Testing Children and Adolescents’ Ability to Identify Fake News: A Combined Design of Quasi-Experiment and Group Discussions

# Keywords

* fake news and online information
* children and adolescents and fake news
* vulnerability to fake news

# Details

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## Sample

Similarly to the previous study, the first part of this research is based on exploratory research, using one-group post-test only quasi-experimental design, mixed with qualitative debriefing sessions on a sample of N = 54 Romanian children and teenagers (26 girls and 28 boys) from two age categories: 10–11 years old and 18–19 years old. All participants lived in the same small city and went to a public school with no fake news, digital literacy, or online skills programs. Parental consent for all minor participants was obtained before the study.

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

# Abstract

Nowadays, people increasingly choose to turn to the Internet and especially to social media for news and other types of content, while often not questioning the trustworthiness of the information. An acute form of this problem is that children and adolescents tend to include the use of new technologies in all the aspects of their daily life, yet most of them are unable to distinguish between fake news and trustful information in an online environment. This study is based on a Dutch empirical study and was conducted in Romania to examine whether schoolchildren and adolescents were able to identify a hoax website as fake, using a self-administrative questionnaire and open group discussions about the given online source. Similar to other studies based on the same research design, this research aims to explore the vulnerability of students to fake news and the way they experience an experimental situation in which they are exposed to online fake information. This exploratory study revealed that both children and adolescents are not preoccupied with the trustworthiness of the information they are exposed to in social media. While only 4 of the 54 students stated that they would not choose to save a fake animal (from a hoax website), all four of them had reasons that proved that they did not perceive the information as being a hoax. Thus, participants proved that they would act upon being exposed to fake information even when they do not trust the source.

# Outcome

"In Romania, only 3 of the 33 children and 1 of the 21 adolescents indicated that they would not sign a petition to save the jackalope. Even though, following the Loos et al. [2] study’s design, this would suggest that the four respondents perceived the website as fake, their motives demonstrated the contrary—“No, because it is a dangerous creature”, “No, as it is an aggressive animal”, “No, because it kills”. Consequently, when analyzing this study’s results or similar studies’ findings, the respondents’ motives should be considered. Accordingly, it would be recommended for future similar studies to include open discussions, interviews, or focus groups in their debriefing sessions, with the purpose of understanding the results accurately."