Report on the role of critical information skills in recognising mis- and disinformation

# Details

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Report and working paper

## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Literacy and skills
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities

## Sample

Young people between 12 and 15 years old in three European countries: Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Finland.

## Implications For Educators About

# Abstract

Online mis- and disinformation poses threats to societies and individuals, and young people form a group that may be particularly vulnerable to the potential negative consequences of exposure to such false information on the internet and on social media. Therefore, digital skills, news literacy, and particularly the skills that allow them to evaluate the credibility of online news and information and to distinguish between true and false, have become increasingly essential.

This report presents the findings from a multi-method study about young people’s (12 to 15 years old) skills to cope with online mis- and disinformation in three countries: Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Finland. Through an online survey, a news exposure phase comprising a credibility evaluation performance test, and focus groups, this study aimed (1) to gain more insight into how 12- to 15-year-olds understand and engage with online news; and (2) to assess to what degree they are able to differentiate between truths and falsehoods and how they arrive at these judgments, and to understand the role of digital skills in these processes.

# Outcome

"This report presents the findings from a multi-method study about young people’s (12 to 15 years old) skills to cope with online mis- and disinformation in three countries: Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Finland. Through an online survey, a news exposure phase comprising a credibility evaluation performance test, and focus groups, this study aimed (1) to gain more insight into how 12- to 15-year-olds understand and engage with online news; and (2) to assess to what degree they are able to differentiate between truths and falsehoods and how they arrive at these judgments, and to understand the role of digital skills in these processes.
The findings show that social media constitute young people’s main way of keeping up to date with current events, followed by more traditional news channels such as television and radio. The findings particularly illustrate the strong position of public service media in this news landscape: across the entire sample, the news from sources associated with the public broadcaster was seen as the most reliable. While the participants’ survey responses suggest they perceived their information navigation and processing skills, which include credibility evaluation skills, to be the lowest of all digital skill dimensions outlined in the youth Digital Skills Indicator (yDSI; Helsper et al., 20201), overall they reported good scores on the credibility evaluation performance test, with the majority of participants with valid responses arriving at correct credibility judgements.
The participants in this study generally had a good awareness of the presence of mis- and disinformation on the internet and on social media, and of the importance of credibility evaluation skills to build resilience and to avoid being misled by such falsehoods. However, it seemed that their knowledge about significant credibility cues, or elements of the news message that signal credibility, sometimes remained rather superficial and limited to source and visual cues, and their awareness regarding elements that were less on the surface and less straightforward did not always emerge from the focus group discussions.
The findings from this study suggest that existing news literacy and credibility evaluation interventions seem to be effective, as the participants generally reported correct credibility evaluations in the performance test and showed good knowledge relating to online news credibility during the focus groups. However, we would like to highlight the importance of a continuing allocation of resources to the stimulation of information navigation and processing skills in order to tackle skills and knowledge that stimulate attention to less straightforward or superficial credibility cues. Lastly, it is important to note that in stimulating credibility evaluation skills, we should also be wary of potential adverse effects relating to increased scepticism about mainstream news media and young people turning to unreliable alternative sources instead." (Vissenberg et al., 2022, p.4).