

POSTER PROPOSAL

Information Literacy of Young Adults at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek: Online Disinformation, Misinformation, and Malinformation

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Extended Abstract

While searching for information on the Internet, and especially on social media, many users are faced with a plethora of harmful content in the form of disinformation – false information created and shared with an intention of deception, misinformation – false information shared unintentionally, and malinformation – true information shared with the intent of harming other people. The amount of these types of information differs from website to website. Scientific databases are websites that do not tolerate any kind of harmful content, so they are under constant supervision from information sciences experts who thoroughly verify all content that is published there. However, those types of websites are usually partially open source. Some offer free access to anyone interested in the content they provide, while others require registration via credentials given to users by their university or any other scientific or research institution. The problem lies in perusing and searching for information on websites for everyday use – forums, blogs, audio-visual content websites, news portals, and, above all, social media. Transfer of information on those web places is almost entirely unregulated, which is to say that a user can share virtually any sort of news, photo, video or any other file with other users. The criteria for assessing information are almost completely non-existent – neither relevance nor expediency nor accuracy of what is published is verified. That phenomenon goes hand in hand with the fact that a user visits such a website mainly with the goal of amusement and relaxation, so they will not consciously evaluate information they find there in a detailed manner, as they might in the case of searching through a scientific database. This phenomenon of coming across harmful web content is notably apparent when it comes to university students who satisfy most of their information needs via online searching. These searches mainly come down to quick Google queries or scrolling through front pages of news portals and social networks. Both aforementioned information sources are filled with false information and deceptive content published both accidentally and intentionally. While writing articles, the primary role of which is to inform the reader, journalists often share either mal-information or information that is in its essence true, but is written in such a way to purposefully deceive the reader. Despite that, with newspapers there is more control and evaluation of what is published than with social media, the primary characteristic of which is the ability of a user to post their own opinion, often without any elaboration. Social networks are, assuredly, significantly more attractive to the average user than

regulated web spaces because they enable them to share their own opinions, as well as assess the ones posted by other users with no obstruction. These possibilities are extremely dangerous for a person with a lower level of information literacy because they will be more prone to evaluating the given content on the basis of other readers' reception of it, rather than the qualitative analysis of information or critical thinking. The way university students today will use that information highly depends on their level of information literacy, which, despite their coming of age with the Internet and social media, significantly differs between individuals. Their information sharing habits are directly tied to their information evaluation habits, so some will frivolously share information, while others will critically evaluate it and consult other reliable information sources. One possible reason for this phenomenon is the uneven and unstandardized practice of information literacy education during early and preschool age until adolescence. It has been shown that even in the twenty-first century there is a great disharmony in the university students' ability to think critically and effectively evaluate information. The goal of this research is to clearly define the dependence of those two phenomena on the level of academic education using the example of the humanities and social sciences. The level of university students' information literacy will be researched via a survey conducted among students of the Information Sciences Department, as well as the English Language and Literature Department of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, part of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek. The survey will be conducted from October, 2022 until January, 2023 among first-, second-, and third-year undergraduate students, as well as first- and second- year graduate students. The survey will clearly show the differences in information literacy between students who are explicitly educated and the students who are not even familiar with the term and all the connotations attached to it.

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