

Disinformation in Belarus, summer 2022

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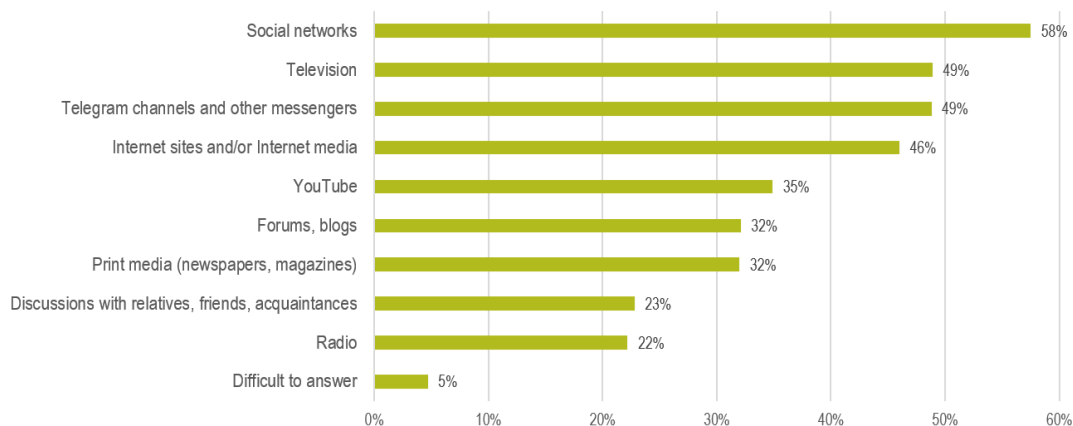
Users believe that messengers contain just as much misinformation as TV, according to a new survey of the Belarusian internet audience by Digital Skills Coalition Belarus

The study had a series of questions on the topic of disinformation in Belarus. The main question repeated the one that was asked to the Belarusian Internet audience aged 18-74 in August 2021 and February 2021 (before the new phase of Russian military aggression against Ukraine). It read as follows: **Based on your experience, where do you most often encounter fake/fake news and misinformation?**

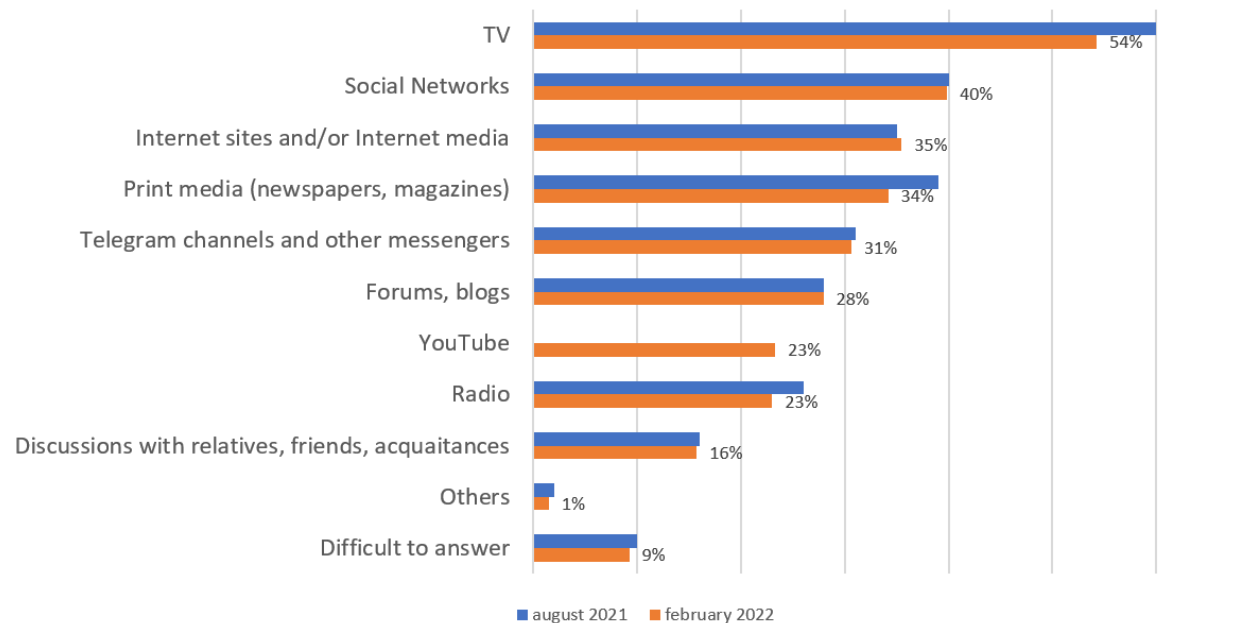
The answers were distributed as follows:

DISINFORMATION

Based on your experience, what is the most common place to encounter fake/false news, misinformation?



If we compare it with previous research findings, we can see a major difference in attitudes towards social media as a possible source of dis/misinformation:



A 5% decrease in TV is within the statistical margin of error and cannot be considered significant.

Regarding the rise of social media and YouTube as sources of disinformation, a possible hypothesis is that after February 24, 2022, when the next phase of the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine began, the amount of disinformation spread by both sides through social media as elements of hybrid warfare increased manifold. For the Belarusian Internet audience, the situation in terms of obtaining reliable information becomes even more dramatic, as the vast majority of Belarusian independent media are blocked, which requires the use of VPNs, and from the current research we know that about 50% of the Belarusian Internet audience does not use any means to bypass blocking. An additional demotivating factor in obtaining information

from independent media is that they are considered extremist and terrorist formations by the current regime.

Socio-demographic differences in respondents' responses by gender:

	men	women
TV	53%	45%
Social Networks	49%	43%
Internet sites and/or Internet media	34%	31%
Print media (newspapers, magazines)	58%	57%
Telegram channels and other messengers	42%	28%
Forums, blogs	50%	48%
YouTube	21%	25%
Radio	26%	19%
Discussions with relatives, friends, acquaintances	36%	29%
Others	3%	6%
Difficult to answer	1%	0%

As can be seen from the table above, the men's audience sees television, YouTube, radio and the print media as more significant sources of misinformation.

By age:

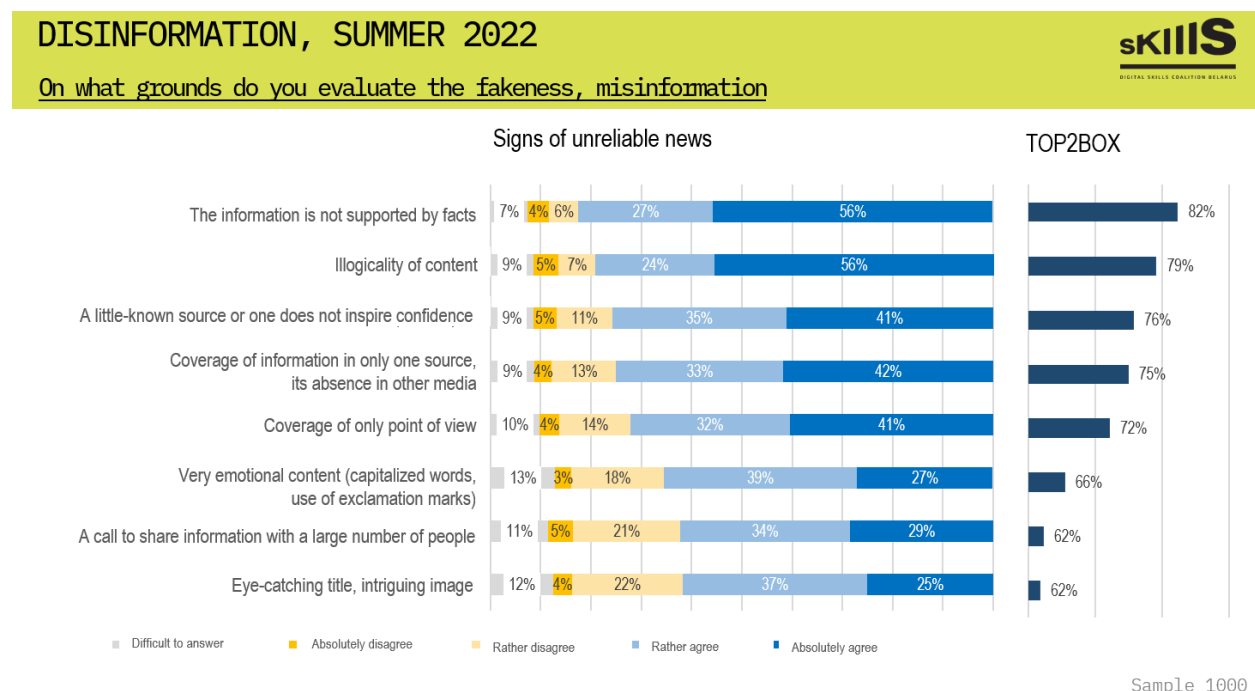
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	>54
TV	40%	52%	51%	49%	55%
Social Networks	41%	46%	46%	54%	42%
Internet sites and/or Internet media	26%	30%	34%	40%	35%
Print media (newspapers, magazines)	53%	61%	57%	59%	55%
Telegram channels and other messengers	30%	33%	39%	37%	36%
Forums, blogs	46%	53%	48%	47%	47%
YouTube	30%	20%	21%	19%	28%
Radio	14%	20%	25%	26%	34%
Discussions with relatives, friends, acquaintances	24%	30%	33%	41%	37%
Difficult to answer	5%	4%	4%	4%	6%

We see many unexpected things. For example, that young audiences do not consider television a serious source of disinformation, but perhaps young people simply do not watch traditional television channels. Most misinformation in social media (networks, YouTube, messengers) is expected by the most active part of the Internet audience aged 25-44.

How do you estimate the unreliability or untruthfulness of the information?

This question was the same as the one from the Ukrainian survey "USAID-Internews 2021 Media Consumption Survey", conducted in 2021.

The result for the Belarusian Internet audience:



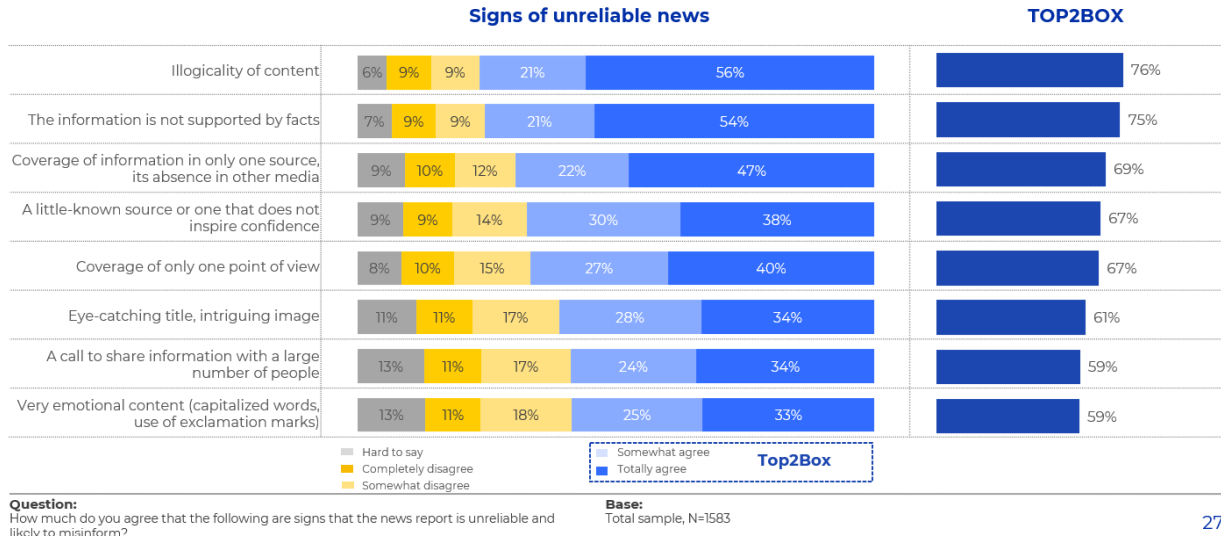
We will compare it with the Ukrainian results:



Disinformation. 2021



The main signs of inaccurate information, according to respondents, are illogicality, lack of facts to back up the story, and when it cannot be found in other media.

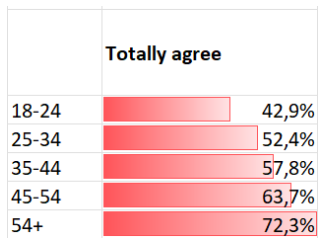


In principle, apart from a slight difference in the order of the most popular answers, the absolute results are quite similar in values.

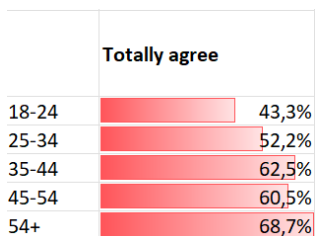
The Belarusian male Internet audience pays more attention to information unsupported by facts - 59.6% (completely agree), in contrast to 52.1% among the female audience, and to the coverage of only one point of view - 45.4% (female - 36%). A prominent title, intriguing image in the headline was a sign of misinformation among women - 27.8%, among men - 22.3%.

By age, the most significant difference in responses to the two options of answers:

1. Absurdity and illogicality of the material:



2. The information is not supported by facts:



Conclusions

Media literacy and critical thinking skills development are important for all age groups in all countries.

The topic of misinformation is very important and sensitive for the entire Belarusian society, as citizens have seriously limited access to independent sources of information and on the other hand are exposed to information aggression, both from Russian propaganda and from state-controlled Belarusian media.

Source: <https://digitalskills.by/2022/09/02/aspekty-upravleniya-internetom-v-belarusi-rezultaty-issledovaniya-kratko/>

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