Attitude of the Belarusian Internet Audience Towards Fake News

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The situation with the number of coronavirus COVID-19 infections in Belarus had rapidly worsened in September-October, with a lot of discussions regarding the possibility of using the larger spectrum of WHO-recommended vaccines for vaccination of Belarusian citizens and, of course, also regarding the mandatory mask regime and its scandalous repealing, COVID-dissidence, disinformation.

One of the most relevant digital skills of the Internet audience today is the ability to detect and recognize unreliable information (fake news) and factoids. This skill is one of the most basic from the point of view of media literacy.

Let us take a look at the attitude of the Belarusian Internet audience aged 15-74 towards fake news based on the data of the study "Media Consumption and Media Literacy in Belarus in August 2021" conducted by the Baltic Internet Policy Initiative in August 2021.
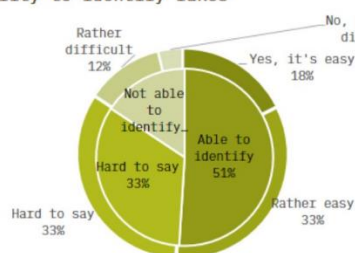
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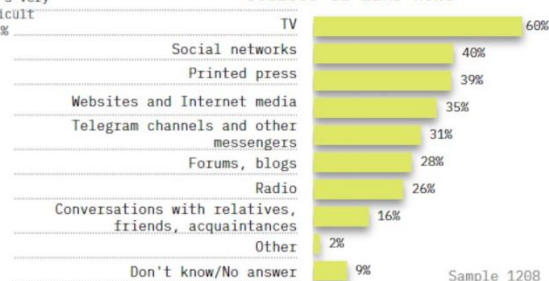Baltic Internet Policy Initiative

Ability to Identify Fakes

The question was formulated as: "Do you think you can identify situations when the media wants to manipulate or change the opinion of residents, by, for example, spreading fake / false news, propaganda, disinformation, etc.?"

Ability to determine a fake
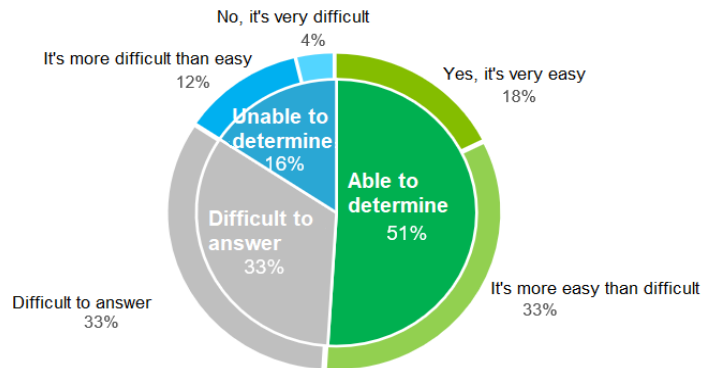
Seems like a great result: half of the respondents believe that they can identify fake news and about a third are not sure about it.

Let's consider socio-demographic characteristics to try to understand who is so optimistic about false information.

The first socio-demographic characteristic is gender:

The chart immediately demonstrates how much more optimistic male respondents are regarding their ability to identify fake information in comparison to women who took part in the survey.

Distribution by age:
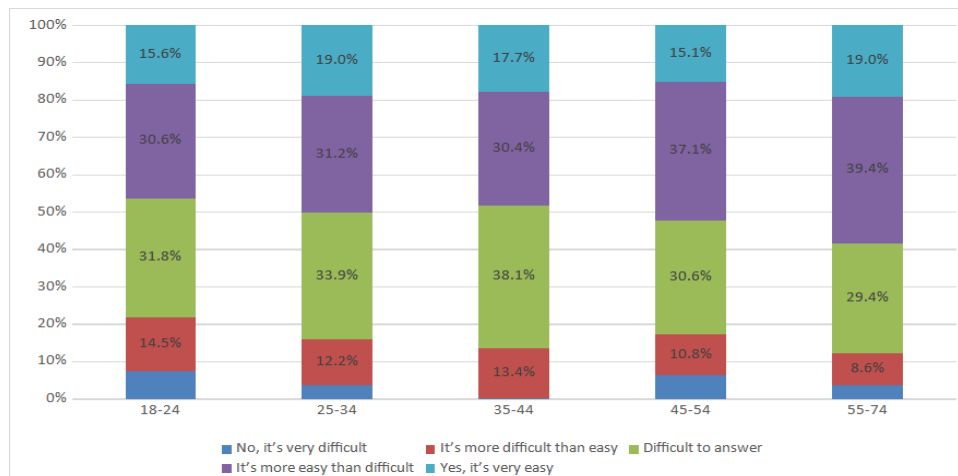
The results turn out to be completely unexpected: The older people are, the more they feel that they can easily identify inaccurate information. The largest number of those who found it difficult to answer is found among the young audience aged 18-24.
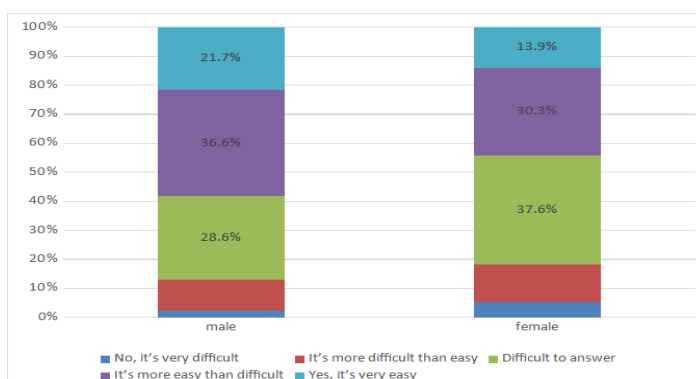
Based on geographical location: the proportion of people that believe that they can easily determine fake news ranges from 46.4% in the Vitebsk region to 54.9% in Minsk. The number of those who find it difficult to answer varies from 29.4% in Minsk to 38% in the Mogilev region.

An important question in the study was regarding the sources used for obtaining information. Let's consider five main ones (websites and online media, social networks, word of mouth, telegram channels or other messengers, television):

What are the sources you use most frequently to obtain news and needed information?

Internet sites and media — 71%, 12%, 59%

Social networks — 54%, 5%, 49%

Discussions with relatives, friends, acquaintances — 35%, 34%

Telegram channels and other messengers — 34%, 31%

Television — 31%, 28%

- This source only
- Among other sources of news
- Not used
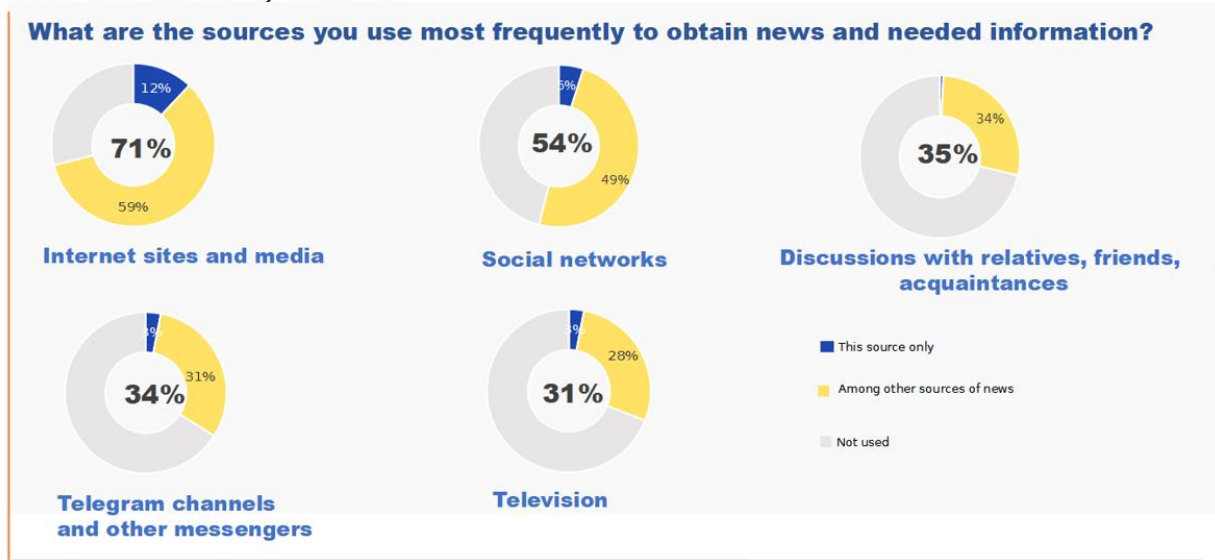
Source: «Media Consumption and Media Literacy in Belarus in August 2021»
https://digitalskills.by/2021/10/08/prezentatsiya-i-obsuzhdenie-issledovaniya-mediapotreblenie-i-mediagramotnost-v-belarusi-v-avguste-2021/

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Members of the Belarusian Internet audience predominantly use several sources of information. For example, only television or only telegram channels, as the only source of information for three 3% of the respondents.

Now let's create a correlation with the scrutinized issue:

	Internet sites/media	Social networks	Dicsussions with relatives, friends, acquaintances	Telegram channels and other messengers	Television
Yes, it's very easy	17.6%	15.6%	14.8%	21.4%	12.6%
It's more easy than difficult	37.0%	33.0%	33.8%	40.0%	27.7%
Difficult to answer	32.0%	34.3%	34.3%	28.4%	40.8%
It's more difficult than easy	11.9%	13.4%	14.8%	8.5%	14.2%
No, it's very difficult					4.7%

- No, it's very difficult
- It's more difficult than easy
- Difficult to answer
- It's more easy than difficult
- Yes, it's very easy

The respondents who indicated telegram channels or other messengers as the source of information believe that they can easily recognize fake information.

The respondents, who indicated television as their source of information, were most skeptical of their skills and believed that it is difficult to detect fake news.

Let's compare two main messengers used as sources for news: Telegram and Viber
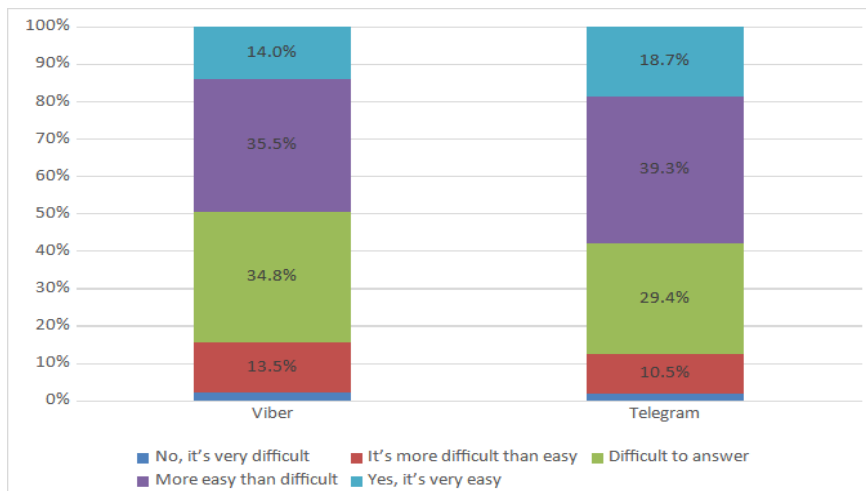
Telegram users assume that they can easily recognize false information.

An interesting behavioral question: what news sites do you use most often in order to find out the news, the necessary information?
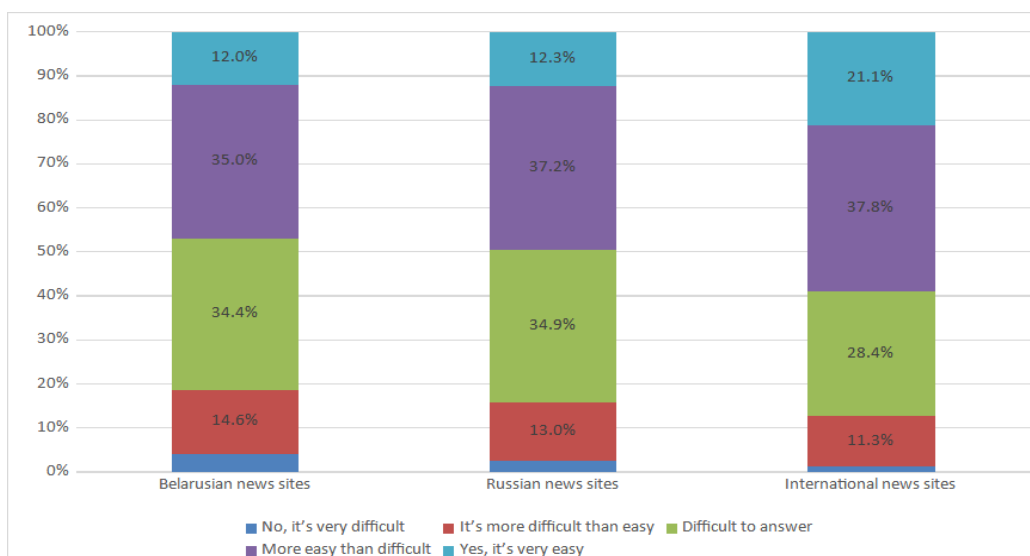
Readers of international news sites assume they can easily spot fake news, and there were fewer of those who responded with "difficult to answer" among those than among readers of other news sites.

The socio-demographic portrait of "optimists" regarding recognizing fakes: a man over 45, living in Minsk.

Bearing in mind that this study was conducted by a survey method, it makes sense to pay more attention to the issues of media literacy in these target groups.

Sources of Fake News

Question: Based on your experience, where do you most often come across fake news?

Sources of fake news

Source	Percentage
Television	60%
Social networks	40%
Printed press (newspapers, magazines)	39%
Internet sited and internet media	35%
Telegram channels and other media	31%
Forums, blogs	28%
Radio	26%
Discussions with relatives, friends, acquaintances	16%
Other	2%
Difficult to answer	9%
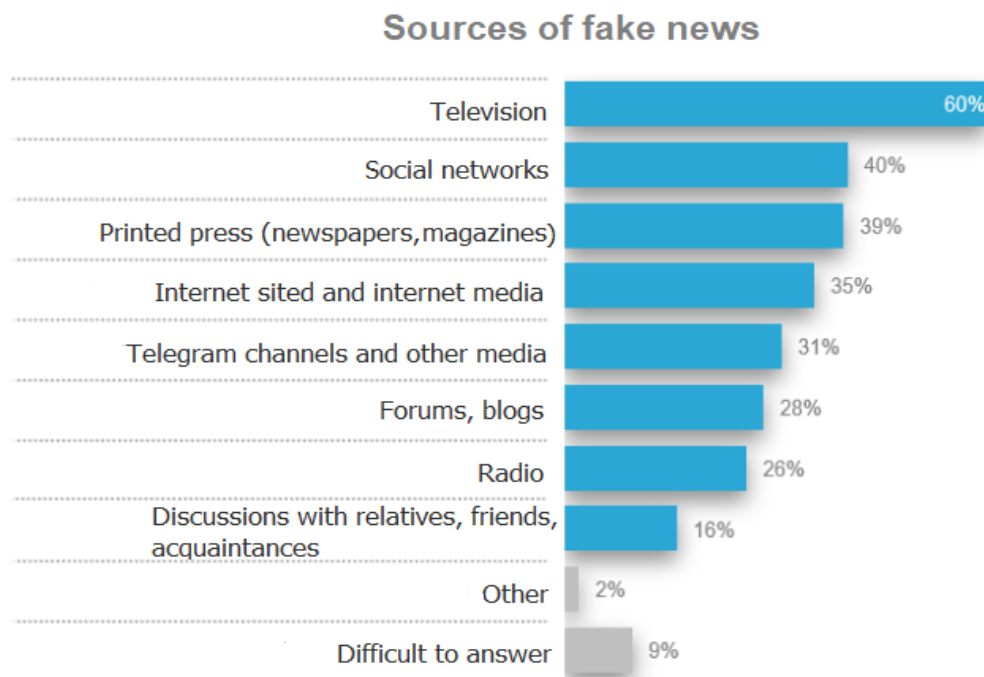
Is it unexpected that television "leads" by so much, and for which target groups does it lead?

Among the male audience, 64.2% consider TV the leading source of fake news, among the female audience, 55.5% think so.

Distribution by age:

18-24 — 64,9%

25-34 — 63,7%

35-44 — 56,7%

45-54 — 52,7%

55-74 — 59,7%

That is, Generation Z, born after 1996, are the most critical of television as a reliable source of information.

Geographically, there is a very significant spread from only 51% in the Mogilev region to **70.2%** in Minsk!

Every day Belarusian consumers of media information are faced with an increasing amount of false information (fake news) and factoids.

Therefore, there is a need for regular research (quantitative and qualitative) of the Belarusian audience regarding its readiness to identify and recognize fake narratives.

Consider the example of two studies from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

One example is from a recent study conducted in Ukraine, "Setting the Population to Media and Living in New Media 2021", which showed that almost 50% of Ukrainians believe in a fake narrative about a vaccine that is more dangerous than Covid-19.

Since the beginning of 2021, have you come across any of the following statements?

The side effects of the vaccine are more dangerous than the coronavirus itself	Ukraine is run by external actors, it is completely dependent on international bosses who tell it what to do	Debts for utility services will be automatically deducted from bank accounts	The United States is trying to make Ukraine a tool to use it in its own conflict with Russia	Ukraine is a failed state / failed to develop as a state / Ukraine is a failure
Yes 68% / No 32%	Yes 57% / No 43%	Yes 53% / No 47%	Yes 51% / No 49%	Yes 39% / No 61%

In your opinion, these are: ■ True ■ False ■ Hard to say — *Base: Those who came across the statement*

49% 28% 23%	56% 28% 16%	57% 26% 16%	51% 33% 16%	37% 51% 12%

Did you share this statement? ■ Yes ■ No ■ Hard to say — *Base: Those who came across the statement*

47% 50% 3%	34% 41%	56% 2%	32% 65% 2%	34% 64% 2%

In what ways did you share and discuss them? ■ Discussed in a personal conversation ■ Discussed on the Internet ■ Reposted on social media — *Base: Those who shared statements*

97% 5% 5%	96% 5% 5%	96% 5% 4%	96% 7% 5%	96% 7% 4%

Why did you share them? *Base: Those who shared statements*

41% 35% 30% 7% 2% 2%	40% 34% 27% 8% 2% 2%	33% 37% 32% 5% 3% 3%	37% 40% 25% 8% 2% 1%	36% 40% 19% 11% 4% 2%

■ To find out what others think ■ It's just a topic starter ■ It's true and people need to know about it ■ It's a disinformation and I wanted to warn others ■ It's funny ■ To have some fun by sharing something I know is disinformation

Questions:
Since the beginning of 2020, have you come across any of the following statements? Which of them, in your opinion, were true or false?
Did you share or discuss these statements with others? Why did you decide to share these statements or discuss them? In what ways did you share these statements / discuss the news?

Base:
Total sample, N=1583
Came across the statements, N = 1071/906/841/814/624
Shared the statements, N = 506/304/347/263/210

Another example is from the Czech Republic, where according to a CTHH study in 2019, up to 70% of Czechs agree with disinformation narratives (for example, "The European Union tells the Czech Republic what to do and violates its sovereignty" or "The Prime Minister cannot influence key decisions of the European Union ")

Conclusion

Any qualitative (good) analysis of the situation that claims to provide strategic conclusions should be based not on topical issues on the agenda, but on a serious conceptual basis, when the results of the study (studies) can be used effectively not only for answering the topical questions of today, but for developing strategic recommendations.

Source:

https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Фальшивые_новости

This publication was prepared by the Baltic Internet Policy Initiative.