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 and beyond. Here, we present trends and emerging topics in the field of mis- and disinformation research, focusing on research articles published in the year 2024. As per the criteria outlined by Bak, Walter and Bechmann[1], and in line with previous reports, 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 160 articles. Overall, Communication and Media studies was once again the most dominant research field, with Twitter being the most common source of data. Spain was also the region with the most investigations once again, and research focusing on detection 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—was whether or not the research investigated disinformation "at scale". Of our 160 articles, 33 articles could be identified as studying disinformation (or misinformation/similar topics) at scale. Thirty-one 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 (96) 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 and Media Studies, followed by Computer Science and Political Science. Notable is the sheer diversity of fields covering disinformation (or misinformation/similar topics) that are outside of the most popular fields, suggesting a wider range of fields are delving into the investigation of this topic. Compared to previous years, the Health-related fields have declined, indicative of a gradual downwards trend after a surge of COVID-19 research.

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[1] Bak, P. D. P., Walter, J. G., & Bechmann, A. (2023). Digital false information at scale in the European Union: Current state of research in various disciplines, and future directions. *new media & society*, *25*(10), 2800-2819.
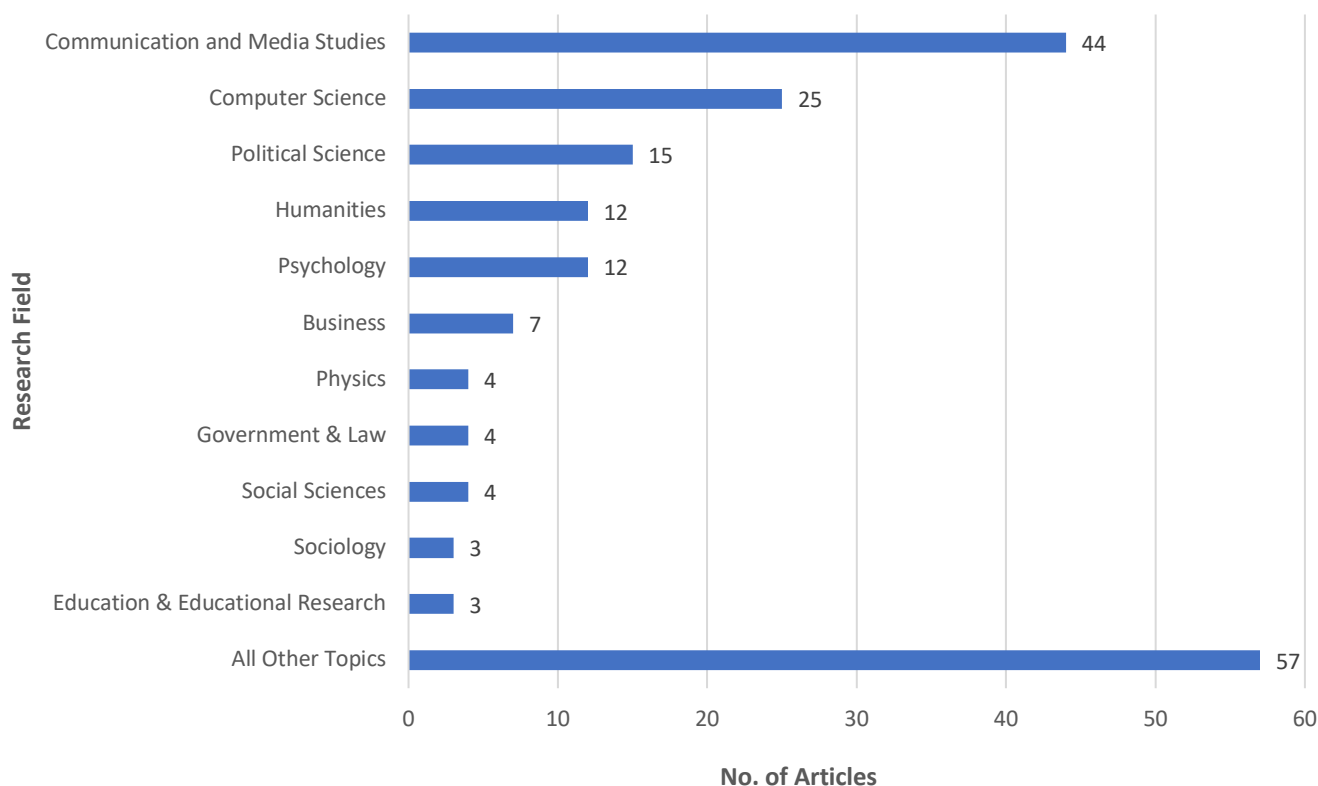
Figure 1: Number of articles by research field

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 in 2024, Twitter was used a source of data, followed by surveys and experiments. Reviews were the second most common type of inquiry. Compared to previous years, it is once again the diversity of other sources of data that is most notable. Some of these other sources include Telegram, Pinterest, and 4chan. It should be noted that some articles explicitly mentioned a platform (e.g., Twitter) whereas others broadly mentioned social media, hence the distinct categories.
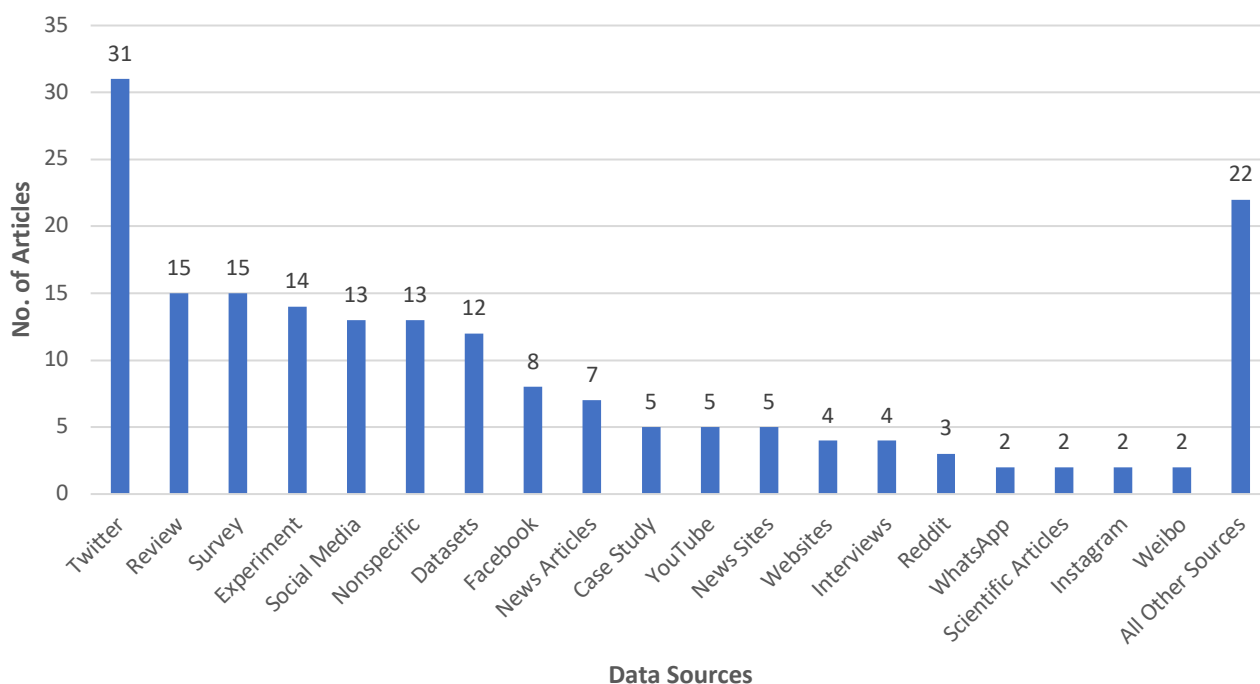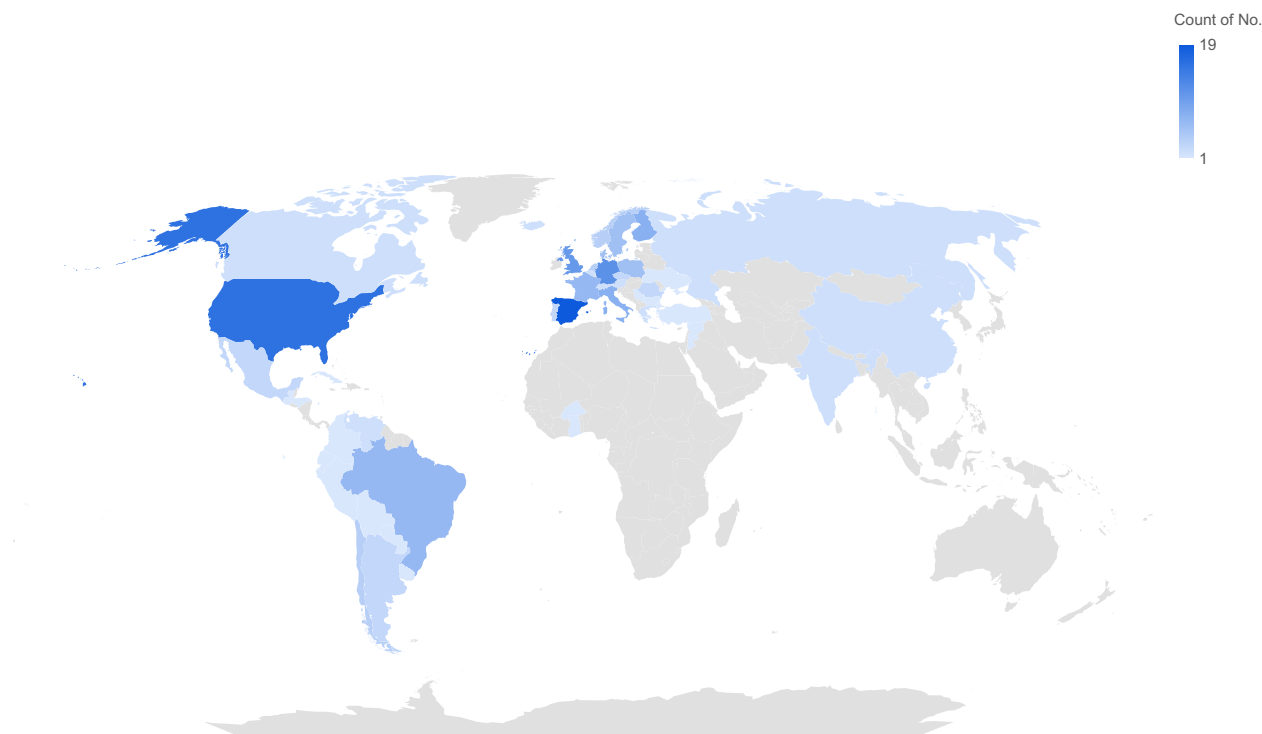
Figure 2: Number of articles by sources of data

5.   REGION OF INTEREST

Our search revealed that most of the articles focused on regions that were not specified in the abstract (79). For the second year in a row, the country which emerged with most investigations was Spain (19). The next EU country was Germany (12), followed by Finland and Italy (8). Interestingly, despite the focus on EU-specific research, the US (16) and the UK (11) were still highly represented in disinformation research, followed by Brazil (7). Compared to previous years, a wider range of countries outside of North America and Europe were of regional interest in dis/misinformation research in the year 2024, highlighting the emerging global relevance of this topic.

Figure 3: Number of articles by geographical region of interest. Non-specific (79), Spain (19), USA (16), Germany (12), UK (11), Finland, Italy (8), France, Brazil (7), Poland, Denmark, Europe, Sweden (6) Chile, Netherlands, Norway (4), Portugal, EU, Romania, Mexico, Argentina, Czech Republic (3), Switzerland, Canada, Greece, Belgium, Venezuela, China, India, Austria, Russia, Iceland (2), Turkey, Ecuador, Latin America, Colombia, North America, Ukraine, Ghana, Bolivia, Paraguay, Burkina Faso, Peru, Syria, Bulgaria, Jordan, Guatemala, Uruguay, Honduras, Cuba, Hong Kong, Serbia (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, based on the abstract and title only. In 2024, research focused on detection was most frequently noted as a prominent topic across articles, with 26 being categorised as such. This was followed by categories like Countermeasures and Public Perceptions (19); see Figure 4 for the most popular topics. Compared to previous years, there has been a sharp increase in research focusing on the Russia-Ukraine war, and a steady decrease in research focusing on COVID-19.
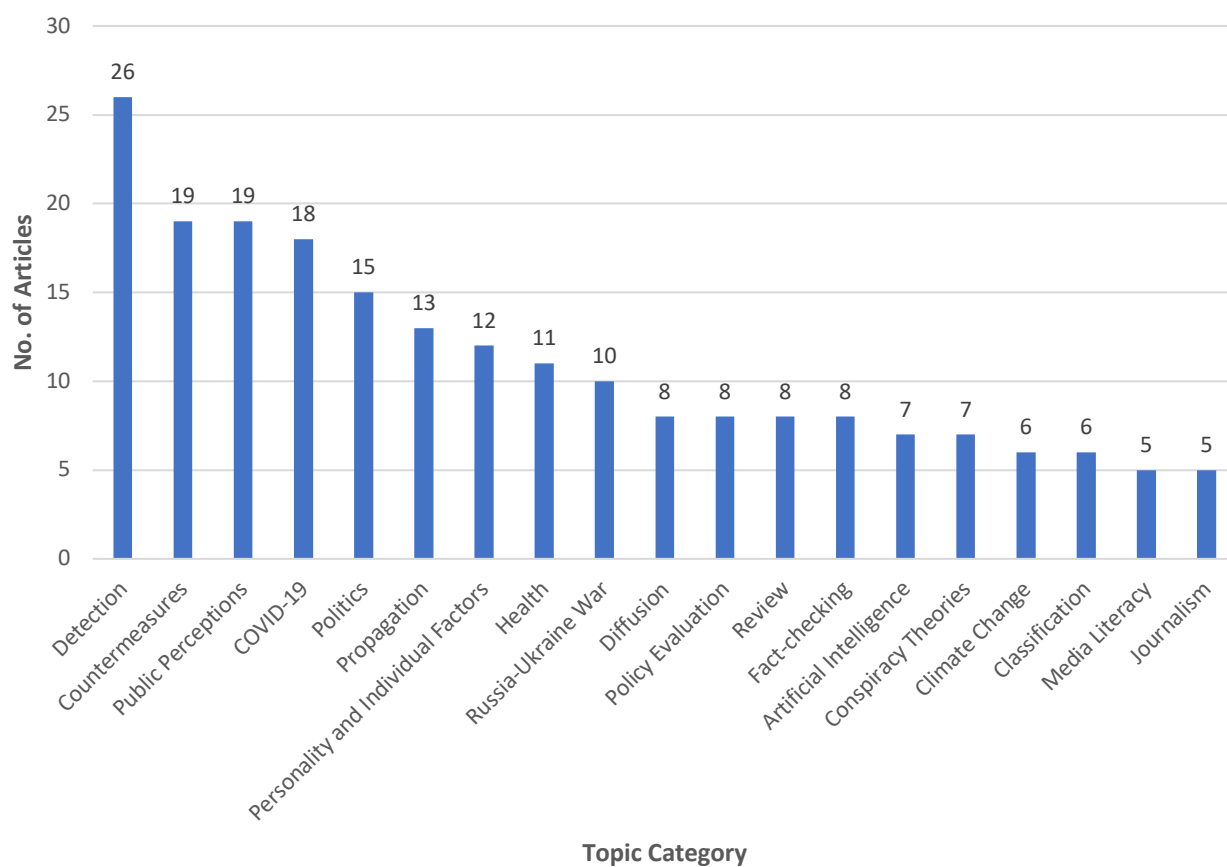
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Figure 4: Number of articles by topic category