental organisations – there are still quite a few unanswered questions (Frau-Meigs, 2022).

The most important ones pertain to the necessary shift from responsive and reactionary to more active **disinformation risk awareness** raising via strategic policymaking moves as well as practical educational trainings and interventions. As anticipated, these moves would enhance the democratic epistemic capacities of the public, fostering the ability to employ effective strategies for distinguishing truth from falsifications (Gunn & Lynch, 2021). This, in turn, would enhance the resilience to digital information disruptions.

Alongside these efforts and responses, the issue defined as "(dis)information vulnerability" emerges as a major focal point of attention in developing societal resilience. Additionally, beyond the selection and analysis of the scope of disinformation, the emphasis on vulnerability aims to explore **socio-psychological aspects** that are anticipated to play a significant role in rebuilding trust, both in institutions and among fellow citizens, thereby ensuring societal integrity and resilience.

In response to the growing need to combat online disinformation, media literacy, fact-checking and platform governance initiatives are advocated by European institutions and collaborative initiatives, such as European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)[1], as well as national and regional Hubs, as the necessary means to the development of epistemic resilience and sustainable risk awareness among all stakeholders. These efforts hold significant importance in terms of mobilisation and sharing of expertise in governance actions, fact-checking, research innovations and media education on transnational, regional and local levels.

[1] The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO, https://edmo.eu) brings together fact-checkers, media literacy experts, and academic researchers to understand and analyse disinformation in collaboration with media organisations, online platforms and media literacy practitioners.

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Still, what seems lacking is not just a more precise awareness of the disinformation problem's scope or variety of responses to it (DIGIRES, 2022). Manipulative communication has always been present, but there is limited awareness about (dis)information vulnerability, i.e., the determining factors and the extent to which **individual information processing and public opinion formation processes** might be affected by changing communication conditions and strategic communicative aims and how people's trust in institutions and fellow citizens might be shattered.

Disinformation And Vulnerability As Contested Notions

To begin with, online disinformation calls to be defined as a wicked problem that is intricate, conflicting, and linked with difficulties rooted in rapidly changing environments. Wicked problems refer to a myriad of problem types, including environmental disasters, health risks, and social conflicts. These types of problems are characterised by high complexity and the absence of precise definitions. Online disinformation, too, can be defined as a "wicked problem" because of its deceptive nature that is inherently marked by significant ambiguity (Montgomery, 2020).

Formulating national policies to address such multifaceted problems and provide adequate solutions requires a holistic understanding of socio-structural factors. In the case of online disinformation and information-related manipulations, such communications condition is determined by the specificities of the national information ecosystem, which nowadays is characterised as a convergent, hybrid and transmedial communications environment (Chadwick, 2013; Jenkins, 2003; Jenkisn, 2006; Hancox & Klaebe, 2017). The "transmedial" characteristics signify variations in both infrastructure and content within a hybrid news ecosystem, encompassing both conventional news media as well as alternative channels. In addition to these factors, there is a wide range of stakeholders seeking communication-based solutions. Taking all these factors (infrastructural diversity, content multidimensionality, variations of interests among the communicating actors) into account, it seems plausible to contend that addressing online disinformation as a wicked problem cannot be approached with a single definitive problem definition leading to one successful solution.

When dealing with disinformation, in most cases, the focus is on fostering societal resilience as a desirable outcome (Apostol et al., 2022; Garrand, 2022), around which all solutions aimed at mitigating disinformation should revolve. On the other hand, "resilience" itself is a multidimensional concept and dynamic characteristic, which refers to an ambiguous social state on societal, organisational and individual (or group) levels and thus lacks a clear-cut definition (DIGIRES, 2022).

Given these complexities, an understanding evolves that all societal reactions to online (dis)information, along with susceptibility to manipulations and related vulnerabilities of

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decision-making in disruptive situations, should be examined within the context **of information processing within dysfunctional communication and the resultant societal conflicts.**

In such a view, it looks like (dis)information vulnerabilities arise on the basis of communication responses rooted in **(a) individual socio-demographic and socio-structurally-shaped** inequalities (determined by age, education and social capital, but also structural economic factors) and are highly influenced by **(b) situational factors** typical to specific national context and communication cultures.

A few additional words must be said in relation to situationally-determined topics and communication features. As revealed in various analyses (Juurvee & Arold, 2021; Kapantai et al., 2021; Lewandowsky & Van Der Linden, 2021), the spread of controversies and detrimental content, including hatred, supremacism, Islamophobia, racism, or misogyny (Vériter et al., 2020), goes hand in hand with the spread of misinformation, generating conflicts and accelerating disagreements. When reinforced through the effect of echo chambers, in most cases, these already established and deeply seated radical beliefs and national conflicts are becoming even more digitally visible and dangerous (Nguyen, 2020; Bjola & Papadakis, 2021; Di Mascio et al., 2021).

Briefly, the available research findings suggest that communication-related conflicts, disagreements, dilemmas and critical issues, as well as social narratives surrounding them, are intricately intertwined with the cultural and contextual aspects unique to each country (Bennett & Livingston, 2020; Kreiss, 2021). It seems plausible that the formation of conflicting views is influenced by enduring and unresolved societal struggles revolving around developmental histories, social upheavals, individual losses, and cultural traditions specific to each geographic, cultural, and socio-psychological context. Therefore, the analysis of vulnerabilities should be highly nuanced and sensitive to the specificities of both individual and contextual conditions.

Available examinations of “disinformation vulnerability” reveal a broad spectrum of adverse effects of disinformation on democratic institutions, national security, public health, economic stability, technological issues, overall societal well-being, and more. In analyses focused on disinformation threats to democracy, vulnerability is discussed as the risks of election manipulation by internal and external malignant actors (Kapantai et al., 2021; Lee, 2018; Shackelford et al., 2020; Vériter et al., 2020), utilisation of specific disinformation to enforce attacks against the legitimacy of social and political institutions, (Claudia, 2022; Di Mascio et al., 2021; Lewandowsky & Van Der Linden, 2021; Rodríguez-Pérez & Canel, 2023; Jerónimo & Esparza, 2022), as well as the rise of populist movements whose claims are reinforced in such an environment (Di Mascio et al., 2021; Tripodi et al., 2023). Through these actions, institutional trust is not the only thing that is affected. Due to the fact that polarisation leads to radicalisation and extremism, a direct national security challenge is posed by disinformation.

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In conclusion, situations linked with communication and opinion formation become highly sensitive and are exploited by foreign and local agents to magnify political populism. Consequently, this fuels polarisation and social fragmentation, affecting **societal integrity** (Manwaring & Holloway, 2023).

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As previously noted, the commonly identified adverse effect of disinformation is a decrease in social and institutional trust and the crisis of people's willingness to believe in facts. Because of respect for human rights and having narrower opportunities to legitimately deal with disinformation in cases related to beliefs and trust, democracies appear especially vulnerable to information attacks (Shadmy, 2022).

The experiences of recent years have demonstrated that achieving a balance between implementing regulatory measures and assuring citizens' communication and information rights in a changing information environment is a delicate task (Ala-Fossi et al., 2019; Balčytienė & Horowitz, 2023a). As illustratively explained in a comprehensive overview done by Bjola & Papadakis (2021) on the case of Finland, information manipulation harms the epistemological basis for truth-claim validation, which causes intensification of affective responses, empowers destructive counterpublics and reinforces the challenges towards multiculturalism and diversity.

With this perspective in mind, we contend that a national country's responses to the influx of disinformation and dysfunctional communication should be examined not only through structural measures such as available policy initiatives and governance decisions made or the number of education programs applied. Instead, developing strategies to combat disinformation should be treated as a socio-political and socio-cultural process on its own that involves the development of required awareness of arising vulnerabilities (DIGIRES, 2022).

Furthermore, for all those efforts to be successful and reach the aim of building **information inclusiveness and resilience** in contemporary societies, the spirit of sharing and co-creation must be complemented with an additional ideal of inclusiveness and dialogue (Balčytienė, 2023).

Risk Awareness

As mentioned earlier, we are dealing with intricate phenomena defined by scholarly concepts, each laden with diverse perceptions and meanings shaped by different decision-makers. Responses to a shifting social reality often reference socio-structural factors, societal

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resilience, public actions and more, which have found applications in policymaking and public discourse.

Since decision-making and information-processing are socio-psychological and socio-cultural processes that are sensitive to values and communication traditions relevant to a national context, as well as a country's geo-political location and memory politics[2], it is justified to think that such variations across countries will also be evident in strategic thinking and policymaking.

In the broadest terms, risk awareness in relation to information disorders, such as disinformation and misinformation, is perceived as a **horizontal strategy** that encompasses a holistic approach with several dimensions, such as policy-making, fact-checking, and media education. The approach applied in different analyses leans towards relying on the examination of structural-level characteristics (see, for example, Humprecht et al., 2020; 2021) or individual capacities (McDougall, 2019; Jolls, 2022) that are required to adequately respond and minimise the detrimental effects of disinformation.

In our analysis, we focus on and contend that a designated level of risk awareness and risk perception in a country is evidenced by strategic policymaking and the development of longer-term strategies to combat arising **inequalities and digital information vulnerability.**

The most common argumentation in scholarly writings rests on the idea that the resilience of societies and groups can be improved if risk awareness is institutionalised in policymaking and everyday practice. To achieve such an integrated practice, adequate situational awareness and risk perception is required at all social levels, including macro, mezzo, and micro levels (Balčytienė & Horowitz, 2023b; Balčytienė & Imbrasaitė, 2023). However, there are results provided revealing critically significant structural and organisational capacities of the media environment, such as the economic viability and trust in public service media (see, for example, Humprecht et al., 2020, 2021). Still, a human-centred approach has been overlooked in these comparative studies. In particular, finding adequate risk management solutions that take into account people's readiness, willingness and capacity for informed reaction to disinformation has been insufficient.

By advocating for our approach, we endorse the idea that information-related risks and crises are not solely linked to physical phenomena, such as digitally accelerated communication

[2] Cultural and contextual aspects of communications cultures are eloquently described in Hallin and Mancini (2004, 2012), Gross (2023), Balčytienė (2012).

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and overabundance of (dis)information. Instead, these risks reflect connections to the evolution of people's epistemic capacities of media awareness, which is influenced by agentive features, such as information processing strategies, cultural and social traditions, and psychological factors (Harambam, 2021).

Therefore, it is necessary to broaden the conceptualisation of "disinformation vulnerability" to incorporate new aspects of both the digital media environment and individual reactions. In other words, we argue that the understanding of individual (dis)information vulnerability should not be restricted to those factors traditionally viewed as segregating, such as socio-economic disparities like age, gender, years spent in education, and income. Additional factors must be considered to define **communicatively structured inequalities.**

Digitally Managed Exploitations

As a complex and multifaceted issue, disinformation and the risks it generates are so pervasive that no one can fully consider themselves entirely immune to its detrimental effects (DIGIRES, 2022).

Likewise, it must be acknowledged that the specific concept of vulnerability, frequently explored in research on responses to risk situations and disinformation as well, must be examined in combination with the concept of resilience. Its particular aspect, defined as "informational vulnerability", refers to an individual state that emerges in response to information disruptions. National (or societal) resilience to information disruptions, on the other hand, evolves over time, with different factors contributing to its final outcome, among which individual information capabilities (digital skills and media accessibility) and assessments of self-efficacy are among the predominant ones (Bandura, 2006; Huurne & Gutteling, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, disinformation often exploits prevailing societal divisions and conflicts. When confronted with conflicting narratives and generally dysfunctional communication, individuals tend to respond by relying on their biases and prejudices that confirm their pre-existing beliefs, thus further deepening divisions and increasing suspicions. As a result, trust declines, leading to societal disintegration, which exacerbates conflicts (Huurne & Gutteling, 2009).

Improving the resilience of people and communities is intricately linked to understanding the conditions that contribute to vulnerability. Therefore, a number of questions call to be addressed in such a context, namely:

- Which issues should be taken into account in analysing the determining factors of individual and social vulnerabilities to (dis)information, and how these should be taken into account in drafting policies for resilience capacities development?

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- How should vulnerable groups be defined?
- How comparative cross-country analyses of vulnerability can inform national policies in terms of common practices and nationally/culturally specific characteristics of resilience development?

In traditional sociological terms, **vulnerability** refers to distinct material or cultural features of a social group that might make them susceptible to exploitation, leading to **inequality**. The sociological perspective on vulnerability refers to different risk factors leading to **injustice** (Limantė & Tereškinas, 2022). Furthermore, vulnerability is socially constructed and is dependent on **power relations** existing in concrete social communications context. For example, in a digital communications environment, arising digitally shaped inequalities highlight the unequal distribution of digital (dis)advantages, such as information accessibility and reach (Nieminen, 2019; Ala-Fossi et al., 2019) and digital platforms infused media representations (i.e., online visibility), resulting in different levels of provided attention that results in different power arrangements between communications actors (Helberger, 2020).

As known, social conditions for information vulnerability tend to be most severe in undemocratic societies and communities, where legal rights are limited, unevenly distributed, or where the rule of law is not respected. In other words, vulnerability is often connected to socially underprivileged groups: non-citizens, the disabled, the elderly, the poor, etc. In online environments, demographic characteristics like age, education, and social status may play a role in conditioning vulnerability to information disorders, including specific types like conspiracy theories, fake news, and rumours.

For example, as for the age dimension, research studies tend to have a consensus that older people are more vulnerable to information disorders, including disinformation (Boulianne et al., 2022; Claudia, 2022; Golob et al., 2021; Miyamoto, 2021; Rodríguez-Pérez & Canel, 2023); yet it is recognised that young people have their own challenges, largely associated with the extensive use of digital technologies (Miyamoto, 2021; Monteiro et al., 2022). Also, education has some positive effects (Golob et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Pérez & Canel, 2023), though it is not always decisive (Boulianne et al., 2022; Claudia, 2022). On the other hand, a higher income is often mentioned as a factor that favours resilience.

As for the gender question, there are very different findings among scholars. Boulianne et al. (2022) argue that “being female is rarely significant as a factor in predicting awareness of, exposure to, and sharing of misinformation”, while the article by Rodríguez-Pérez & Canel (2023) states that women have less resilience to disinformation, which, according to their own commentary, contradicts other studies (Golob et al., 2021; Humprecht et al., 2021). One of the potential explanations may be conveyed from the Golob et al. (2021) study, where the authors elaborate that while having higher meta-reflexivity, women may have fewer opportunities to additionally check media content due to being more distracted in domestic spaces.

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All in all, the identification of vulnerabilities is selective in all societies, yet it is unlikely that any polity could free itself of vulnerabilities. It is important to consider that "vulnerability" is a dynamic and contested notion. Any individual or group can become vulnerable depending on several key determining factors, including **individual and socio-structural as well as situational features.**

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In summary, in the realm of a digital communication environment, society, its individuals, and groups may experience disinformation vulnerability stemming from their restricted control of (a) overarching structural conditions (macro level), (b) digital media representations and portrayals, (mezzo level), and (c) their agentive features as well as communication rights and digital capacities at the micro level (Frischlich & Humprecht, 2021; DIGIRES, 2022). On an individual level, in addition to communication rights, these capacities include specific aspects, such as physical or mental health, legal status, access to services and recognition.

Hence, (dis)information-based online exploitations might take on different forms, such as promotions of social and institutional distrust, advertising of populism and conspiratorial thinking, which can result in the deprivation of certain quality information resources or fundamental rights among these vulnerable groups.

In all these situations, "communicatively structured inequalities" or "digital information vulnerabilities" might be **directly exploited** with manipulative attacks, specifically constructed false narratives, and disinformation, leading to detrimental outcomes, such as manipulations in political opinion formation during elections, a decrease in trust in intuitions and fellow citizens, and more. In hybrid and transmedial information environments, receptive to different power configurations where authority rests in the hands of those who shape, manipulate, and direct information flows to align with their objectives, susceptibility to disinformation is a primary concern to policymakers and educators. One specific reason for that is that the influence of online (dis)information extends to modifying, facilitating, and impeding the power, particularly on those individuals and groups who lack attention or information proficiency.

Communicatively Structured Inequalities

In the broadest terms, constructive politics is defined as the pursuit of achieving a rationally motivated consensus, which, while challenging an ideal of deliberation in contemporary transmedial environments with manipulative content, remains an aspiration in the development of (constructive) communication (see also Steenbergen et al. 2003).

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To address the very broad challenge of currently dominating dysfunctional communication, much more focused scholarly attention towards human-actions-centred awareness that employs both critical reasoning and moral aspects and runs on agentive features of the meaning-making processes is required.

As already noted, discussions on societal resilience often center around the entirety of "capacities", which is broadly defined as the individual sense of empowerment and its epistemic and affective aspects, enabling individuals to respond to potential threats and harms (Hall & Lamont, 2013). Practising such capacity in a political news environment requires individual (political) agency (Hendrickx, 2022; Marin & Copeland, 2022; Hofmann, 2019). Empirical research on communication rights is especially informative and demonstrates that structural constraints within a society might limit such individual agentive sense, intentions, and actions (Ala-Fossi et al., 2019). These constraints may appear in the form of restricted access to news and political information, a deficiency in digital skills leading to ineffective participation in dialogic communication, and a lack of diversity in the representation of views, among other issues. Furthermore, what is crucial in digital environments is the algorithmic logic of information structuration and predetermined ways to access and use information. Thus, it should be considered that in digital environments, additional structural constraints, including factors such as time spent online as well as digital skills, which may influence human capacity to respond to potential (digital safety) threats, must be considered (see, for example, Coeckelbergh, 2022).

In the most general terms, human agency is defined as a collection of capabilities (Bandura, 2006) to address practical conditions that emerge from an individual's interaction with (mediated) reality. For example, in digitally mediated confrontations with content, such as accessing information on social networks, the agentive aspect of mental actions is dependent on the association between motivation and knowledge (arousal and other reactions), on the one hand, and changing media conditions, on the other. Besides, human capacities are instigated and driven by differing socio-psychological norms: just the mere fact that an agent's act is based on false belief does not constitutively impair his or her ability to make decisions and act (O'Brien & Soteriou, 2009). Furthermore, if we contend that agency is defined by the capacity to consciously make decisions based on one's own judgments, beliefs, and values and to respond to practical situations, then it is critically significant to assess how people reflect on such an individual awareness-related capacity (Booker, 2021; Steinert et al., 2022). In other words, do people feel empowered by the surrounding reality and motivated to participate and act, or, on the contrary, do they feel deprived?

Taking these matters into account, we introduce the concept of "communicatively structured inequalities" or "digital information vulnerabilities", which arise on the **basis of inequalities** in two broad areas of factors, including (a) socio-demographic-economic characteristics and (b) the socio-political profiles and capacities of individuals (see Figure 1).

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In relation to our analysis, **socio-demographic characteristics** unveil individual features, encompassing aspects such as age, years of completed education, profession, place of living and others. The classical analysis of vulnerability and social exclusion regards these features as factors of injustice and exclusion that hinder individual freedom and emancipation of individual autonomy. On the contrary, **agentive features, such as socio-psychological-political factors,** are interconnected with individual **self-efficacy**: these features are primarily rooted in various aspects of individual awareness stemming from communication traditions and values, media usage and expression of trust. In this regard, vulnerability arises in response to individual self-efficacy and social trust variations.

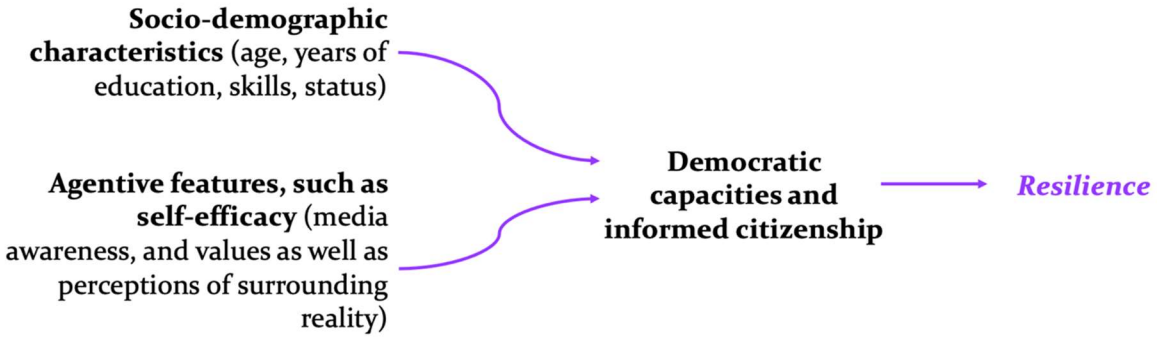

Figure 1. Communicatively structured inequalities and their relation to democratic capacities required for informed citizenship, which drives civic resilience.

In this conceptual framework centered on individual agency, autonomy manifests when individuals possess conscious ability (awareness) to actively shape their own lives (see Figure 2). Likewise, self-construction within a (mass networked or interpersonal) communication defines the connection between communication and autonomy, as individuals acquire capacities that enable them to assume the role of a "subject". However, to make independent decisions and choose ethically valid options in the (digital) public realm, awareness must come before action-making, enabling an understanding of the consequences associated with (online) choices.

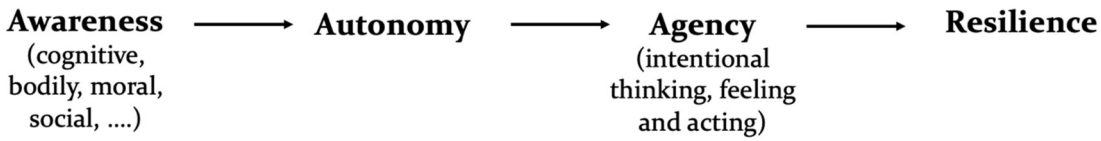

Figure 2. The interplay between awareness, autonomy and agency factors.

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In typical communication situations, individuals often rely on automatic decision-making. As widely recognised, automaticity is susceptible to various cognitive biases that lead to various decision-making failures. Hence, developing democratic capacities in addition to democratic skills is necessary to achieve a mode of thoughtful, informed, and intentional decision-making that positively influences effective communications and dialogue.

In this scenario, **societal and civic resilience** represents an enhanced, autonomous, and well-informed ability to confront and influence change. This capability relies on both individual and societal structures facilitated by social groups and a functional and diverse media system. In a general sense, “civic resilience” encompasses a broader idea of “informed citizenship”, signifying a collective capability of society, the national media landscape, and individuals to withstand information disorders.

In conclusion, the schematic model designed here is constructed on the foundational idea that individual democratic capacities of the public should evolve to align with the complexities of (digital) communications infrastructures as well as the changing information ecosystems. Therefore, in addition to promoting ideas of critical thinking (which is a common theme in all media literacy-related policies and education programs), there is a need to raise and foster individual awareness of “effective communication” practices along with a practical culture of engaging in dialogic communication.

Discussion And Conclusion

There is no single answer to what makes some societies more resilient than others and which strategies in countering disinformation work best in which geographic and cultural context.

Building resilience to disinformation by promoting institutional transparency and accountability and strengthening people's political engagement and media literacy capacities are important steps in mitigating the impact of disinformation on societal trust. Still, what needs to be taken into account is the fact that democracies with lower degrees of institutional and interpersonal trust appear especially vulnerable (Balčytienė, 2021) in situations of heightened uncertainty and might be more prone to populist manipulations (Ramonaitė, 2023). Nevertheless, even in more mature democracies, with high levels of institutional trust, press freedom, and media literacy, online disinformation poses challenges to national security and societal coherence (Aslama-Horowitz et al., 2021).

Public perceptions and responses to risk are subjective. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a multidisciplinary research approach to individual and group response analysis to the implications of manipulative content and dysfunctional communication. By examining the socio-economic factors behind related digital information vulnerabilities, one can find solutions for information-linked inequalities, such as variations in digital skills, distrust in institutions, growing support for political populism and similar expressions. On the one hand,

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policy responses promoting inclusive communication and communication rights must be put forward. In addition, these responses should be empowered with practical guidelines for ethical communication. But, beyond strategic policy thinking and risk awareness, a comprehensive framework of engaging interventions by different public and private actors needs to be pursued.

Hence, in addition to identifying vulnerable groups, the proposed conceptual framework aims to establish new networks and reinforce existing levels of **collaboration** and networking between state and business organisations, media, creative industries, civil society groups and the general public, all working to safeguard the right to reliable information. Hence, a significant issue in this context is tied to **actor inclusiveness and stakeholder cooperation.** Simultaneously, it is understood that the establishment of a **dialogic culture of communication** presents a challenge that numerous stakeholders are only now beginning to recognise (DIGIRES, 2022).

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In summary, the democratic capacities of the public must evolve to align with the complexities of online communication environments and changing news ecosystems. This implies that, in addition to the promotion of critical thinking (which is a common theme in all media literacy policies), there is a need to raise and foster awareness of **accountable and responsible communication** practices along with a practical culture of engaging in dialogic communication.

The current crises in all societies are caused by complex and multiple factors, such as the enduring climate changes and environmental threats, followed by economic challenges and global migration, health risks and post-pandemic issues, Russian aggression and war in Ukraine, and related geopolitical challenges to security in Europe.

Additionally, there is a growing feeling of a rapidly approaching revolutionary **epistemic shift** that arises from accelerated digitalisation and technological AI innovations. It becomes crucial to elevate digital (media and information) literacy, along with critical thinking and related ethical decision-making actions, to the stats of “meta power”. Such transformation ensures that knowledge and capacities of ethical reasoning must become a sustainable, democratic, resilience-oriented, and mutually empowering force, offering a decisive response to manipulations and attacks on human rights and democracy. This must become a force that grows “from below” – from actions of citizens of all age groups, expertise, professions, and social standings. A force for which space for development is created by structures and institutions “from above” – those of government, IT, media, education, and cultural services.

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