CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION OF INFORMATION DISORDER: A DECADE OF DISCURSIVE TRANSFORMATION IN BULGARIAN

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Abstract:

This paper traces the conceptual evolution of „information disorder", examining how the term has developed from earlier concerns about propaganda and media manipulation to a more complex understanding in the digital age. Reviewing key literature and policy debates, the study explores how disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation have been defined and distinguished across academic, governmental, and civil society contexts. The analysis highlights how evolving technological, political, and cultural forces have shaped the framing and governance of information disorder. Ultimately, the study argues for a historically grounded and multidisciplinary approach to understanding information disorder as a persistent and adaptive phenomenon.

Keywords: Information, misinformation, pragmatics, integrity, trends

Introduction, motivation and methodology

The discursive framing of problematic information phenomena fundamentally shapes our understanding of the problem and the potential strategies in response[1,2]. The linguistic and conceptual frameworks deployed within public discourse serve as both reflective indicators and generative mechanisms that shape cognitive schemata regarding information integrity challenges. Terminological choices delineate the boundaries of public discourse.

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[1] Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2008), *Metaphors we live by*, University of Chicago Press.

[2] Entman, R. M. (1993), *Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*, Journal of Communication, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 51-58.

This study[3] employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the conceptual evolution of information disorder terminology in Bulgarian media discourse from January 2013 to April 2025. Our methodological framework integrates quantitative trend analysis with qualitative discourse analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of terminological shifts and their contextual determinants.

The primary quantitative component utilises Google Trends as an analytical tool to track the relative frequency of search queries related to key terminology. We systematically monitored five central concepts: „fake news" (фалшиви новини), „disinformation" (дезинформация), „propaganda" (пропаганда), „hybrid warfare" (хибридна война), and „information integrity" (информационен интегритет). Google Trends data was retrieved using the following parameters: Geographic scope: Bulgaria; period: January 1, 2013, to April 30, 2025).

Through systematic analysis of these explanatory factors, the study will contribute to our understanding of how societies conceptualise, problematise, and respond to emerging information threats in democratic contexts.

For each term, the study documented temporal patterns of usage frequency, peaks, popularity across terms and some correlations with significant geopolitical events.

The selection of terminology was formed by preliminary expert analysis identifying the most prevalent concepts within Bulgarian media discourse regarding problematic information phenomena. This initial mapping drew on manual content analysis of major Bulgarian news outlets (mentioned in Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024[4]) and policy documents (parliamentary corpora[5]) to establish the conceptual terrain.

The qualitative component involved analysing contextual factors surrounding significant peaks in search interest, examining some media coverage during peak periods and connections to international events and frameworks. This contextualisation allowed us to identify potential causal factors for shifts in terminology usage and analyse the semantic evolution of key concepts as they moved between international and Bulgarian contexts.

While this research provides valuable insights into the conceptual evolution of information disorder discourse in Bulgaria, several limitations warrant acknow-

[4] Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024, https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-06/RISJ_DNR_2024_Digital_v10%20lr.pdf

[5] https://www.clarin.eu/parlamint

ledgement. Our reliance on Google Trends data introduces certain constraints. The platform provides only relative search volume rather than absolute numbers, making precise quantification difficult. Additionally, Google Trends data reflects search behaviour rather than media usage directly, serving as a proxy measure for public engagement with concepts. Search queries may not perfectly align with how terms are used in media discourse. While our study spans over a decade, Google Trends' historical data granularity varies, with more detailed information available for recent years. This potentially creates an imbalance in analytical depth across the study period. The translation of international concepts into Bulgarian presents challenges. We have attempted to account for various Bulgarian formulations of key terms, but some semantic variations may not be fully captured in search queries.

This research does not encompass questions concerning cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and their role within the broader disinformation landscape. Furthermore, the integration of other concepts into the context of disinformation is not discussed.

Literature review

Navigating the intricate landscape of contemporary information threats necessitates a rigorous understanding of the conceptual differentiations among disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, information operations, and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). The definitional frameworks articulated by entities such as the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and the Council of Europe furnish a robust analytical basis for dissecting the multifaceted character of information manipulation. Effectively mitigating the challenges posed by these activities demands a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy integrating regulatory frameworks, technological innovations, educational initiatives, and robust international collaboration.

In Tackling Online Disinformation, the EU authorities define the concept of disinformation as 'verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm'[6]. The same definition was repeated in the Action Plan Against Disinformation[7] and in the Code of Practice of Disinformation (2018) and The Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation (2022). The European External Action Service (EEAS) has taken a leading role in addressing the FIMI, and on 7 February 2023, the High Representative and Vice-President of the European Union Josep Borrell announced the creation of an Information Sharing and Analysis Centre at the EEAS[8].

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[6]   Commission, 'Tackling Online Disinformation: A European Approach' (Communication) COM (2018) 236 final (the Communication), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52018DC0236

[7]   https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/action_plan_against_disinformation.pdf

[8]   https://fimi-isac.org/index.html

FIMI shows the role of state actors in information manipulation aimed at achieving geopolitical objectives and it has also been adopted in the European Union's conceptual framework through several documents, such as the Report on StratCom activities[9], and the two reports on FIMI threats published up to date[10]. What is worth mentioning is that the activities falling under FIMI are mostly non-illegal[11].

The period following 2016 marked a turning point in public awareness of information disorder, with the term „fake news" gaining widespread currency during the BREXIT referendum in the United Kingdom and the United States presidential election[12,13]. However, this simplistic binary classification proved inadequate for capturing the complex ecosystem of problematic information. Consequently, scholars and policymakers gradually developed more nuanced taxonomies, differentiating between disinformation (deliberate falsehoods), misinformation (unintentional inaccuracies), and malinformation (contextually manipulated truths)[14]. The notion of a „post-truth" era[15] gave way to discussions of „information disorder"[16] and subsequently to the concept of an „infodemic"[17] during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most recently, discourse has coalesced around the more holistic concept of „information integrity," emphasising systemic approaches to fostering resilient information ecosystems rather than merely combating individual instances of falsity[18].

The accuracy of the emerging EU anti-disinformation framework is linked to the European Court of Human Rights' consolidated standards[19].

Acknowledging that various risks related to the spreading of disinformation in the „digital ecosystem" are very serious, the precise definition of the term

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[9] 2021 StratCom Activity Report - Strategic Communication Task Forces and Information Analysis Division, EEAS', 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2021-stratcom-activity-report-strategic-communication-task-forces-and-information-analysis-division_en

[10] European Union External Action 2023, 2; 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/_en

[11] Munteanu, D. (2024), *Societal Resilience to Disinformation - What Is It and How Can We Bolster It?*, XXIV Summer Seminar Future Scenarios for Central and Eastern Europe, p. 90.

[12] Waisbord, S. (2018), *Truth is What Happens to News: On journalism, fake news, and post-truth*, Journalism Studies, Vol. 19, No. 13, pp. 1866-1878. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1492881

[13] Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2017), *Defining „Fake News": A typology of scholarly definitions*, Digital Journalism, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 137-153. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

[14] Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017), *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*, Council of Europe.

[15] https://global.oup.com/academic/content/word-of-the-year/

[16] https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/information-disorder

[17] https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic

[18] Posetti, J., & Bontcheva, K. (2020), Disinfodemic: Deciphering Covid-19 disinformation, Policy Brief, 1

[19] Cavaliere, P. (2022), The truth in fake news: How disinformation laws are reframing the concepts of truth and accuracy on digital platforms, European Convention on Human Rights Law Review, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 481-523.

disinformation is difficult to draw and the consequence of certain ambiguities in the various definitions used by international organisations augments risks of human rights violations, especially of the freedom of expression[20]. Concerns about misinformation's impact on democracy have grown, especially after events like the 2020 US election and COVID-19 vaccine debates. Interventions such as fact-checking, media literacy, and increased news coverage emerged, but their effectiveness is mixed. Fact-checking can sometimes reinforce false beliefs or reduce trust in institutions, while media literacy efforts may increase scepticism toward all information. News coverage that repeats falsehoods without context can also undermine trust. Recent research suggests that focusing on claim verification (not just blaming sources) and teaching about bias, rather than only misinformation, can reduce negative spillover effects and improve trust and discernment[21].

In Bulgarian scientific literature, the terms disinformation, manipulation and propaganda exist together. Most of the studies define the concepts they use, but there is no separate study, except for Nina Venova's translation of Journalism, fake news & disinformation: handbook for journalism education and training[22], which focuses on the definitions of the phenomenon. Many efforts are concentrated on the NLP detection of fake news, disinformation, propaganda and media bias[23, 24, 25, 26] as well as on the Bulgarian specifics[27, 28, 29].

[20] Scheu, H. C. (2022), The concept of disinformation in the practice of international organizations, Public Security and Public Order, (31), pp. 183-196.

[21] Hoes, E., Aitken, B., Zhang, J. et al. (2024), Prominent misinformation interventions reduce misperceptions but increase scepticism, Nature Human Behaviour, Vol. 8, pp. 1545-1553.

[22] Ireton, Ch., & Posetti, J. (2018), Journalism, fake news & disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training, UNESCO.

[23] Martino, G. D. S. et al. (2020), *A survey on computational propaganda detection*, arXiv preprint arXiv:2007.08024

[24] Nakov, P. (2020), *Can We Spot the „Fake News" Before It Was Even Written?*, arXiv preprint arXiv:2008.04374

[25] Nakov, P., & Da San Martino, G. (2021a), Fake news, disinformation, propaganda, media bias, and flattening the curve of the COVID-19 infodemic, Proceedings of the 27th ACM SIGKDD Conference, pp. 4054-4055

[26] Nakov, P., & Da San Martino, G. (2021b), Fake news, disinformation, propaganda, and media bias, Proceedings of the 30th ACM International Conference on Information & Knowledge Management, pp. 4862-4865.

[27] Margova, https://bpos.bg/publication/57700; Temnikova, I. et al. (2023a), New Bulgarian resources for studying deception and detecting disinformation; Temnikova, I. et al. (2023b), Looking for traces of textual deepfakes in Bulgarian on social media, Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Recent Advances in Natural Language Processing, pp. 1151-1161.

[28] Temnikova, I. et al. (2023a), New Bulgarian resources for studying deception and detecting disinformation.

[29] Temnikova, I. et al. (2023b), Looking for traces of textual deepfakes in Bulgarian on social media, Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Recent Advances in Natural Language Processing, pp. 1151-1161.

In political analysis in Bulgaria, the focus is on Russia and its ambitions, especially in former Soviet states, using disinformation as a key destabilising tool. A series of reports shows the systematic Russian influence[30, 31, 32].

A series of detailed analyses of anti-democratic propaganda and especially of the role of Russian propaganda in Bulgaria by the team of the Foundation for Humanitarian and Social Research - Sofia[33]).

Analysing the use of hybrid warfare in the Bulgarian media during the first five months of 2019, Kovatcheva concluded that „hybrid warfare" (and its synonyms) are the most common it is mentioned in the informational materials, without being explained and specified, and it is observed that the purposeful use of the phrase „hybrid war" has a meaning that is completely different from the meaning of the concept contained in the definition[34]. Analysing the presented definitions of „hybrid war" in the Bulgarian space is enough to search for a more adequate concept to replace „hybrid war"[35]. The connection between climate change and the interference with the overall risk of new hybrid conflicts because it accelerates the development and the implementation of innovations, related to the conduct of hybrid wars[36].

1. Analysis

The impetus for this study arises from the dynamic evolution of the lexicon associated with the pervasive phenomenon of misinformation, a concern highlighted as a significant global risk in the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report (2025). This report identified misinformation as a prominent threat for both 2024 and 2025[37].

Employing Google Trends (Table 1, Google Trends, comparison of terms) as a freely accessible analytical tool, this research examines the diachronic trends in the utilisation of key terms – *disinformation, fake news, information integrity, and propaganda* – within the period spanning January 1, 2013, to

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[30] Trifonova, G., & Malinov, S. (2024), *Operation „Disinformation": Uncovering Kremlin Influence in Ex-Military Networks in Bulgaria*. https://csd.eu/publications/publication/operation-disinformation/

[31] Georgiev, G., & Novossiolova, T. (2023), Disinformation Storm: WMD Hybrid Threats in Bulgaria and Romania, CSD. Available at: https://csd.eu/publications/publication/disinformation-storm/

[32] Shentov, O., Stefanov, R., & Vladimirov, M. (2020), Countering the Kremlin playbook in Europe after Russia Invasion in Ukraine.

[33] https://hssfoundation.org/%d0%b4%d0%be%d0%ba%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%b4%d0%b8/

[34] Kovacheva, R. (2019), „The hybrid war" in Bulgarian media, Медиалог.

[35] Bakalov, Y. (2022), Semantics and thesaurus of the terminology of hybrid warfare, Scientific Almanac of the Bulgarian University of Finance and Economics „Chernorizets Hrabar", Ser. Legal Sciences and Public Security, Book 42, pp. 34-42.

[36] Bankov, B. (2023), Are hybrid wars changing because of climate change, Doctoral Readings, 7, p. 179.

[37] https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GRR25_Shareable_Risks_by_severity_2_Years.jpg and https://www.weforum.org/press/2025/01/global-risks-report-2025-conflict-environment-and-disinformation-top-threats/

April 2025. This timeframe is pertinent due to its overlap with significant geopolitical events, notably the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation on March 18, 2014, and the preceding period of intense sociopolitical unrest in Ukraine during the winter of 2013-2014, triggered by the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend the signing of an association agreement with the European Union on November 21, 2013.

The initial scope of the Google Trends analysis was intended to encompass online discourse within Bulgaria more broadly, rather than being exclusively limited to media sources. However, the recent development of the Google Trends platform and its limitations in providing granular historical data necessitated a focus on observable trends within the available timeframe. Despite this constraint, discernible patterns in the usage of the selected terms are evident.

The selection of the mentioned terms was formed by expert analysis identifying the most prevalent concepts within the media landscape concerning misleading information. Further comparative analysis of more specific term combinations is intended for subsequent investigation.

Table 1. Google Trends, comparison of terms
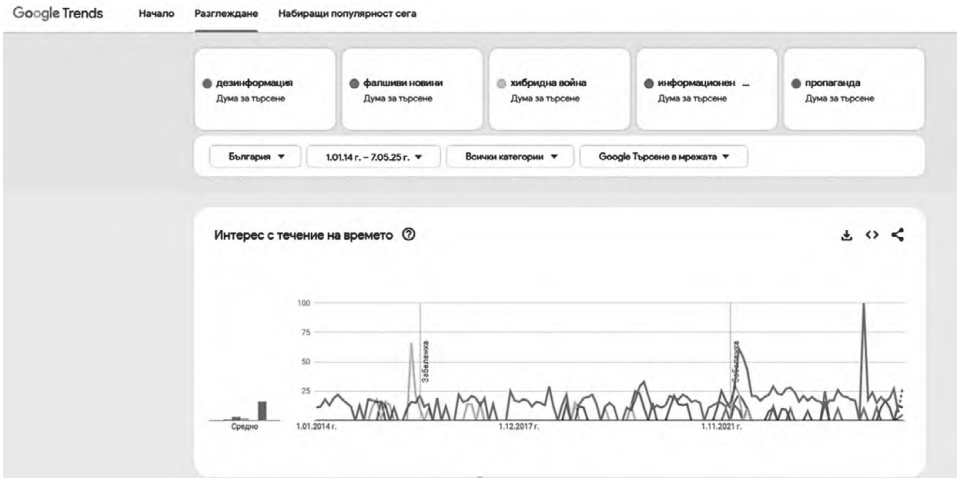
1.1. Propaganda

The analysis reveals a consistent and enduring presence of the term „propaganda" throughout the entire ten-year period under scrutiny, marked by a notable peak in usage. This suggests that „propaganda" is the most stable and consistently employed concept among those examined, exhibiting minimal fluctuation throughout the research period. This stability likely stems from its historical embeddedness within the Bulgarian linguistic and socio-political context. The collective memory of socialist-era propaganda renders the term readily recognisable, particularly among older segments of the population,

obviating the need for extensive contextualisation. However, the analysis further indicates that the application of „propaganda" is not exclusively confined to the domain of disinformation. Preliminary examination suggests a strong correlation between the use of „propaganda" and discussions surrounding LGBT rights, a connection that appears more prominent than its association with Russian propaganda, despite prior in-depth analyses conducted by the Humanitarian and Social Research Foundation[38]. This observation raises pertinent questions regarding the accessibility and comprehension of these nuanced terminological reports by a wider public, a consideration of particular salience given the importance of disseminating research findings effectively within the ongoing efforts to counter disinformation.

The latest spike in the word propaganda comes in the context of the president's decision in August 2024 to promulgate legislative amendments banning the propaganda and promotion of „non-traditional sexual orientation" and „gender identity other than biological" in schools. This was announced by the press office of the head of state[39]. This direct connection between propaganda and LGBT rights must be taken into account in the Bulgarian environment. It can even be considered intentional since it was directly multiplied by media.

1.2. Hybrid war

In the Bulgarian space, the first peak of the hybrid war came in November 2015, when reports appeared in the media that Russia was waging a hybrid war against Bulgaria. Before, in August Ministry of Defence announced that Russia is a risky factor for the national security of Bulgaria[40]. In Bulgaria, a hybrid war was waged, as stated in the reports on the status of armed forces in 2014[41]. During the same period, the word propaganda also dominated. The next peak of hybrid war coincides with the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine, in February 2022. The introduction of the notion of hybrid warfare into the Bulgarian media discourse in 2014 appears to have been characterised by novelty and a lack of established definitional boundaries, potentially contributing to its unconstrained application. While the term gained traction by 2019, inconsistencies and inaccuracies in its usage persisted, raising concerns about its potential co-option within disinformation campaigns orchestrated by specific media outlets[42]. However, this study posits that a unified understanding and application of the concept of „hybrid" within the Bulgarian context has yet to be achieved. Establishing a precise and consistently applied definition for this term, enforced across media outlets and among policymakers, is crucial. Such definitional clarity would mitigate the current reliance on metaphorical

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[38] https://hssfoundation.org/en/team2/

[39] https://news.lex.bg

[40] https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2014/08/26/2368889_ministerstvo_na_otbranata_oficialno_obiavi_rusiia_za/

[41] https://dariknews.bg/novini/bylgariia/mo-v-bylgariq-se-vodi-hibridna-vojna-zaradi-ukrajna-1412304

[42] Kovacheva, R. (2019), „The hybrid war" in Bulgarian media, Медиалог.

and improvisational usage, fostering a more coherent and strategically advantageous framework for countering disinformation efforts.

1.3. Fake news and disinformation

The term „fake news" entered the Bulgarian online sphere in March 2017, achieving considerable establishment by the year's end. This emergence coincided significantly with two prominent international information events: United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (BREXIT) and the United States presidential elections. While these processes commenced in 2016, their reverberations within the Bulgarian information environment became pronounced several months thereafter. The English phrase „fake news" has also become integrated into Bulgarian colloquial speech, often used in its transcribed form.

The designation of „fake news" as the most impactful word of 2017 by the British publishing house Collins was mirrored in Bulgaria's linguistic landscape. Notably, an examination of the „word of the year" selections by various British dictionaries over the preceding decade reveals a consistent thematic focus on concepts related to disinformation, exemplified by terms such as „permacrisis" in Collins, 2022[43], „gaslighting" in Merriam-Webster, 2022[44], „hallucinate" in Cambridge 2023[45], and „brainrot" in Collins, 2024[46]. This seemingly disparate observation underscores a broader trend in the English language, as a lingua franca, towards the prominence of vocabulary concerning disinformation, a trend that subsequently influences other linguistic contexts.

Subsequently, in April 2020, the term „disinformation" gained traction within the Bulgarian online environment, gradually establishing itself in parallel with „fake news." Concurrently, the frequency of „fake news" usage experienced a relative decline. While „disinformation" exhibited a minor peak in 2014, its consistent and sustained presence dates from 2021 onwards, suggesting a gradual displacement or „unlearning" of „fake news." This shift can potentially be attributed to the increasing institutional efforts of the European Union to counter disinformation. Consequently, the definition and understanding of „disinformation" have gained prominence among Bulgarian researchers investigating its societal impact. This trend is further evidenced by the establishment of the Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of digital media BROD[47], a hub within the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)[48], in late 2022. The nuanced definitions of disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation are receiving increasing scholarly attention within Bulgaria. Furthermore, the accreditation of fact-checking initiatives, such as the Bulgarian branch of AFP[49] and the

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[43] https://blog.collinsdictionary.com/language-lovers/a-year-of-permacrisis/

[44] https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/word-of-the-year-2022

[45] https://www.cambridge.org/news-and-insights/hallucinate-is-cambridge-word-of-the-year-2023

[46] https://www.collinsdictionary.com/woty

[47] https://brodhub.eu/en/

[48] https://edmo.eu/

[49] https://proveri.afp.com/

Bulgarian National Television (BNT)[50] fact-checking team (both licensed in 2023), alongside the established Factcheck.bg[51] team (licensed by the European Fact-Checking Standards Network - EFCSN)[52], signifies a growing emphasis on fact-checking within the Bulgarian media ecosystem. These socio-political and media developments are reflected in the evolving public perception of information integrity challenges, with „disinformation" emerging as a dominant concept, increasingly associated with misleading political information carrying the potential for public harm and frequently featured in the titles and themes of academic and professional conferences in Bulgaria.

Despite its contentious nature, the definition of disinformation demonstrates functional utility, exhibiting relative conceptual clarity in its application. While the terms „disinformation" and „fake news" are often employed indiscriminately by political actors – a phenomenon warranting distinct scholarly investigation into their manipulative potential – a discernible consistency prevails in their usage within academic research and policy documentation. This definitional coherence represents a positive attribute, facilitating a more precise delineation of the problem domain necessitating concerted and targeted interventions.

1.4. Information integrity

The countermeasures against disinformation are in five broad domains: legal and regulatory, educational, political and governance, psychological and social-psychological, and technological[53], even though there are some overlaps between domains. National information resilience is important for information integrity[54].

The concepts of „information integrity" and „resilience" present significant challenges within the Bulgarian linguistic context. The term „integrity" lacks a direct and comprehensive equivalent in Bulgarian, encompassing multiple semantic layers that complicate its translation. Similarly, „resilience" is not a commonly employed term in everyday Bulgarian usage, contributing to a perceived distance and lack of immediate recognition for these concepts within the language environment. This linguistic barrier is reflected in the limited visibility of „information integrity" within the Bulgarian online sphere in our study. While „integrity" predominantly appears in association with regional development programs, „resilience" is primarily linked to the domain of economics.

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[50] https://bntnews.bg/proverka-na-fakti-102533tag.html

[51] https://factcheck.bg/

[52] https://efcsn.com/

[53] Rød, B., Pursiainen, C., & Eklund, N. (2025), Combatting Disinformation - How Do We Create Resilient Societies? Literature Review and Analytical Framework, European Journal for Security Research, pp. 1-43.

[54] Dragomir, M., Rúas-Araújo, J., & Horowitz, M. (2024), Beyond online disinformation: assessing national information resilience in four European countries, Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 1-10.

Conversely, research on countering disinformation emphasises the importance of employing positive and constructive communication strategies, avoiding accusatory or insinuating language. Current efforts in Bulgaria to address disinformation align with this approach, focusing on promoting media literacy and fostering understanding to engage individuals who have not yet solidified their opinions based on reasoned arguments. While these positive communication endeavours are crucial and should be sustained, the translation of key concepts into accessible Bulgarian remains a significant impediment to broader public comprehension. Consequently, media literacy from early childhood through adulthood assumes paramount importance. Equipping individuals with critical thinking skills can mitigate the reliance on complex, difficult-to-translate terminology for understanding and navigating specific information phenomena.

Our experiment showed that integrity is not recognised as part of the semantic field of disinformation.

2. Con clusions

This study has traced the conceptual evolution of information disorder terminology in Bulgarian media discourse from 2013 to 2025, revealing significant shifts in how problematic information phenomena are framed and understood. Our analysis yields several important insights with implications for research, policy, and practice.

2.1. Key Findings

The diachronic analysis of terminology usage reveals three distinct patterns. First, „propaganda" demonstrates remarkable stability throughout the period, reflecting its deep historical embeddedness in Bulgarian socio-political contexts. However, its semantic application has expanded beyond disinformation to encompass other domains, particularly LGBT discourse, complicating its utility as a precise analytical term.

Second, „hybrid war" emerged abruptly in the Bulgarian information space following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 but has suffered from definitional inconsistency. This terminological ambiguity has potentially undermined its effectiveness in public discourse and made it vulnerable to co-option within disinformation campaigns.

Third, we observe a clear transition from the colloquial „fake news" (peaking after 2017) toward the more institutionally backed „disinformation" (gaining prominence after 2020) in Bulgaria. This shift coincides with increasing EU initiatives to counter disinformation and the creation of fact-checking infrastructure within Bulgaria, suggesting the influence of institutional frameworks on discursive practices.

Most notably, concepts central to contemporary international discourse on information resilience – particularly „information integrity" – have not gained

traction in Bulgarian media. This represents a significant linguistic and conceptual gap that may impede efforts to foster more resilient information ecosystems.

2.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

These findings underscore how deeply embedded issues of trust, power, and media systems are in our understanding of truth and communication. Information disorder emerges not only from technological changes but also because of a complex historical, political, and cultural transformation. The linguistic barriers to translating key concepts like „integrity" and „resilience" into Bulgarian highlight the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to addressing disinformation.

Our analysis suggests several practical applications. The study provides a foundation for comparative analysis with other linguistic and national contexts. For policymakers, our findings indicate the need for more precise and consistent terminological frameworks to enable coherent public discourse and policy formulation. For media literacy practitioners, understanding these conceptual gaps can inform more effective educational approaches.

2.3. Future Directions

This research opens several avenues for further investigation. First, more granular analysis of how different stakeholders (government, media, civil society) employ these terms could reveal power dynamics in shaping public discourse. Second, audience reception studies could explore how these terminological shifts affect public understanding and trust. Third, comparative analysis with other post-communist contexts could identify regional patterns in information disorder discourse.

As Bulgaria faces complex information threats, particularly foreign information manipulation and interference, developing a shared conceptual vocabulary becomes increasingly critical. The positive communication strategies currently employed by anti-disinformation initiatives are valuable but must be complemented by efforts to address fundamental linguistic and conceptual barriers.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that addressing information disorder requires not just technological or regulatory solutions, but a deeper engagement with the cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts through which societies make sense of truth, deception, and the information environment. By mapping the evolution of these concepts in Bulgarian media discourse, the study contributes to a more historically informed and contextually sensitive understanding of information disorder – one that recognises its persistence and adaptability across different media environments and political contexts.

The Bulgarian media landscape has unique characteristics shaped by post-communist transition and specific geopolitical influences. Information disorder continues to evolve rapidly, potentially outpacing the conceptual frameworks used to analyse it. Terms that emerge after our data collection period may significantly reshape the discourse.

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