European Digital Media Observatory

# D.4.b Report on the Status of Academic Research on Disinformation in the EU

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Final version

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the status of academic research on disinformation in the EU. Here, we present trends and emerging topics in the field of mis- and disinformation research, focusing on research articles published in the year 2023. As per the criteria outlined by Bak, Walter and Bechmann (2023), the focus of our systematic filtering process was on academic publications where disinformation (or misinformation/similar topics) was addressed and publications where interactions or experiences with digital media were involved. This filtering process resulted in 188 articles. Overall, Communication, was the most dominant research field, with surveys being the most common source of data. Spain was the region with the most investigations, and research focusing on public perceptions emerged as the most frequent. The repository with all research articles, from 2015 onwards, can be accessed here: https://edmo.eu/resources/repositories/scientific-publications-repository/

# 2. RESEARCH "AT SCALE"

One of the criteria we coded for, but did not use as an inclusion criteria—contrary to Bak and colleagues (2023)—was whether or not the research investigated disinformation "at scale". Of our 188 articles, 34 articles could be identified as studying disinformation (or misinformation/similar topics) at scale. Eighty-four of the articles were coded as "unspecific", as it was not possible to infer the scalability of the research from its abstract alone. The remaining articles (70) were identifiably not investigating disinformation at scale (e.g., they were focusing on a single, or a few populations)

# 3. FIELD OF RESEARCH

As visible in Figure 1, the research field best represented amongst the articles is Communication, followed by Computer Science and Psychology. Notable is the sheer diversity of fields covering disinformation (or misinformation/similar topics), with it being relatively less surprising to see research fields such as Health Care Sciences trending in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.
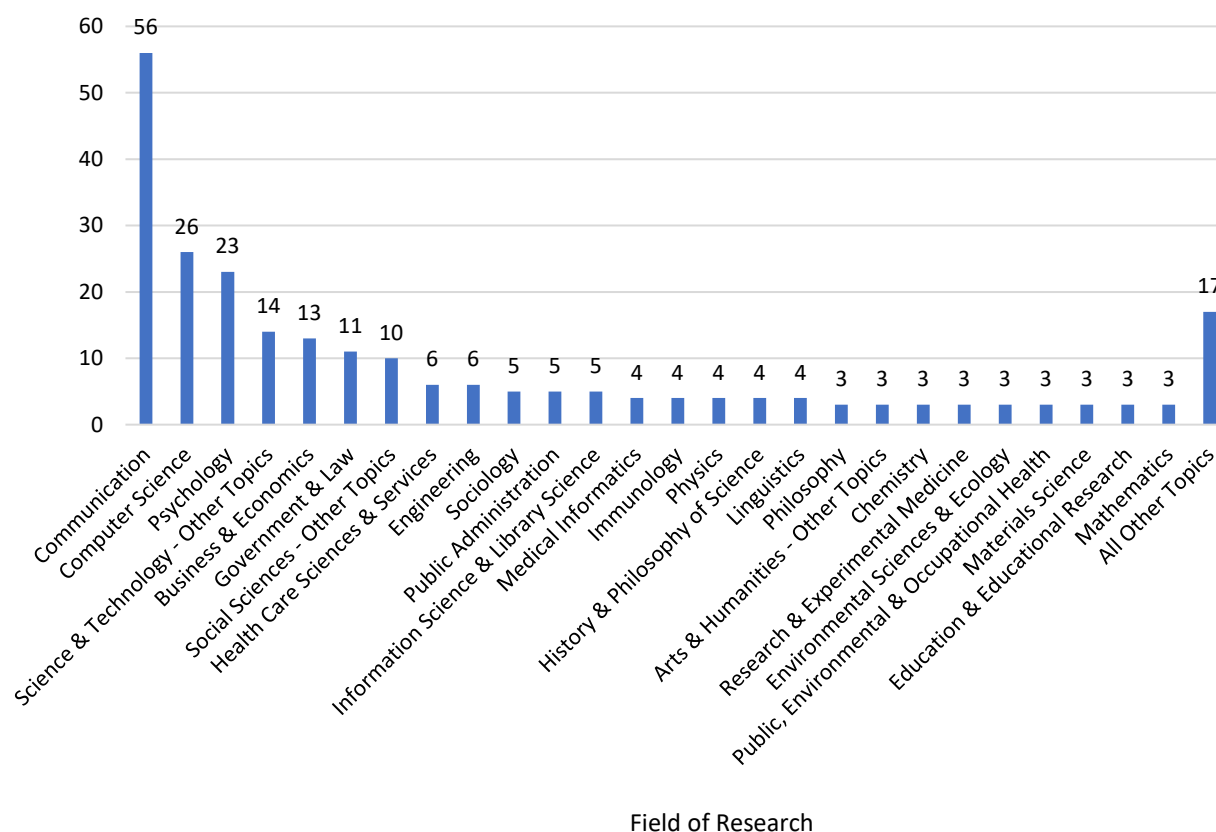
Figure 1: Number of articles by research field

## 4.    DATA SOURCE(S)

The articles in our search investigating disinformation (or misinformation/similar topics) obtained their data from a variety of different sources (see Figure 2). Most commonly, survey data and experimental data was used, followed by investigations into social media. It should be noted that some articles explicitly mentioned a platform (e.g., Twitter) whereas others broadly mentioned social media, hence the distinct categories.
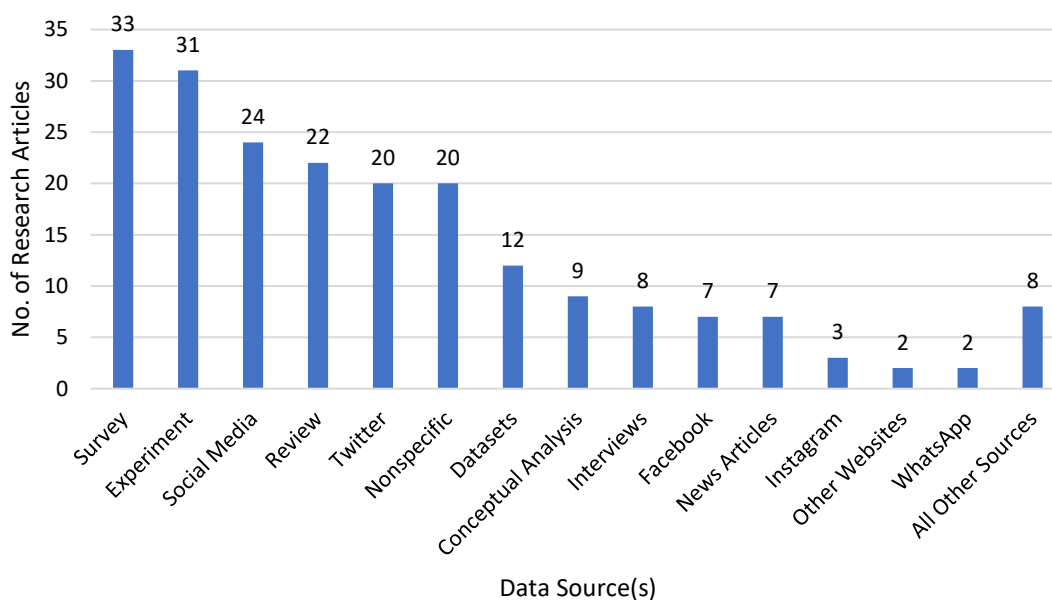
*Figure 2: Number of articles by sources of data*

# 5. REGION OF INTEREST

Our search revealed that most of the articles focused on non-specific regions (125) reflecting the volume of investigations involving digital media such as globally used platforms. The country which emerged with most investigations in the year 2023 was Spain (17). Interestingly, despite the focus on EU-specific research, the UK (10) and the US (9) were still highly represented in disinformation research, followed by Italy (5).
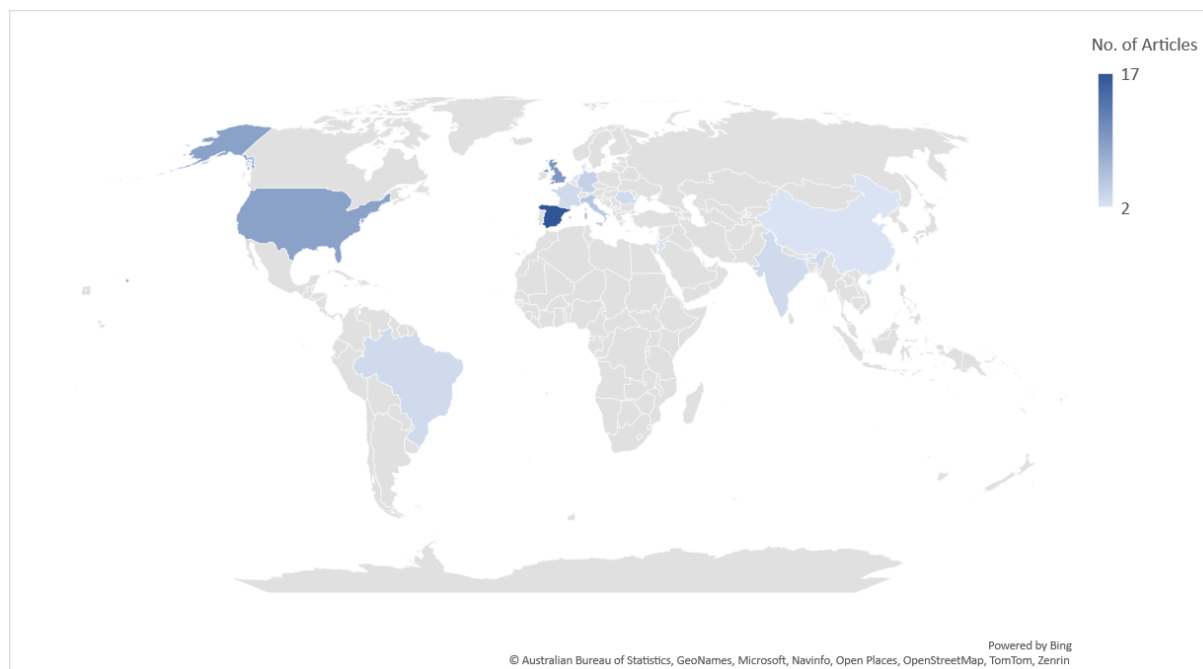
*Figure 3: Number of articles by geographical region of interest. Non-specific (125), Spain (17), UK (10), US (9), Italy (5), Latin America (5), Germany (4), Romania (3), India (3), France (3), Brazil (3), Netherlands (2) Denmark (2), China (2), EU (2), Jordan (2), Greece (1), Eastern Europe (1), Belgium (1), Chile (1), East Asia (1), Georgia (1), Latvia (1), Mexico (1), Egypt (1), Canada (1).*

## 6.    TOPIC CATEGORY

After conducting our search, we manually categorised each article based on the topics that were most prominently addressed in the research. In line with surveys being the most common source of data in investigations, Public Perceptions research was most frequently noted as a prominent topic across articles, with 52 being categorised as such. This was followed by categories like Detection (35) and Propagation (31); see Figure 4 for the most popular topics.
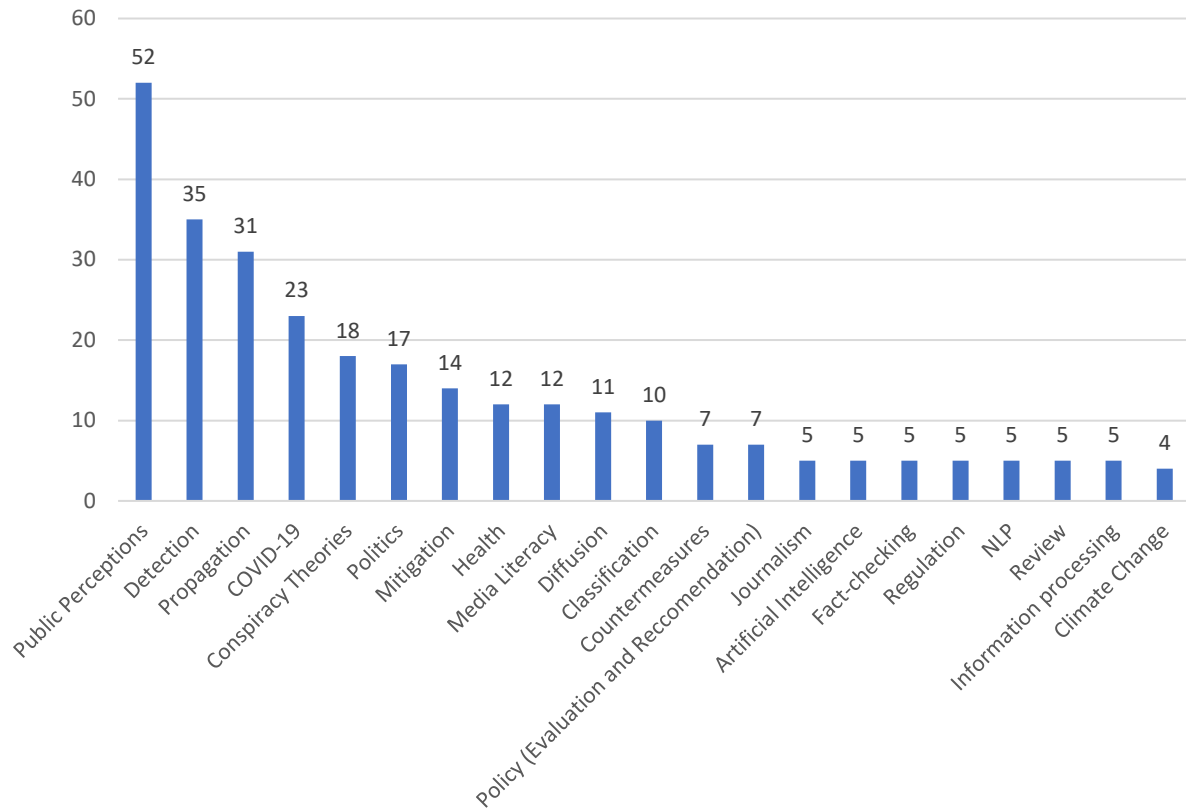
*Figure 4: Number of articles by topic category*