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Resilience to Disinformation: An Analysis of Political, Media, and Economic Environments in Finland and Poland

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Abstract: Online disinformation has been identified internationally as a concerning phenomenon due to its potential effects on communication, democracy, and the very conceptions of truth and reality. This thesis aims to examine the question of what factors may make societies resilient to disinformation. Based on the theoretical framework originally outlined in Humprecht et al.'s (2020) cross-country ranking of 18 Western democracies, this thesis analyzes how structural environmental factors at the country level may strengthen resilience to online disinformation in two countries: Finland and Poland. Based on longitudinal mixed methods analyses informed by international indices, reports, and national scholarship, this thesis analyzes the political, media, and economic environments of Finland and Poland to consider how these environments—colored by cultural, historical, and societal contexts—may contribute to each country's respective resilience to disinformation. This within-case analysis shows the challenges of quantifying and ranking resilience to disinformation and to develop the theoretical framework further. While Finland has historically been found to perform well in resilience studies, its examination alongside the Polish case demonstrates the necessity of nuancing each factor, informed by questioning what each factor actually entails as well as the impact of country contexts. Indicators such as populist communication, public service media, and trust in news were revealed to be more complex than originally outlined in the framework when applied to two different country contexts. This thesis also identified two novel additions to further contribute to the framework: journalistic standards, roles, and ethics and media literacy. By proposing additions to the framework and critically discussing the interactions between factors, this thesis also identifies key areas of future research to contribute to the field of disinformation studies.

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1 Introduction

In the European Union, the Code of Practice on Disinformation aims to tackle the problem of online disinformation in an international, multidisciplinary way, including signatories from the major social media platforms and search engines such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook. In 2022, this Code was strengthened; it put forth more self-regulatory commitments, including the creation of more monitoring tools, empowering users through media literacy initiatives, and demonetizing advertising tied to disinformation (European Commission, 2023). Such measures demonstrate the growing international focus and effort to combat the dissemination of disinformation.

The Covid-19 pandemic tested the ways in which people across the world consumed information and news online. Between rapid developments, lockdowns, and scientific research being publicized as it was occurring, the pandemic tested news quality, delivery, and trust. Reports published by the European Commission (2020) under its Code showed the scale to which users utilized social media to learn about Covid-19 and to which users were exposed to disinformation about the pandemic. For example, while 14 million users in the EU utilized the Facebook and Instagram “Information Center” about the pandemic in August 2020 alone, 4.6 million Facebook posts in the EU were fact-checked and subsequently included a Covid-19 misinformation warning in the same month (European Commission, 2020).

In 2022, the invasion of Ukraine sent another wave across Europe, testing information validity with the swift progression of the war and with Russia, as the invading belligerent, being known for its state-sponsored disinformation campaigns through methods such as its Internet Research Agency (Klyueva, 2019, p. 21). The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) fact-checking network examined over 2000 instances of disinformation since the start of the war in February 2022, finding that a great proportion used videos to spread false information online and on social media (Carnapete et al., 2023), demonstrating the constant evolution of online disinformation. The two countries that will be examined in this thesis—Finland and Poland—are nations that are close to the conflict in different ways and have experienced disinformation because of it. In both countries, such disinformation uses

a variety of media and targets local populations, including Russians living in Finland and refugees in Poland (Rogalewicz, 2023; *Yle Kioski Investigated*, n.d.).

As seen from these two major events, the integration of digital communication through our phones, the internet, and social media into our daily lives has influenced the ways in which we consume information through constant access, updates, and commentary. While disinformation, deception, and propaganda more broadly are not new, it is the amplification and scale of such deception that presents a novel societal challenge (Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 5; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Aspects that have influenced this increase in scale include algorithms and bots, as well as reduced barriers to participation and production, which allow anyone with an internet connection to create content online (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Woolley & Howard, 2018; Klyueva, 2019; Dale, 2019; Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018). While the internet has paved the way for an amplification of disinformation through anonymity, virality, and low barriers to production and dissemination, to blame the internet for this trajectory is too simple a conclusion. Rather, the internet is another method of communication and knowledge building that is nonetheless influenced and based on our existing societal structures—political, media, and economic environments. While technological advances make it easier for false information to spread, the existence of disinformation as a phenomenon has not occurred in a technological vacuum. As “fake news” and propaganda have existed long before the internet, a feedback loop of the ways existing structural systems influence how people use technology has formed, consequently influencing the construction and deconstruction of these societal structures.

While online disinformation has rightfully become an important topic of discussion, it is nonetheless a difficult phenomenon to identify, ascribe, and measure the effects of. As described by Allcott & Gentzkow (2017), who examined the spread and pervasiveness of disinformation on social media during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, it is difficult to prove whether disinformation has a concrete effect on events or behaviors.

Though scholars have found it difficult to ascribe causality of disinformation, they have nonetheless warned of the dangers it poses to democratic societies and public spheres (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Amadae, 2018; Benkler et al., 2018; Bjola & Papadakis, 2020; Humprecht et al., 2020; Pal & Banerjee, 2019; Tenove, 2020;

Woolley & Howard, 2018). According to Amadae (2018), without the commitment to truth that is assumed in the communication that occurs in the public sphere, there is no way to bridge political polarization (pp. 21-22). As argued by O'Connor & Weatherall (2019), it is not as simple as saying uneducated or ignorant individuals spread false information because such falsehoods can fool anyone. It is therefore necessary to better understand the factors that influence the spread of online disinformation and, in contrast, what makes a society more resilient.

Humprecht et al. (2020) outlined one such theoretical framework through which to measure country-level resilience to disinformation in their quantitative cross-country comparative study. The authors examined seven influencing factors across political, media, and economic environments to categorize 18 Western democracies' resilience to disinformation. The authors found variance across countries—Northern European nations were found to have the strongest resilience to disinformation while Southern European nations and the United States performed more poorly. In proposing a theoretical framework outlining resilience to disinformation, Humprecht et al. (2020) opened the door for future studies to apply this framework to in-depth case study analyses of individual countries to nuance their existing indicators, and to potentially propose new ones. As the authors focused on cross-country quantitative comparisons, what do these indicators reveal when examined closer in country-specific contexts?

To pursue this question and contribute to disinformation resilience scholarship, this thesis will apply Humprecht et al.'s (2020) framework to two disparate cases to reveal new findings through their different country situations: Finland and Poland. Finland was included in Humprecht et al.'s original study and ranked amongst the most resilient to disinformation, which calls for a closer examination to understand its position. Poland, however, was not included in the study, but, as a relatively new democracy and a post-communist state, it has different historical, cultural, and political contexts that offer different perspectives through which to consider disinformation resilience. At the same time, applying the framework to these two cases contributes to the framework and disinformation scholarship at large by analyzing Humprecht et al.'s (2020) indicators in different country contexts, revealing new insights into the application of such indicators, as well as how they interact with each other and additional factors that could not be identified in a large

cross-country quantitative study. To accomplish this, I will re-examine Humprecht et al.'s (2020) quantitative data sources in addition to supplemental international reports and national scholarly literature. To avoid the difficulties of ascribing causality to disinformation or of pinpointing sources of disinformation, this study will instead focus on the structural elements that inhibit or amplify the spread of and belief in disinformation.

In order to expand upon the theoretical foundations of Humprecht et al.'s (2020) study, I intend to contribute in four ways. Firstly, I will revisit the analysis of Finland as a highly resilient country. As noted by Humprecht et al. (2020) in the case of the United Kingdom—another highly resilient country—such countries can nonetheless be at risk of disinformation campaigns and weakened resilience to disinformation (p. 508). Therefore, while Finland is not in the same situation as the United Kingdom, it is nonetheless important to revisit the discussion of its resilience in greater depth. Similarly, a closer examination of the Finnish case may reveal new understandings about the factors that contribute to resilience, and whether and how they may translate to other country contexts.

Secondly, Humprecht et al.'s (2020) study did not include any Eastern European countries. Without focusing on these nations as well, important scholarly discussions on disinformation are missing. In order to contribute to these discussions, this study will also examine Poland using the same theoretical framework. As discussed by Gorwa (2018), there is a lack of international focus on Poland's disinformation situation. Applying this theoretical framework to a country that is under scrutiny for its democratic status, including government encroachment on press freedom, will also illuminate the ability of this framework to translate across different country contexts. These case studies will therefore focus on country differences to explicate how structural factors in political, media, and economic environments interact in a given country context to influence said country's resilience to disinformation.

Thirdly, this study seeks to add to Humprecht et al.'s (2020) theoretical framework through the inclusion of journalistic standards, roles, and ethics and media literacy. These indicators offer additional insight into resilience to disinformation.

Journalistic standards, for example, may interact with other media environment indicators to influence resilience more broadly. Media literacy has been identified by many scholars as contributing to disinformation resilience. These inclusions

supplement disinformation resilience scholarship by suggesting future avenues for research in these areas.

Finally, the large quantitative cross-country comparative format through which Humprecht et al. (2020) established their framework means that some nuanced considerations visible at the country-level may have been. As noted by Benkler et al. (2018), “[d]ifferent political systems, coming from different historical trajectories and institutional traditions, will likely exhibit different effects of the same basic technological affordances” (p. 8). Analyzing each factor in-depth reveals the complexity of using these as indicators for international rankings and the challenge of ranking disinformation resilience more generally. Such critical discussion highlights avenues for future research.

To accomplish these contributions, this thesis will proceed as follows: in the next chapter—the literature review—I will review the theoretical framework and expand upon it with additional research to support or nuance each influencing factor. I will also propose additions to the framework. Chapter three will review the methodology, country selection, and indicators and sources used in this study. In chapter four, using the original quantitative sources outlined by Humprecht et al. (2020) and additional secondary qualitative sources, I will analyze each factor of the resilience to disinformation framework in both the Finnish and Polish cases to identify new considerations. Finally, in chapter five, I will discuss the findings of this in-depth mixed methods case study analysis of the original framework.

2 Literature Review

The spread of false information online is a phenomenon with many disputed names, characteristics, and effects. Amongst the wide-ranging and divergent studies on the overall topic of online deception, concepts including “computational propaganda,” “misinformation,” and “disinformation” are studied—each describing slightly different understandings, foci or characteristics. A brief explanation of the concept studied here is thus necessary to clarify the focus and conceptualization of disinformation as used in this thesis.

Misinformation and disinformation can be separated through the degree of intentionality. As argued by Pal & Banerjee (2019), misinformation encompasses media that may contain false information, context omission or biased viewpoints but does not intentionally mean to deceive; in contrast, disinformation intends to deceive by using the aforementioned elements as mechanisms for deception (p. 6).

Humphrecht et al. (2020)—the theoretical framework on which this thesis is based—focus on disinformation, which they define as “content produced to generate profits, pursue political goals, or maliciously mislead, such as in the form of hoaxes” (Humphrecht et al. 2020, p. 494). This broad definition therefore leaves room to analyze the different intentions and sources of disinformation, such as the purely economically-motivated, the government-sponsored, and so-called ‘trolling’ by individuals. Disinformation is therefore broadly defined as false information that is intentionally created, manipulated, or disseminated online (Pal & Banerjee, 2019; Humphrecht et al. 2020).

However, disinformation as defined by Humphrecht et al. (2020) also stands to be nuanced through the understanding of disinformation as propaganda. According to Hobbs (2020), “propaganda refers to a form of persuasion that aims to influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of a large audience,” with disinformation falling under this form of persuasion (p. 8). Benkler et al. (2018) pinpoint their understanding of disinformation as a “subset of propaganda that includes dissemination of explicitly false or misleading information” (p. 32).

Scholars have also framed disinformation as propaganda in the context of the digital space. For example, computational propaganda is defined by Woolley and Howard (2018) as “the use of algorithms, automation, and human curation to purposefully

manage and distribute misleading information over social media networks” (p. 4). Benkler et al. (2018) pinpoint “network propaganda” as “the ways in which the architecture of a media ecosystem makes it more or less susceptible to disseminating these kinds of manipulations and lies” (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 24). The authors argued this creates a propaganda feedback loop—“a network dynamic in which media outlets, political elites, activists, and publics form and break connections based on the contents of statements, and that progressively lowers the costs of telling lies that are consistent with a shared political narrative and increases the costs of resisting that shared narrative in the name of truth” (p.33). In this way, as the core of disinformation is to spread false information with the intention to influence in some way, it is a form of propaganda.

While propaganda has a long history in mass communication, it has undoubtedly changed with the advent of the internet and the change in media throughout the digital age. Digital platforms allow for “automation, scalability, and anonymity” as well as “rapid distribution of large amounts of content” (Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 6). Producers and disseminators of disinformation can be hidden behind anonymous or fake accounts; easy, direct engagement by users can amplify sensational messages through viral posts; bots and trolls can create the illusion of support or rejection; algorithms can purposely lift content for the sake of promoting engagement or securing advertising (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Benkler et al., 2018; Hobbs, 2020; Hwang et al., 2021; Klyueva, 2019; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Rhodes, 2022; Srba et al., 2023; Woolley & Howard, 2018). As stated by Woolley and Howard (2018), “propaganda is old, the rate of misinformation’s spread is new”—it is not simply that propaganda occurs online nowadays, but that strategies now “rely on computational enhancement” (p.6).

Therefore, while the authors behind the resilience to disinformation framework this thesis relies on suggest “[d]isinformation is similar to propaganda” (Humprecht et al., 2021, p.2), this thesis will go a step forward to assert that disinformation is propaganda. This assertion highlights a major argument underlying this thesis—while technological developments, the internet, and social media may offer new ways of creating and rapidly disseminating disinformation, this is not an inescapable trajectory brought on by these advancements, but rather a further reflection of existing societal structures that can cause the dissemination of disinformation as well

as hamper or build resilience to it. Furthermore, conceptualizing disinformation as a form of propaganda clarifies the interaction between structural influencers across political, media, and economic environments as well as the importance of a critical approach to media literacy as a response to this phenomenon.

2.1 Resilience to Online Disinformation

Despite the focus on online disinformation, the factors influencing the dissemination of and resilience to disinformation span far beyond the internet (Benkler et al., 2018; Garrett, 2017; Humprecht et al., 2020). Technology, and specifically the internet, does not operate in a vacuum or in a one-way relationship with society. According to Benkler et al., (2018), “[t]he fundamental mistake of ‘the internet polarizes’ narrative is that it adopts too naïve a view of how technology works and understates the degree to which institutions, culture, and politics shape technological adoption and diffusion patterns” (p.8). While advances in technology influence our understanding of the world and the way in which we communicate, it is nonetheless also under the influence of existing institutions that shape and are shaped by these advances. As such, “[e]ach country’s institutions, media ecosystems, and political culture will interact to influence the relative significance of the internet’s democratizing affordances relative to its authoritarian and nihilistic affordances” (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 8). Focusing on the ways political, media, and economic environments influence disinformation—and the idea that disinformation is a form of propaganda in it of itself—acknowledges the interplay between society and technology, rather than ascribing it as technology and communications’ inevitable fate. This also impacts the way each of the sub-factors—discussed below—interact to influence how people across countries navigate the internet.

The benefit of studies such as that by Humprecht et. al (2020) is that they seek to acknowledge, at least in some ways, this feedback loop (see Benkler et al. (2018) p. 33). Humprecht et al. (2020) broadly conceptualize resilience as the collective ability for a group to overcome challenges (p. 497). The disinformation resilience framework, then, outlines three major structural environments that impact this resilience: political, media, and economic. In particular, the authors argued that greater polarization and populist communication, high audience fragmentation, low trust in news, weak public service media, large ad markets and high social media use

for news will negatively influence a country’s resilience to online disinformation (Humprecht et al., 2020, pp. 498–501). These factors and environments are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Structural Influencers of Resilience to Disinformation

Note: Table compiled from Humprecht et al. (2020, pp. 498-501).

Political Environment	Media Environment	Economic Environment
Polarization of Society	Trust in News	Ad Market Size
Populist Communication	Public Service Media	Social Media Use
	Audience Fragmentation	

In the context of online disinformation, resilience can be understood as preventative—not only does it aim to prevent the dissemination of disinformation in the first place, it also aims to equip people to be critical of information and less inclined to engage or share it (Humprecht et al., 2020, p. 498). In a 2021 survey-based application of their framework, the authors solidify this position by “operationaliz[ing] resilience as the unwillingness to share, like, and comment on disinformation” (Humprecht et al., 2021, p. 3).

These environmental factors overlap and work in conjunction to create a complicated web of influencers that interact to impact a country’s resilience to disinformation. However, though these structural influencers sketch out a meaningful framework through which we can understand a country’s generalized ability to resist dissemination and belief in disinformation, they must be further nuanced in order to develop how these influencers work in practice in different historical, societal, and cultural contexts.

Humprecht et al. (2020) applied these structural factors to a quantitative study of 18 Western, Northern, and Southern European countries as well as the United States and Canada. Using their findings, they separated these countries into three clusters. The first cluster contains countries that maintain a “high level of resilience” (p. 505). According to the authors, these mostly Northern European countries, including Finland, are “media-supportive and more consensual,” which means they have public support for public service media, relatively high trust in media, low audience fragmentation, low populist communication, and low polarization (p. 505). The second cluster, which consisted of mainly Southern European countries, are

described by the authors as “polarized” because of partisan news, political polarization, populist communication, and the use of social media for news (p. 505). The third cluster contains only the United States, as it remains unique in its polarization, ad market size, weak public service, fragmented news consumption, populist communication, and low trust in the media, making it “a low-trust, politicized, and fragmented environment” (p. 506).

In the following sections, I will critically discuss each factor identified in Humprecht et al.’s (2020) framework in the context of wider literature. Following this review, I will propose two additional factors based on scholarly literature.

2.1.1 Polarization of Society

According to Humprecht et al. (2020), higher polarization leads to greater amounts of disinformation because it causes people to only consume information that is favorable to their partisan beliefs and reject facts that are harmful to those beliefs, thus creating the foundation for disinformation to spread (p. 498).

Political polarization contributes to low resilience to disinformation because it influences what sources and stories people believe and spread. Studies have shown that people tend to believe information that aligns with their existing views, also known as confirmation bias (Cinelli et al., 2021; Hobbs, 2020; Jang & Kim, 2018; O’Connor & Weatherall, 2019). In the case of polarization, this existing cognitive bias can make people more willing to believe information favorable to their side or detrimental to the other side, regardless of the source (Humprecht et al., 2020; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). This fosters a complete lack of trust in the opposing viewpoints polarized political environments create, thus increasing the likelihood that individuals will believe disinformation about their opposition or themselves. This feeds into itself—being exposed to polarized perspectives leads to entrenchment and further polarization (Levy, 2021).

High partisanship makes people less likely to trust sources that strive to be unbiased. The usefulness of fact-checking websites, which aim to confirm or debunk claims, has been called into question as a mis- and disinformation fighting tool because many simply choose to deny confirmed facts that reject their preconceived opinions (Humprecht, 2019; Humprecht et al., 2020, p. 498). This rejection can also make

people less likely to trust public service media, (Newman, 2020, p. 10), thus feeding into the loop of polarization as partisan media continues to move toward further partisan coverage (Benkler et al., 2018, p.77).

Disinformation can therefore also work to increase societal polarization, demonstrating the complex, reciprocal relationship (Benkler et al., 2018; Pal & Banerjee, 2019). According to the V-Dem 2023 report, “disinformation, polarization, and autocratization reinforce each other” as autocratizing political actors spread disinformation with the aim of influencing perceptions and behaviors to increase their support while also sowing division, thus increasing polarization and autocratization, which goes on to feed more disinformation” (Papada et al., p.25).

A country’s polarized political environment can also impact the spread of false information through individual politicians themselves. For example, the 2020 Digital News Report found that “domestic politicians are the single most frequently named source of misinformation, though in some countries—including the United States—people who self-identify as right wing are more likely to blame the media—part of a ‘pick-your-side’ dynamic” (Newman et al., 2020, p. 9). Domestic politicians are most often identified as sources of false information, which may both suggest these are frequent purveyors of misinformation and disinformation as propaganda, but also that the respondents indicating these factors may themselves be polarized to a point that they believe opposing politicians may be spreading false information, regardless of the veracity. The political divisions highlighted in the U.S. also show how such polarization can bleed into the media, and may be associated to specific ideologies.

2.1.2 Populist Communication

Closely linked to the polarization of society is populist communication. While populism itself remains a contested term amongst scholars, this thesis, as per the definition used by Humprecht et al. (2020), conceives of populism as a communication style. According to this theorization, populism—rather than being attached to a particular ideology or political leaning—is a political communication method that, at its core, must appeal to or claim to represent ‘the people,’ and may additionally consist of anti-establishment/anti-elitist and/or exclusionary rhetoric (Aalberg et al., 2016; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Being a political communication style, it can also be utilized by actors outside of political parties, including the media

and civilian actors. For example, studies have linked tabloid media in particular with more positive coverage of populist parties (Fawzi, 2019; Herkman, 2017) and with populist communication themselves (Stępińska, 2020).

According to Humprecht et al. (2020), the existence of populist communication hampers resilience to disinformation. In their 2021 study, Humprecht et al. found that populist party support made a person more likely to spread disinformation (Humprecht et al., 2021, p. 13). Populist communication can contribute to the polarization of society through the identification of the outgroup and use of rhetoric to between 'us' and 'them.' Populism also seeks to undermine established institutions that are perceived as a corrupt elite. This anti-elitism may target the media, current governments and political systems, and state institutions, for example (Aalberg, T. et al., 2016; Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Engler et al., 2019; Fawzi, 2019; Hameleers, 2021; Newman et al., 2020).

Another method through which populist communication can hamper resilience to disinformation is the propagation of conspiracy theories (Szebeni et al., 2021; Ylä-Anttila, 2018; Žuk & Žuk, 2020). Benkler et al. (2018) and Szebeni et al. (2021), for example, found a link between believing in conspiracy theories and believing in false information. According to Ylä-Anttila (2018), conspiracy theories may be utilized in populist communication as “counterknowledge,” which challenges “epistemic authority by advocating alternative knowledge authorities” (p.4). In particular, conspiracy theories are “particularly suited for populist framing because [they] posit that the common people are misled in secrecy by an elite” (Ylä-Anttila, 2018, pp. 6–7). Scholars have also found that right-wing and conservative groups specifically are more likely to disseminate and believe disinformation, including conspiracy theories (Benkler et al., 2018; Hameleers, 2021; Morosoli et al., 2022; Szebeni et al., 2021). Ylä-Anttila (2018) and Žuk and Žuk (2020) have both linked populist right-wing rhetoric in Finland and Poland, respectively, to the spread of conspiracy theories online. This counterknowledge and anti-elitism of populist communication often targets news media outlets and institutions as purveyors of falsehoods. Due to the ways in which populism may encourage anti-elitism in the creation of ‘an other’, it can influence the polarization of society and trust in the media by calling into question the motives of traditional media outlets while solidifying an “us” versus “them” (Aalberg, et al., 2016, p. 23; Humprecht et al., 2020, p. 499).

In their 2021 study, Humprecht et al. found that “in more consensus-oriented democracies, such as Switzerland, extreme ideology seems to be a less relevant driver of the spread of disinformation. In other countries, however, where the rise of populist ideology is tearing open social rifts, extreme ideology diminishes the resilience of citizens” (p. 13). This finding may be of particular relevance in this thesis, as between Poland and Finland—as discussed later in the analysis section—Finland continues to have a more consensus-oriented system than that of the severely polarized and antagonistic political environment seen in Poland, where many populist parties are active and garner significant support.

2.1.3 Trust in News

According to Aalberg et al. (2016),

[F]or citizens, media coverage is typically by far the most important source of information about real-world situations and politicians, with social media gaining in importance only recently. Based on direct and mediated experiences as well as personal predispositions, the populist or non-populist messages of politicians and the media might produce certain outcomes including reality perceptions regarding the state of the country ... positive or negative emotions ... relevant aspects of social identity ... attitudes ... and behavioral consequences (p. 23).

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the truth behind this statement as the urgent need for up-to-date reliable information reversed a years-long negative trend in trust in the news across the globe; however, save for Finland, this reversal did not last, as trust continues to fall globally (Newman et al., 2022, p. 10). This decreasing trust in the news is a cause for concern as, according to Humprecht et al. (2020), low trust in the professional news media can negatively influence resilience to disinformation because it causes people to selectively interpret news and search for alternative news sources that may not be held to the same journalistic standards (p. 499). Similarly, low trust in such organizations to deliver seemingly ‘unbiased’ news may lead readers to seek out information from alternative sources that they perceive to be unbiased or match their preconceived opinions (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 215). As found by Humprecht (2019), low trust may lead audiences to seek out fewer news sources and stick to those that meet their partisan biases, and vice versa. If—as argued by Aalberg

et al. (2016) above—media coverage is our main gateway through which we receive information about local, national, and global affairs, then losing trust in common sources of said coverage will hamper resilience to disinformation.

This element is thus closely tied to the polarization of society and some types of populist communication because of the desire to consume partisan news or news that is not part of the ‘elite establishment,’ as seen in anti-establishment populism. This can lead to a so-called propaganda feedback loop that reinforces this dynamic—“once it is set in motion the media, elites, and public are all participants in a self-reinforcing feedback loop that disciplines those who try to step off it with lower attention or votes, and gradually over time increases the costs to everyone of introducing news that is not identity confirming, or challenges the partisan narratives and frames” (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 79). Similarly, without care, the discussion of disinformation itself can continue to “erode public trust in any commonly held media” (Boler, 2019, p. 187) and form a self-fulfilling prophecy that could simply serve to increase distrust (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 268).

This growing distrust may also come from “a general political malaise” (Humprecht et al., 2020, p. 499) or the deeper political issues behind these problems (Bennett & Livingston, 2018, p. 127). This may also be a sign of a lack of representation, frustration with the status quo, and the desire to challenge current ways of thinking. Simply put, this “contestation of authorities” may be used by social movements across the globe to challenge political regimes and societal norms (Ylä-Anttila, 2018, Mosca & della Porta, 2009). In some instances, it may not be the quality of journalism at issue, but rather audiences’ satisfaction with existing institutions and the perspectives news organizations may provide.

This complicated relationship between media, politics, and public may therefore have many reasons underlying why trust in the news is low. For these reasons, the factor of trust in the news must be considered carefully as to not be reductive of the myriad of reasons why a particular society may opt out of mainstream news or seek their news elsewhere. In a society in which news is censored and public broadcasting consists of state-sponsored propaganda, the idea of trust in the news may lead to entirely different conceptions.

Humphrecht et al. (2021), upon testing their earlier framework through surveys, noted “only a limited relationship between resilience and public service broadcaster use, a diverse media diet, and trust in new media” (p. 13). Though the authors note this may have been due to the aforementioned pandemic-era trust increase, it may also have been because “the relationship between media-related factors and disinformation dissemination is more complex than presented in previous research” (Humphrecht et al., 2021, p. 13). As this thesis will argue, while Humphrecht et al. (2020)’s study looked at democracies in particular, even conditions in these countries can vary drastically, calling for a more intricate consideration regarding the media environment especially. As an indicator, trust in the news begins to tell the story, but may nonetheless need additional considerations that nuance its outcome depending on the country which is being examined.

2.1.4 Public Service Media

A strong public service media environment suggests greater resilience to disinformation because of the type and amount of news coverage it provides and its potential ability to improve the news environment as a whole (Humphrecht et al., 2020, p. 500). Scholars argue that public service media improve political knowledge and attention on domestic and international affairs as compared to commercial news media because of its coverage of so-called “hard news” topics (Aalberg, 2015; Aalberg & Curran, 2011; Curran et al., 2009, 2011). According to Aalberg (2015), the “hard news” broadcast by public service media is “politically relevant for society as a whole, and based on impersonal and unemotional reporting.” In contrast, commercial, market-driven media are more likely to provide “soft news” or “infotainment”, which is “less political and more focused on individuals, personal and emotional reporting” (pp. 3-4). Hard news has been associated with greater political and current affairs knowledge (Aarts et al., 2012; Curran et al., 2009). This distinction between hard and soft news is important in the context of democratic societies where the public’s perceptions and behaviors are informed by the media they consume. Though it has been noted to be “a relatively blunt tool of analysis,” as *how* news is reported is important in addition to *which* stories are reported (Curran et al., 2011, pp. 85–86), for the purposes of this study, these categories are nonetheless useful in highlighting the importance of public service media.

Public service media is also more successful at reaching all demographics in society. Countries in which public service broadcasters have dedicated news slots during prime time viewing not only ensure large portions of society watch the news, but are also more likely to ‘catch’ viewers who were not searching for news, thus making it easier to disseminate hard news, even if passively (Aalberg, 2015; Curran et al., 2009). Curran et al. (2009) also found that public service broadcasters were better at reaching “disadvantaged groups” in Finland, noting that public service media’s funding model and goals to inform and serve means they will prioritize reaching all kinds of viewers over advertising incentives (p. 18-19). Due to market-driven goals, commercial media has been found to focus more on soft or entertaining news in order to ensure viewership (Aalberg, 2015).

This factor also demonstrates the need to include an in-depth analysis into the country-specific circumstances surrounding public service media. For example, a country that already maintains polarized and populist leadership may still possess public service media, but it may not be to the same neutral degree expected in an ideal liberal democracy. For example, Tsfati and Ariely (2014) found that trust in public service media is correlated to level of democracy. Such a finding may be relevant when considering the Polish case, for example, where the public broadcasting service Telewizja Polska (TVP) is distrusted due to a major increase in its pro-government coverage since the election of PiS in 2015 (Gorwa, 2018, p. 93) and attacks on freedom of the press (Reporters Without Borders, 2023; Poland, 2023). Aalberg (2015) also found that it may not be enough for a country to have public service media, as the quality influences its positive effects; in the case of Italian public broadcasting, the effect on news knowledge was actually negative (p. 6). The interconnected nature of the political and media environments requires careful consideration into how these elements influence each other within a given country, and therefore how these interactions may influence which factors contribute to disinformation resilience.

Humprecht et al. (2020) used market share of public TV and public revenue (or license fees) to measure the strength of public service media (p. 502). While this does measure the reach and resources of public service media, as well as its standing in a country’s government and wider society, it does not capture the quality or journalistic standards nor the independence of said public service media. Furthermore, as the

theoretical framework does not account for trust in specific news brands, it does not capture how poor public service media may actually contribute to the disinformation environment. For this reason, this thesis will expand upon the original indicators by also examining trust in news by brand.

2.1.5 Audience Fragmentation

Audience fragmentation, or conversely, overlap, represents the shared news sources audiences consume (Humprecht et al., 2020, p. 500). A fragmented audience is one in which people are split across different news sources and may consume them exclusively. Between the internet and traditional news outlets, the sheer amount of news sources means that audiences may no longer be consuming the same shared media sources that were standard in the ages of print or television news domination.

With lower barriers to entry, almost anyone can become a producer of content on the internet without the same journalistic standards and resources of professional news media (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Woolley & Howard, 2018; Klyueva, 2019; Dale, 2019). Though this leads to greater access and participation, it may also lead to greater risk for disinformation. In addition to the increased amount of and access to news sources, the technological methods with which social media platforms and search engines function may also lead to what scholars have identified as echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2020; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Rhodes, 2022; Terren & Borge-Bravo, 2021) and filter bubbles (Papadamou et al., 2022; Rhodes, 2022; Srba et al., 2023).

Echo chambers—regardless of whether they occur in-person or online—describe conditions in which the information and opinions a person comes across all conform to their pre-conceived biases and thus only serve to confirm them (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). On social media, echo chambers become even more defined as people are allowed to curate who they follow and what they see and train algorithms that define these chambers further; this may especially be the case with partisans and highly polarized individuals (Rhodes, 2022, p. 5). Cinelli et al. (2020) found that the type of platform may influence how consistently echo chambers form. For instance, the authors found that platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are more prone to echo chambers according to users' leanings on certain issues while platforms such as Reddit cause users to interact with other leanings more easily (pp. 6).

Filter bubbles focus more on the backend platform end, in which engagement or interaction with certain topics or opinions will lead a social media platform's content algorithm to continue suggesting related content. Platforms such as YouTube work by suggesting content its algorithm curated on prior engagement, including rabbit holes of conspiracy theories and pseudoscience (Papadamou et al., 2022; Srba et al., 2023). Interestingly, these scholars have opposing conclusions regarding where the algorithm shows such content more—the search page (Papadamou et al., 2022) or the recommendations and homepage (Srba et al., 2023). Though both demonstrated an increase in suggestions for similar content, this disparity nonetheless highlights the difficulty of measuring this phenomenon and thus drawing conclusions about its effects.

Scholars have also criticized studies on filter bubbles and echo chambers. For example, Garrett (2017) and Flaxman et al. (2016) argue that echo chambers are an inaccurate description of social media networks and that people actually encounter opposing information and opinions quite often. Rather, “engagement echo chambers” are more accurate in capturing the picture—people may be exposed to different opinions, but it does not matter because they will not “like” or heed those opinions, but instead engage more with their own (Garrett, 2017, pp. 371–372). Exposure to facts countering one's opinion may simply entrench them further.

In relation to the aforementioned political polarization and trust in the media, audience fragmentation can also occur if audiences consume limited news sources due to lack of trust or if they only seek out news sources that correspond to their biases. A larger and more varied mediascape, as seen in Poland, may lead to greater audience fragmentation than that in Finland. However, the Polish mediascape also simply offers more options than the Finnish mediascape. Scholars have found that some countries maintain strong public broadcasters and limited private options, such as in Northern Europe (Aalberg & Curran, 2011, p. 198).

With these different facets of audience fragmentation in mind, Humprecht et al. (2020) determine that more fragmented audiences reduce resilience to disinformation, as fewer differing opinions can be encountered and more opportunities for disinformation exist if there are few “universally recognized news media” (p. 500). As such, this conceptualization of resilience is not just about

individual news stories, but also the expectation and ability to collectively turn to certain news outlets as a society.

2.1.6 Ad Market Size

Under economic structural factors, Humprecht et al. (2020) argue that a large ad market size reduces disinformation resiliency (p. 500). This assertion is based on the discovery that dissemination of disinformation can be a lucrative business due to online advertising (Humprecht et al., 2020, p. 501; Dale, 2019, p. 128; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, pp. 218-219). This incentive arises as low barriers to entry and less scrutiny than in the professional news media allow for such websites to utilize clickbait titles and outlandish disinformation to attract clicks, which ultimately results in financial gain (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Dale, 2019). One such example is that of a group of teenagers from Macedonia, who earned thousands by publishing disinformation on 2016 American presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 217). Similarly, the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation includes commitments to curb monetization on disinformation sites (European Commission, 2023) This adds further complexity to the dissemination of disinformation as producers may arise with the sole incentive of earning money, thus further muddling who creates these wide-reaching stories.

However, online advertising incentives are not the only aspect of a large ad market that may influence the quality of reporting. Scholars of media systems and public broadcasting have noted that commercialization of news can harm the quality and amount of hard news, as discussed above in the public service media section (Aalberg et al., 2010; Aalberg, 2015; Brekken et al., 2011; Curran et al., 2009; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2019). Whereas public broadcasters are funded through license fees or taxes, commercial broadcasters rely on advertising revenue, thus influencing their incentives to retain audience interest through sensational or entertaining news coverage and target audiences who may be more willing or able to respond to advertising. Curran et al., (2009, p. 19) note that the latter may also harm the ability of disadvantaged members of society to access news, as compared to public broadcasters. Such monetary incentives have been found to lead broadcasters to report on politics and news as a “game” (Curran et al., 2011, pp. 96) or framing stories around scandals, sensational headlines, or small pieces of interesting information

rather than policy details (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 17). This aforementioned ‘infotainment’ focus can lead to diminished news quality and therefore decreased political affairs knowledge, opening the door for dissemination of disinformation in addition to the existing monetary incentives to capitalize on sensationalist disinformation.

2.1.7 Social Media Use for News

Scholars of disinformation have found examples of complicated and far-reaching methods for creating and spreading disinformation on social media. New technology has allowed for the increased propagation of deepfakes (Hwang et al., 2021; Hobbs, 2020), trolling (Benkler et al., 2018; Bjola & Papadakis, 2020; Klyueva, 2019; Woolley & Howard, 2018), and astroturfing (Klyueva, 2019). Each of these represent different ways in which false information can purposely be created to spread online, and do so with great virality. Vosoughi et al. (2018), for example, studied the spread of false information on Twitter, concluding that “false news spreads farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth because humans, not robots are more likely to spread it” (p. 5). Social media platforms exacerbate the dissemination of disinformation through their very business models—algorithms, sensationalism, attention economy. In combination with built-in mechanisms that support such behavior, social media users themselves have been found to be the “primary drivers of fake news” (Dale, 2019, p. 127).

The final factor identified by Humprecht et al. (2020) is therefore social media usage, which the authors tested as “social media use for news” and “sharing news on social media” (p. 502). To more accurately present this factor, I have renamed it Social Media Use for News. According to the authors, high social media usage can be understood as an indicator of resilience due to the high exposure of disinformation of social media platforms (p. 501).

In their 2021 operationalization of this framework, Humprecht et al., (2021) adapted their understanding of social media use to mean not only the amount of general social media use, but also engagement on social media, finding that across the six Western democracies they surveyed, high social media use and activity for news “significantly lowered the intention to refrain from giving additional exposure to disinformation” alongside other factors (p. 13).

Xiao et al., (2021) found that people who consumed most news through social media were more likely to believe in false information and conspiracy theories, however, these results were exacerbated when coupled with high trust in social media news, even if users had a self-identified strong ability to identify misinformation. However, of those who did not have high trust in social media news, their self-identified ability to identify misinformation did help. These results show a twofold qualification for social media usage: first, confidence in one's ability to identify misinformation is not alone sufficient in actually ensuring users are skeptical of misinformation. Second, using social media for news may affect dissemination of disinformation differently depending on other behaviors and characteristics.

In a deeper analysis of social media news consumption across all markets, the 2021 Digital News Report found that on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, people pay the most attention mainstream news outlets and content. With Facebook, the news opinions of ordinary people are a close second; with YouTube, internet personalities are a close second. Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok news consumers all pay the most attention to personalities. This closely follows the motivations for using these platforms for news—most users on YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok seek out news for entertainment. On Facebook, 32% of respondents who use the platform for news see it incidentally while on the platform for other reasons (Newman et al., 2021, pp. 24–25). Other studies on incidental news consumption also highlight the fragmented nature with which people may consume news on social media—tending to focus on headlines or interesting stories in a myriad of other content—as well as the filtering that occurs when users' friends and families are the ones choosing what news comes in front of them (Boczkowski et al., 2018).

2.2 Additions to the Framework

While Humprecht et al. (2020)'s framework lays the foundation for analyzing the complex and interconnected political, media, and economic elements influencing resilience to disinformation, there are nonetheless additional elements that may add fruitful considerations that are currently lacking from the model. This thesis suggests two additional elements to be considered as part of the media environment's impact on resilience to disinformation: journalistic standards, roles, and ethics and media literacy.

2.2.1 Journalistic Standards, Roles, and Ethics

In their study on populism and trust in the media, Fawzi (2019) noted that not enough consideration is given to how people’s “naïve media theories” or “normative expectations toward media” based on their everyday experiences with media goes on to influence their trust in it (p. 149-150). One way in which an audience may be influenced through their everyday reactions to news is through the norms, standards, and ethics through which journalists in a given society abide. The trust in news is therefore also “closely connected to [the media’s] performance, which leads to another element of media evaluations: satisfaction with the media’s political and societal functions such as their information, watchdog, and socialization functions” (Fawzi, 2019, p. 150).

Studies have shown that journalists across different countries view the function of their work differently, from neutral observers to interventionist watchdogs (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Mellado, 2020; Standaert, 2022; Stępińska & Ossowski, 2012; Väliverronen et al., 2016; Willnat et al., 2013). In a related vein, studies have also shown that audiences maintain different preferences and expectations about their news as well. The 2020 Digital News Report, for example, found that countries such as Germany and Japan prefer “strong and independent” broadcasters, while countries such as Spain and Portugal prefer more “partial” news (Newman et al., 2020, p. 15).

A country’s journalistic standards, roles, and ethics—both formal and informal—have great influence on the population’s general trust in the media which, as demonstrated above through the existing framework, can have massive impact on other elements of the media environment, such as where audiences get their news. For example, public service media will also be influenced by the standards and norms journalists abide by.

Hanitzsch et al., (2011) examined how journalists in 18 countries perceived of journalism’s institutional role, including interventionism, power distance, and market orientation—beliefs in epistemologies such as objectiveness, and ethical ideologies. The authors found that while certain aspects of so-called ‘western ideals’ such as being detached and being a watchdog of the government were generally accepted across the globe, there were also many differences between countries. Even within western countries, the authors observed differences within these established norms. One in particular is the concept of interventionism, wherein journalists

provide “active support of particular values, positions, groups, and social change,” which “is generally not a characteristic of western journalistic cultures” (Hanitzsch et al., 2011, p. 280). Rather, “a tendency towards interventionism can be found among journalists from developing societies and transitional democracies” (p. 280). The unique situation of each society impacts journalistic norms differently, which goes on to impact the media environment and the ways in which the public consumes and views the media, and, ultimately, their resilience to disinformation.

The aim in examining journalistic standards, roles, and ethics is not to ascribe a hegemonic set of standards to be applied across the globe, but rather to acknowledge how different historical, cultural, and political elements influence the ways in which journalists view their work and their duty to society. This suggested influencer addresses a problem with the current framework that has been raised in previous sections: it assumes a standard of media. The inclusion of this influencer, then, is also to acknowledge the elements behind country-level lack of trust in the media, rather than simply acknowledging the lack of trust itself.

2.2.2 Media Literacy

Media literacy has been omitted from Humprecht et al.’s (2020) model, despite being cited as a key factor in strengthening resilience to disinformation (Bjola & Papadakis, 2020; Durach et al., 2020; Filipec, 2019; Hobbs, 2020; Hwang et al., 2021; Jang & Kim, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). Bjola and Papadakis (2020), for example, argued that media literacy equips the individual as they interact with disinformation. Lee et al. (2017) pointed to media literacy as “ever more important when the internet and social media are full of unproved and invalidated information, including fake news” (p.261). Hwang et al. (2021), for example, found that media literacy improved ability to detect a newer form of media manipulation—deep fakes.

Scholars have also identified other types of literacy aimed at addressing the disinformation and general changes in communication brought about by technological advances. For example, data literacy and AI literacy aim to address the incredible data and new technologies and biases that have developed during the digital age (Jandrić, 2019). Science media literacy—particularly tested because of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting disinformation—seeks to promote understanding of science and health in mass communication and discussion (Austin et al., 2021).

Though these perspectives are valuable in nuancing more specific discussions of disinformation and the internet, because this thesis focuses on online disinformation more generally, I will refer to critical media literacy more broadly.

Media literacy may also interact with other factors to improve resilience. Given that social media use for news and trust in the news were identified as a major factors affecting resilience to disinformation, it follows that media literacy be considered, especially as users are able to interact with a variety of sources. In fact, strong media literacy has been identified as one way Finland has successfully resisted disinformation (Bjola & Papadakis, 2020; Lessenski, 2022). According to the Media Literacy Index—a ranking that combines media freedom, education, trust, and e-participation indicators—Finland continues to be the highest ranking country regarding media literacy; Poland has been classified at the low end of “well performing” (Lessenski, 2022, p. 9).

However, Hobbs (2020) argued that media literacy must be understood beyond simply identifying sources, motivations, and the meaning behind propaganda messages, but also include the ability to navigate the technology on which such messages are increasingly hosted and amplified, including understanding how the platforms, algorithms, and tools used work. Scholars have argued that the effectiveness of media literacy requires the incorporation of critical political and historical education (Bjola & Papadakis, 2020; Filipec, 2019; Hobbs, 2020). Bjola and Papadakis (2020) argued that such an approach abandons the “politically neutral argument about creating more educated citizens” and instead covers civic engagement and values in combination with the technical skills needed in order to safely and critically use the internet or social media (p. 21). If online disinformation is understood as a form of propaganda influenced by and influencing societies, this politically- and civically-engaged media literacy may aid in identifying, rejecting, and preventing the dissemination of disinformation. However, this also means that it is harder to measure.

This thesis will frame its conclusions through the lens of critical media literacy and specifically that of Freire and Macedo’s (1987) approach to critical literacy. As noted by Brisola and Doyle (2019) in their application of critical pedagogy to disinformation, “such criticality can be understood as the element that differentiates what is simply made available, technical or taught (formally or informally by

technical devices or apparatus of power) from what is critically seized and used by individuals, contributes to their being in the world and therefore, the exercise of their citizenship” (p. 282).

Accordingly, Freire and Macedo’s (1987) theory of critical literacy has been used in the context of disinformation and media literacy (Brisola & Doyle, 2019; Hobbs, 2020). According to Freire and Macedo (1987), literacy is about more than just “vocabulary development and word identification skills” (p. 146). Through this lens, media literacy is also about more than just learning technical elements of digital platforms or how to trace sources. As constructed by Freire and Macedo (1987), literacy involves investigating and understanding social constructions of language and society in the context of history and culture to empower people to participate in society and democratic institutions more broadly (p. 2). In the current day, in which communication and knowledge is increasingly constructed digitally, critical literacy can be applied in the context of the internet. In addition to the historical and social meanings that must be deconstructed when critically consuming information on and offline, social media and the internet have also necessitated a deeper critical questioning of the application of new technologies, such as the algorithms used by social media platforms. Media literacy, then, calls for constant questioning and learning of these new technologies, including where they originate and how they impact communication and behavior.

While the aforementioned factors were shown to be highly interrelated, media literacy—particularly the way in which it is defined here—relates to all outlined environments. As such, media literacy will be analyzed at the end of chapter four.

This thesis will therefore consider the original factors as outlined by Humprecht et al.’s (2020) framework, including polarization, populist communication, trust in news, public service media, audience fragmentation, ad market size, and social media use for news. I will also analyze the additional factors of journalistic standards, roles, and ethics as well as media literacy. The sources for these analyses are described in the next section.

3 Methodology

In order to contribute to the discussion on influencers of resilience to disinformation, this thesis focuses on two countries as its case studies: Finland and Poland. Though the theoretical model on which this study is based takes a quantitative approach across 18 Western democratic countries, this thesis will apply the model in a more in-depth mixed methods assessment in order to demonstrate the need to consider disinformation resilience holistically, and to contribute further additions to said model that emerged during analysis of the country cases. This approach allows for greater focus on the case studies, but may also limit the conclusions of this thesis; nonetheless, it opens the door for future studies to expand on the findings here.

3.1 Country Selection

Of the case studies, Finland was chosen due to its constant first-place ranking in indicators associated with resilience to disinformation, particularly in its political and media environments. For example, it ranks highest in trust in traditional news media (Newman, 2022) and has been constantly heralded for its media literacy education (Lessenski, 2022). Similarly, in Humprecht et al. (2020)'s study, Finland ranks first in resilience to disinformation.

Poland was chosen as the second case study for the principle reason that it, like many other post-communist countries, has been neglected in the field of cross-country comparative disinformation studies (Gorwa, 2018). Neither Poland nor any other post-communist country was included in the Humprecht et al. (2020) model, for example. While this does not detract from the authors' work, it nonetheless demonstrates a space for the inclusion of post-communist countries in European disinformation studies. The unique historical, cultural, and societal experiences of these nations may significantly influence the political, media, and economic environments that go on to influence a country's resilience to disinformation. Given Poland's current political and media environments, and in contrast to Finland's, this comparison may highlight important factors to disinformation resilience that emerge from varying political environments and the history of their media environments.

Both countries also have significant right-wing populist parties involved in government. While in the Polish case, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, PiS)

is in power and has been since 2015, in Finland, Perussuomalaiset (Finns Party, PS), has been a major political party involved in government through opposition and a coalition since 2011.

As briefly discussed in the previous section, these two countries were chosen to demonstrate new understandings about resilience to disinformation. In line with the theoretical framework of this study, the purpose of this comparative approach is not only to examine and explain some facets of the individual country cases, but also to then use these country cases as examples that can contribute to the discussion of resilience to disinformation as a whole.

3.2 Methods of Analysis

This thesis uses case study analysis. According to Yin (2014), case study research is applicable “in situations when (1) the main research questions are ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events; and (3) the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon” (p. 2). More specifically, I will use within-case analysis, wherein multiple cases are studied in-depth to reveal their own attributes. Bjola and Papadakis (2020) utilized within-case analysis in their study of four different digital propaganda narratives in Finland in order to examine reactions to each case in order to come to a greater understanding about Finland’s ability to resist digital propaganda.

According to Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe (2012), “Each case's findings can then be used as information contributing to the entire study, but each case remains a stand-alone entity.” (p. 971). The foundational idea underpinning this thesis is that a country’s characteristics—built upon its unique history, culture, and society—are influential in determining said populace’s ability to resist digital propaganda. Therefore, while Finland and Poland were chosen as case study countries due to their similarities and differences, the intention is not to compare the two directly, but rather to investigate each individual case in order to “understand the intrinsic aspects of a case study that are representative of other cases or because it is unique in its attributes” (Mills et al., 2012, p. 971).

Similarly, within-case analysis can also “reveal elements that may be otherwise overlooked because identifying common themes across cases in cross-cases analysis

may dilute the findings of individual cases” (Mills et al., 2012, p. 972). By utilizing within-case analysis on a much smaller sample of countries, I aim to address in part Humprecht et al.’s (2020) call for further research built upon their theoretical framework. This focus on individual cases and the understandings that can be drawn from each is a critical part of highlighting the need to consider country-specific cultural and historical legacies that may influence each factor and the ways in which they interact with each other. As such, while I will revisit the quantitative sources used in Humprecht et al.’s (2020) original study, I will also supplement this data with additional secondary sources to expound their country-specific contexts.

3.3 Framework for Analysis

This thesis will first analyze the political, media, and economic environments in Finland and Poland using the theoretical framework outlined by Humprecht et al. (2020) with the additions outlined below in Table 2. While examining these influencing factors, I will also problematize and nuance them in their country settings and, in the discussion, compare findings.

Table 2. Amended Structural Influencers of Resilience to Disinformation

Note: Table compiled from Humprecht et al. (2020, pp. 498-501).

Political Environment	Media Environment	Economic Environment
Polarization of Society	Journalistic Standards, Roles, and Ethics	Ad Market Size
Populist Communication	Trust in News	Social Media Use for News
	Audience Fragmentation	
	Public Service Media	
	Media Literacy	

Following this application of the resilience to disinformation model, I will analyze my additions to the framework. Finally, I will examine self-reported data of exposure to disinformation in both countries, as well as perceived ability to recognize it. In the discussion, I will also take a more critical view of the framework in order to demonstrate how such country case studies can contribute to how resilience to disinformation is discussed and measured.

3.4 Materials

Based on the measurable indicators of Humprecht et al. (2020, p. 502) and in the spirit of case study analysis, this thesis utilizes a variety of secondary sources to demonstrate the environments of each country. Namely, this study's analysis of environmental factors include a mix of secondary quantitative and qualitative sources, including statistics from international indices—such as the Digital News Report and Varieties of Democracy index—and local Finnish and Polish studies.

In a departure from the Humprecht et al.'s (2022) study, I also utilized longitudinal data when available, as looking at long-term trends is important in considering any societal factors. Similarly, longitudinal data makes it easier to pinpoint shifts or events that may have impact on influencing factors, and therefore resilience to disinformation. Humprecht et al. (2021), for example, noted that the pandemic may have influenced their results in their later operationalization of the resilience to disinformation framework (p.13). Analyzing factors over several years may illuminate trends and potential events for further research.

While indicators were kept consistent with the original framework study, where needed, substitutions were made, such as with the populist communication, public service media, ad market size, and exposure to disinformation metrics. As a substitution for populist communication, Järvinemi's (2022) classification of populist communication by political party leader interviews was used. This data was then used to inform data gathering on populist party vote shares, which were taken from Statistics Finland. Unfortunately, a recent similar such study was not available for the Polish case. Instead, Engler et al.'s (2019) study on populist political campaign communication online and Stepińska et al.'s (2020) analyses of right-wing populist parties' campaign manifestos and social media posts were used. This replaced the 2019 Timbro Populism Index, which was inaccessible at the time of writing.

Similarly, data for Public Service Media was substituted with national data and Digital News Report data, as the authors' original sources were inaccessible. Ad market size metrics were substituted with a similar measure provided by the World Bank—that being percentage of online users rather than number of online users per country. When examining reported exposure to disinformation, I also included respondent's reported ability to recognize disinformation.

As there were no journalistic standards, roles, and ethics data from the original study to draw on, data was taken from several sources. The Worlds of Journalism Study was used to examine the Finnish case, however, the current dataset did not include Poland. As such, for the Polish case, a combination of sources were used to provide a similar analysis—Mellado et al. (2020) and Stępińska & Ossowski (2012) surveyed Polish journalists at different points in time, examining their perceived roles, norms, and ethics.

Similarly, there were no media literacy metrics to draw on from the original study, however, in addition, the critical understanding of media literacy outlined above makes it difficult to capture and measure, particularly in the scope of this study. Therefore, the Media Literacy Index is analyzed to critically discuss this addition to the framework.

When necessary, and in line with the explorations in the literature review, additional indicators were added from the same sources or from country-level sources that measured similar indicators. For example, in their original study, Humprecht et al. (2020) utilized the V-Dem Index to measure the polarization of society amongst each country. Specifically, the authors measured the ‘Polarization of society’ indicator and ‘Online media fractionalization’ (Humprecht et al., 2020, p. 502). Interestingly, the authors did not include the ‘Political polarization’ indicator V-Dem also measures. This thesis will include this indicator because it has a direct impact on the polarization discussed in the framework and works in tandem with populist communication to create an antagonistic and polarized environment which contributes to the spread of online disinformation.

The complete list of indicators and sources can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Collected Indicators and Sources for Influencing Factors

Sources are outlined for each indicator. Country codes denote country-specific sources.

Influencing Factor	Indicator	Source
Polarization of Society	Polarization of society; Online media fragmentation; Political polarization	Varieties of Democracy Index (V-Dem Country Graphing Tool, 2001-2022)

Influencing Factor	Indicator	Source
Populist Communication	Populist parties; (FI) Interviews of party leaders; (PL) Party social media campaigns or manifestos; Vote share of populist parties	(FI) Norocel (2016); (FI) Järvinieniemi (2022); (FI) Statistics Finland (2015, 2019); (PL) Stępińska et al. (2016); (PL) Engler et al. (2019); (PL) Stępińska et al. (2020); (PL) Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (2015, 2019)
Trust in News	Overall trust in news; Trust in news I use; Trust in news by brand	Digital News Report (2015-2022)
Public Service Media	License feeds; Market share of public TV; Trust in news by brand	(FI) Statistics Finland (2021); (FI) Vero (2022); Digital News Report (2015-2022); (PL) KRRiT (2022); (PL) NIK (2021); (PL) wirtualmedia.pl (2023)
Audience Fragmentation	Weekly Reach – Offline and Online;	Digital News Report (2016-2022)
Journalistic Standards, Roles, and Ethics	Journalist perceived roles and ethics	(FI) Worlds of Journalism Study (2016); (PL) Mellado et al. (2020); (PL) Stępińska & Ossowski (2012)
Media Literacy	Media literacy ranking	Media Literacy Index (2018-2022)
Ad Market Size	Individuals using the internet	International Telecommunication Union (World Bank, 2021)
Social Media Use for News	Social media use for news; Sharing news online;	Digital News Report (2017-2022)
Exposure to Disinformation	Self-reported perceived exposure to disinformation; Ability to recognize disinformation	Flash Eurobarometer 464 (2018); Digital News Report (2018)

3.5 Limitations of methodology

In order to take a more nuanced qualitative approach to country-specific resilience to disinformation, this thesis is limited in the amount of country comparisons. As such, while this thesis seeks to contribute to its theoretical model by adding new perspectives for analysis and a broader critical discussion of comparative disinformation resiliency, this stance makes it difficult to generalize across countries. That being said, it also opens the opportunity for the implementation of this model to other countries in future case studies.

Due to the nature of mixed methods country case study analysis, the materials used do not represent an exhaustive list of sources or explanations. However, this thesis does not seek to provide an all-encompassing study of online disinformation in Poland and Finland, but rather seeks to operationalize the theoretical model qualitatively and contribute potential further avenues to strengthen measures of disinformation resilience.

In an effort to find comparable data, some data sources come from older studies. For example, data on disinformation exposure for both countries is from 2018. There have been global events and developments that may have impacted these numbers. This should be considered in any conclusions.

Finally, another limitation comes from the nature of disinformation studies to begin with—how much disinformation is out there, who is seeing it, and how much of an effect does it have? This study, like Humprecht et al. (2020), utilizes self-reported exposure to disinformation data, which assumes the ability of audiences to reflect on disinformation they may have come across, and as such, may miss or overstate the actual amount. This complication must be considered in any conclusions.

4 Analysis

Using the quantitative and qualitative sources outlined above, in the following, I examine each factor of the Finnish and Polish political environments, media environments, and economic environments, respectively. When available, longitudinal data was analyzed in order to pay greater attention to changes in environments and the ways in which they may influence resilience to disinformation as per the framework. Analyzing each factor in-depth revealed the importance of considering how each interacts with other factors, both those outlined in this framework and those which are not. To conclude the analysis, I will briefly discuss self-reported measurements of disinformation for both countries.

4.1 Political Environments

4.1.1 Polarization of Society

Finland maintains an overall low degree of polarization, though this has recently increased somewhat. In Figure 1, for online media fractionalization and polarization of society, the higher the value, the lower the polarization or fractionalization (V-Dem Institute, n.d.). A 4.0 value means that online media outlets represent major news in a generally similar way, affording some differences, and there is no significant polarization of society. For political polarization, the opposite is true—the lower the value, the lower the polarization of parties. In other words, a 0.0 value means that political parties are friendly; a 1.0 value means parties are more often friendly than hostile. The three indicators from V-Dem are compiled in Figure 1.

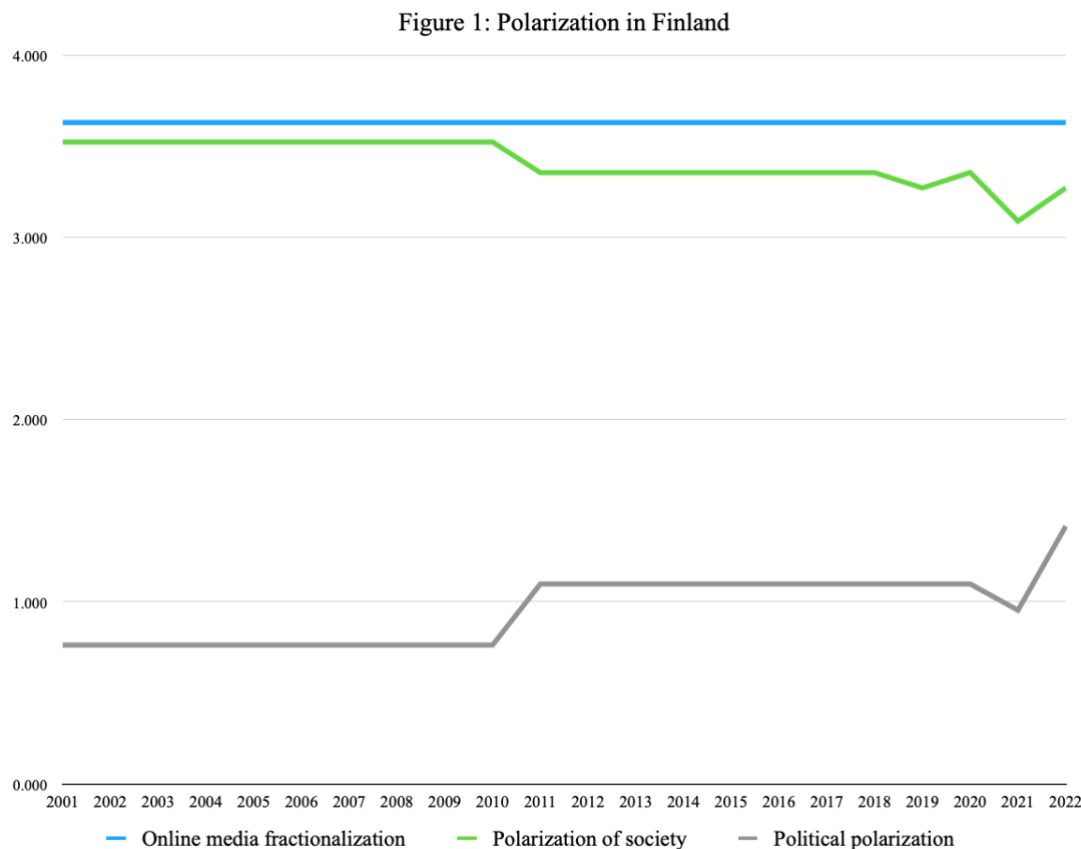


Figure 1. Polarization in Finland. Note: Figure reprinted from V-Dem Country Graphing Tool. Copyright 2023 Varieties of Democracy

Finland shows a low degree of polarization of society and political parties. In terms of online media fractionalization, Finnish outlets are not polarized, according to Figure 1. In recent years, polarization of society and political parties have worsened somewhat, however online media fractionalization has remained stable. That being said, according to V-Dem, a value of 2.0 in polarization of society is still limited and describes some key differences on major political issues. While the purpose here is not to ascribe causes to these changes, there was an increase in polarization around 2011, which may coincide with the breakthrough of Perussuomalaiset (Finns Party, PS) as the third largest party in the parliamentary elections that year. The recent small increase in polarization may have many causes, including the Covid-19 pandemic. Interestingly, political polarization and polarization of society moved in opposite directions in 2022, with parties increasing in polarization while society in general decreased in polarization.

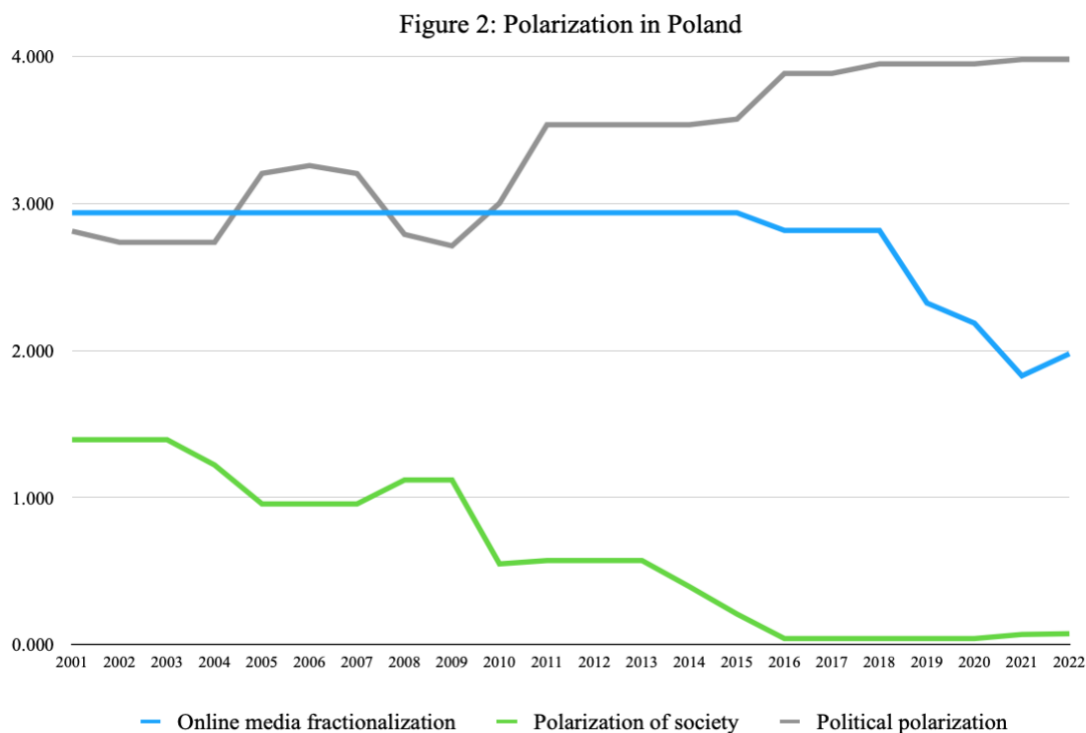


Figure 2. Polarization in Poland. Note: Figure reprinted from V-Dem Country Graphing Tool. Copyright 2023 Varieties of Democracy.

Poland is highly polarized, online, politically, and across society. According to V-Dem, a value of 2.0 in online media fractionalization indicates that the major online media outlets “give a similar presentation of major events about half the time (V-Dem Institute, n.d.). As evidenced by Figure 2, fractionalization has been increasing save for in 2022, when a small decrease occurred. This may be due to the war in Ukraine, a topic which unified the country.

Polarization of society has been relatively high for decades in Poland, however it fell to the lowest possible score after 2015, which may coincide with the election of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, PiS), when the major parties—PiS and Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform, PO)—polarized even further apart.

Finally, regarding political polarization, Poland has been on the higher end of this scale historically. However, once again, this hostility increased after 2015. Another notable date during which polarization increased was 2010, the year in which Polish president Lech Kaczyński and many members of government died in the Smolensk plane crash, which spawned intense political cleavages and conspiracy theories about

the manner of which the plane crashed and who may have been involved (Głowacki & Kuś, 2019, p. 102; Stępińska et al., 2020, p. 55).

As found by the Digital News Report, domestic politicians have been identified in self-reported exposure to disinformation data as being the greatest source of disinformation (Newman et al., 2020, p. 9). In the context of political polarization, this may suggest that more polarized societies may experience greater instances of disinformation; however, it may also indicate individuals are more likely to believe opposing views to be false.

4.1.2 Populist Communication

According to Norocel (2016), “[p]olitical populism has had a sustained presence in parliamentary politics in Finland since 1959, though in various guises and in varying degrees” (p. 42). Currently, and in recent years, the right-wing, conservative nationalist Perussuomalaiset (PS) has represented the largest and most significant populist party. According to Herkman & Jungar (2021, p. 245), in 2011, PS had a major win in the parliamentary elections, which vaulted them to becoming the third largest party in Finland with 19.1% of the vote. Since then, PS has remained a formidable major party in Finnish politics. This included acting as a major opposition party and serving in government as part of the coalition of the 2015-2019 Sipilä cabinet. However, at the same time, PS also faced internal divisions, which spawned additional right-wing populist parties who saw limited, if any, success.

Järviemi (2022) examined Finnish party leader interviews from 2007-2019 to classify whether their statements included populist communication. Of the nine parties studied, PS by far utilized the greatest amount of populist communication, and has steadily increased in its usage over time. In 2007, 21% of the party leader’s interview answers were of populist rhetoric; in 2011, this increased to about 35%. By 2015 and 2019, about 45% of PS party leader interview answers contained populist communication. The populist statements coded by PS leader Timo Soini included anti-EU and anti-elitist rhetoric and cross-party attacks. After Jussi Halla-aho became leader and the party split, Halla-aho utilized exclusionary anti-immigrant and anti-elitist rhetoric—a style remarked by the author as an “example of radical right-wing populism, which was not evident in the previous parliamentary elections” (Järviemi, 2022, pp. 239–240).

Järvineniemi found that all major party leaders used at least some populist communication methods at some point across election periods. Vasemmistoliitto (Left Alliance), Vihreä liitto (Green League) and Kristillisdemokraatit (Christian Democrats), for example, reached or came close to 20% at different years. The populist communication used in these cases included anti-elitist rhetoric and cross-party attacks. Blue Reform's Timo Soini—the party formed following the PS split—also utilized about 20% of populist communication in the 2019 election. PS party leaders by far engaged in such communication methods most frequently in comparison to other parties (Järvineniemi, 2022, p. 239).

When translated into vote shares, according to Statistics Finland, in the 2019 parliamentary elections, PS received 17.5% of the vote (Tilastokeskus, 2019). In 2015, PS won a similar percentage of 17.7% (Tilastokeskus, 2015). While such data shows that the populist PS has garnered more support over the years, it is difficult to draw causality from such a metric. Greater attention may need to be paid to the nature of populist communication in a country, rather than simply whether it exists and how much support such communication has rendered. Especially if populist communication is seen as a communication style, there are different ways in which it may be formed depending on constructions of the people, exclusionary rhetoric, and anti-establishment or anti-elitist rhetoric. While links have been found between populism and belief and dissemination of disinformation, it is nonetheless important to examine the nuances of country-specific iterations of populism as well as across parties. This also demonstrates the need to further investigate such linkages as the concept of populism itself is highly contested.

For instance, populist political communication in Poland is closely tied to its communist history. The anti-elitist and anti-establishment frames of Polish populist parties often equip trace back to the “anti-state attitude” of the communist era and the transition of political parties, state institutions, and society (Stępińska et al., 2016, p. 316). As the Third Polish Republic is still quite a young nation, Polish populists thus question the legitimacy and fairness of the entire establishment of the current republic and have argued for the establishment of a ‘Fourth Republic’ (Stępińska et al., 2016, p. 312). Other components of Polish populist communication consistent across right-wing populism include Euroskepticism, traditional Catholic values, and exclusion of immigrants and the LGBT+ community (Stępińska et al., 2016).

Engler et al. (2019) studied the social media campaigns of political parties or leaders across Poland and other Central and Eastern European Countries. In their analysis of Polish political parties, they identified parties with a mix of ideologies—right, center, left, and combinations of these—including PiS, Kukiz (founded as Kukiz'15), Razem (Left Together), Ruch Narodowy (National Movement), and KORWiN (Confederation for the Renewal of the Republic Liberty and Hope). Campaigns were examined for statements containing populist elements—namely, “general will,” “people-centric,” and “anti-establishment.” When these elements were combined, Kukiz was found to have the most balanced or purest form of populism. About 27% of the campaign’s social media statements were classified as populist, with the majority being anti-establishment statements. 13.8% of left-wing Razem’s statements were coded as populist, and again the majority were anti-establishment. PiS had about 9.8% of analyzed statements coded as populist, however, the majority of the party’s statements were about the general will of the people (p. 1322).

This may, for one, be explained by the party’s history in government. However, it is also important to note that Engler et al. (2019) omitted PiS’ attacks on its main party rival, PO (p. 1323). As argued by Stepińska et al. (2020), a more detailed examination of the actual content of PiS rhetoric against PO shows it is intertwined with anti-establishment statements based on Poland’s communist transition, thus tying PO’s so-called ‘corruption’ and ‘elitism’ to the post-communist Polish establishment (p. 84). Polish populism often accuses the shadowy elite of connections to the Polish communists of the Soviet era and as part of the corrupt group that created an unfair national order for ordinary Poles. This analysis thus demonstrates the difficulty of including populist communication as part of a theoretical framework on disinformation as ideas of what constitutes populist communication can vary.

Stepińska et al. (2020) analyzed party manifestos and social media posts of leaders from three of Poland’s significant right-wing populist parties—PiS, Kukiz’15, and KORWiN—from 2015. Of the party manifestos, the authors found that PiS and Kukiz’15 utilized significant populist political communication, including people-centric, anti-elitist and antagonistic exclusionary rhetoric in their manifestos. Significantly, many of these statements—particularly for PiS—made reference to Poland’s communist history, with anti-communism being significant for the construction of the people and accusations of communist betrayal being levied at

rivals (Stępińska et al., 2020, pp. 88–89). Regarding populist social media posts, Kukiz'15 and KORWiN used more vulgar anti-exclusionary and anti-elitist rhetoric whereas PiS utilized more people-centric rhetoric. These findings demonstrate how populist communication can change depending on the platform, as Stępińska et al. (2020) found that parties used more antagonistic language on social media, but also that different kinds of populist communication appeared across various social media posts whereas it was lacking in the party manifestos—namely, KORWiN utilized anti-elitist populist communication online but not in the party manifestos (Stępińska et al., 2020, p. 105). This finding highlights the way communication may change on social media, indicating yet another complexity in the question of who interacts with such content and its effects on disinformation resilience.

In 2015, PiS won 37.6% of the lower house (Sejm), netting a 235-seat majority. Kukiz'15 received 8.8% of the vote (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 2015a). In the upper house (Senat), PiS won the majority with 61 seats out of 100 (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 2015b). In 2019, PiS's coalition won 43.6% of the vote, gaining a 235-seat majority. Kukiz'15 was part of Koalicja Polska (Polish Coalition) receiving 8.6% of the vote, with Kukiz'15 bringing in 6 seats. KORWiN joined a coalition with other radical right-wing parties to create the Confederation Liberty and Independence (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość). Together, they received 6.9% of the vote (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 2019a). In the Senat, PiS again received 45% of the vote with its coalition (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 2019b).

The differences in understandings of populism, as well as the different constructions of populist rhetoric across parties above show the importance of looking at parties and their communication themselves, rather than just the general existence of populist communication as an indicator of disinformation. For example, the communication used by PiS differed from that of KORWiN and Kukiz'15, which used more openly aggressive and vulgar exclusionary rhetoric (Stępińska et al., 2020). Similarly, the populist communication of PS in Finland, for examples, differed in comparison to that which has been utilized by Vihreä liitto (Järvinen, 2022). If considered as a communication style, it is therefore important to analyze the content of populist communication in addition to its existence as well as the nature and interactions of the parties themselves in order to determine their effects on disinformation.

4.2 Media Environments

4.2.1 Journalistic standards, roles, and ethics

According to the Worlds of Journalism Study's report on Finland, overall, Finnish journalists believe their role to primarily entail providing analysis and reporting news objectively as "detached observer[s]" (Väliverronen et al., 2016, p. 2).

Table 4. Roles of Finnish Journalists

Note: Table reprinted from Väliverronen et al. (2016, p. 2) with selected roles. Original survey question: "Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important... and 1 means unimportant." Copyright 2016 Worlds of Journalism Study.

Role	Percentage of "extremely" or "very important"	Mean
Report things as they are	91.5	4.55
Be a detached observer	91.5	4.51
Provide analysis of current affairs	85.8	4.30
Tell stories about the world	76.9	4.09
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	69.1	3.89
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	63.8	3.73
Provide information people need to make political decisions	62.3	3.61
Influence public opinion	34.1	3.12
Advocate for social change	30.9	2.98
Provide entertainment and relaxation	28.3	2.99
Support national development	27.6	2.94
Motivate people to participate in political activity	20.8	2.57
Set the political agenda	15.0	2.37
Be an adversary of the government	11.0	2.08
Convey a positive image of political leadership	1.1	1.25
Support government policy	.0	1.20

As seen from Table 4 above, Finnish journalists rated their roles as pertaining to neutrality while also providing analyses, stories, and different perspectives as extremely important. Roles that include taking a stance, particularly in terms of supporting government policy and political leadership, are not supported. While still low in support—lending itself to the seemingly main goal of being neutral—11% of respondents indicated that "be[ing] an adversary of the government" is extremely or very important. More journalists find mobilizing people to take some kind of action,

be it in politics or social change, at least somewhat important. However, it is still clear that Finnish journalists—according to this study—find their role to ask questions while maintaining neutrality in providing information, including analyses and narratives.

Regarding ethics and accountability, around 91% of Finnish journalists surveyed were members of journalism associations (Välvirronen et al., 2016, p. 1). The WJS found that nearly 98% of journalists surveyed believed that “journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context;” the majority of respondents also indicated that ethics were not a matter of personal judgement (p. 3). 89% also said that journalism ethics were “extremely” or “very influential,” (p. 4) thus suggesting a strong adherence to outlined ethical codes. Other situational ethical considerations showed greater variance regarding whether journalists believed they were “justified on occasion,” as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. Ethics of Controversial Reporting Methods

Note: Table reprinted from Välvirronen et al. (2016, p. 3) with selected actions. Original survey question: “Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?” Copyright 2016 Worlds of Journalism Study.

Action	Always justified	Justified on occasion
Publishing stories with unverified content	2.2	43.8
Altering photographs	1.1	23.5
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	.8	1.4
Accepting money from sources	.5	.0

Regarding actions that could harm public trust and perception related to the veracity of information, “Publishing stories with unverified content,” “Altering photographs,” “Altering or fabricating quotes from sources,” and “Accepting money from sources” were rarely or never believed to be always justified. However, 44% respondents believed publishing unverified content was justified on occasion. Table 5 contains highlighted survey results, however the original survey contains more information that could color expectations and opinions of journalists based on their ethical standings as well as the quality of journalism as a whole.

Though Poland was not included in the existing WJS research, the perceived roles and ethics of Polish journalists can be glimpsed through studies by Mellado et al. (2020) and Stepińska and Ossowski (2012).

According to Mellado et al.'s (2020) cross-country study on understandings of professional journalistic roles, Poland—alongside other post-communist countries and transitional democracies—tended to have a strong “interventionist” journalistic role (p. 70). This means surveyed journalists tended to share their opinions, voice and proposals, and encourage action through their work (p. 54). This interventionist role was correlated with a strong “watchdog” role—in which journalists question and investigate those in power (p. 53)—thus indicating a more adversarial perceived role (p. 77). At the same time, Poland had a strong “infotainment” role, in which journalists believe part of their job is to entertain, thus resulting in framings or stylistic choices that aim to engage (p. 54).

Stępińska and Ossowski (2012) also found that Polish journalists perceive their role to include acting as an adversary of public officials, as seen in Table 6. Similarly over half of Polish journalists surveyed indicated that both motivating people to be involved and highlighting potential solutions is very important to their role.

Table 6. Roles of Polish Journalists

Note: Table reprinted from Stępińska & Ossowski (2012, p. 865) with selected roles. Copyright 2012 Stępińska & Ossowski.

Roles	Overall percentage who consider function “very important”
Get information to the public quickly	81.2
Provide analysis and interpretation of complex problems	63.5
Provide entertainment and relaxation	34.7
Investigate claims and statements made by the government	41.0
Provide analysis and interpretation of international developments	40.7
Stay away from stories where factual content cannot be verified	34.3
Concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience	59.6
Discuss national policy while it is still being developed	45.3
Develop intellectual and cultural interests of the public	73.6
Be an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions	71.4
To set the political agenda	60.5
Give ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs	62.3
Motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues	57.1

Roles	Overall percentage who consider function “very important”
Point people toward possible solutions to society's problem	61.7

This role of motivation is especially prevalent with older generations of journalists, likely due to their activity during the transitional period from communism to post-communism (Stepińska & Ossowski, 2012, p. 866). Overall, Polish journalists indicated that getting information out to the public, developing public interests, and allowing people to express their views are also very important to their work.

Stepińska and Ossowski (2012) found that some, especially younger generations, find it less important to “stay away from stories where factual content cannot be verified” (p. 865). The authors also found that, at the point of their study, only 20% of journalists were members of any kind of journalistic association (Stepińska & Ossowski, 2012, p. 861). While these go to one part of journalistic standards, the role that Polish journalists believe is important to their work—providing their opinions and being adversarial to those in power—could also be seen as affecting standards as such perceived roles run counter to journalism ideals of neutrality and objectivity. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, the Polish mediascape is already known for its partisanship across news outlets (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2019).

The perceived roles journalists have and the way these roles and norms influence how they deliver the news can have a great impact on disinformation. Firstly, the culture of journalism may have long-term impacts on how people approach the news and how news is delivered in general. Secondly, journalistic roles and standards may interact with other influencing factors, such as political polarization, populist communication, trust in news, and public service media to effect resilience to disinformation. Polish journalists, for example, were found to believe that their role should be more adversarial towards public officials; in contrast, Finnish journalists were found to believe the opposite. It follows that the way journalists perceive their roles will influence how they report on news, but also may reflect the culture at large, therefore suggesting important implications for this indicator.

4.2.2 Trust in News

The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly influenced trust in news in recent years, accounting for increases in overall trust between 2021 for many countries, including

Finland and Poland, as seen in Table 7 (Newman et al., 2022). This may demonstrate the ways in which people revert to traditionally trusted sources in times of crisis; however, there has been a significant dip in 2022 in every country surveyed except for Finland, where trust actually continued to grow (Newman et al., 2022, p. 15).

Table 7. Finnish Trust in News

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2016-2022 and Finland country profile, (Newman et al. 2016-2022; Reunanen, 2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Overall trust	69%	65%	56%	59%	62%	62%	65%	68%
Trust in news I use	75%	73%	69%	70%	72%	69%	--	--

Finland has consistently had some of the highest levels of overall trust in its news sources of all ranked countries in the Digital News Report. That being said, as seen in Table 7, it has also been on a steady decline in trust since 2015, with the lowest measured overall trust in 2020. According to the DNR, this may be due to increasing polarization or greater attention on disinformation (Newman et al., 2020, p. 68). 2019 was also an election year, which may not only account for the decrease in trust that year, but also continuing decrease the year after. 2021 and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic saw an almost 10 percentage point increase in trust, which has only continued to grow.

Trust in personal news sources has followed a similar pattern to that of overall trust, but at several percentage points higher. In combination with Finland's relatively low polarization and common major news sources (discussed in later sections), this disparity may not yet negatively influence resilience according to the framework. That said, this raises the question of whether disparities between overall news trust and personal news trust should be considered closer as polarization across society and media may lead consumers to trust one source completely, but disregard all others.

As shown in Table 8, when divided by brands included in the DNR, Finland's most trusted news source has consistently been the public service broadcaster, Yle News. In the last three years, the percentage of respondents who trusted Yle has been consistent around 85%. The DNR has changed its metrics prior to 2019, however, Yle was still the most trusted brand. In contrast, for most of the years measured, the least

trusted Finnish news brand has been tabloid newspaper *Iltalehti*. However, *Iltalehti* still maintains a high degree of trust, with about 60% of respondents indicating they trust it. This shows that Finland’s major news brands are generally trusted, even the tabloid papers. This may be due to the quality of the paper as, though *Iltalehti* is a tabloid, Herkman (2017) has argued that a more accurate term may be “semi-serious press” as such papers mix serious topics and journalism with entertainment news (Sparks & Tulloch (2000) qtd. in Herkman, 2017, p. 436).

In 2022, the least trusted brand was the small and relatively new conservative-leaning AlfaTV. In addition to the lack of trust, AlfaTV also closed in 2022, showing the trust in traditional brands and overall low degree of audience fragmentation in Finland, as well as the difficulty of entering the Finnish traditional media market.

Table 8. Finnish Trust in News Brands

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2018-2022, (Newman et al. 2018-2022). Method of calculation changed in 2020.

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Most trusted source	Yle News	Yle News	Yle News	Yle News	Yle News
<i>Trust</i>	84%	85%	84%	7.77/10	7.91/10
<i>Distrust</i>	9%	8%	8%		
Least trusted source	AlfaTV	Iltalehti	Iltalehti	Iltalehti	Iltalehti
<i>Trust</i>	45%	62%	59%	6.11/10	6.07/10
<i>Distrust</i>	28%	23%	24%		

The significance of trust in Yle News is also shown by the proportion who distrust it as a source—less than 10% have indicated an active distrust of the public broadcaster. In contrast, about a quarter of respondents actively distrust *Iltalehti* and AlfaTV.

In Eastern Europe, Poland has some of the highest overall trust in news in the region (Newman et al., 2022, p. 15). As seen in Table 9, in 2015 overall trust was 56%. It has since been steadily falling until 2021. During the Covid-19 peak identified by the DNR, trust grew to 48%, while in 2022, it decreased to the lowest measured trust in news at 42%.

Table 9. Polish Trust in News

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2016-2022 and Poland country profile, (Newman et al. 2016-2022; Makarenko, 2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Overall trust	42%	48%	45%	48%	48%	53%	55%	56%
Trust in news I use	49%	55%	55%	55%	55%	60%	--	--

Since the start of the PiS government in 2015, trust in news has been decreasing, likely influenced by the state maneuvers against independent media in Poland it refers to as “polonization”—or the capturing of foreign media brands—and its cementing of public service media as a tool for propaganda (see Głowacki & Kuś, (2019); Reporters Without Borders (2023); Freedom House (2023)). A concrete example of this state capture is the purchase of *Polska Press*, the largest publisher of dailies in the country, by state-owned oil company Orlen (Newman et al., 2022, p. 94).

As of 2022, only 19% of respondents believe that the media is free from undue political influence and 20% believe that the media is free from undue business influence. According to the 2022 Digital News Report, this has been decreasing in both fronts since 2017 (Newman et al., 2022, p. 95). This demonstrates the importance of considering such indicators in a longitudinal format, as significant events and changes in one in environment—such as the election of conservative populist PiS—can have long-lasting effects on other environments through policies, such as encroachment on media freedom in Poland.

Table 10. Polish Trust in News Brands

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2018-2022, (Newman et al. 2018-2022). Method of calculation changed in 2020.

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Most trusted source	RMF FM	RMF FM	RMF FM	RMF FM	RMF FM
Trust	51%	68%	72%	6.93/10	6.85/10
Distrust	14%	11%	10%		
Least trusted source	TVP News	TVP News	TVP News	Radio Maryja	Radio Maryja
Trust	24%	36%	43%	3.06/10	2.89/10
Distrust	49%	46%	39%		

As seen from Table 10, TVP has been the least trusted news brand in Poland since 2020. Prior to 2020, while conservative Catholic radio station Radio Maryja ranked last, TVP was the second least trusted source (Newman et al., 2018, 2019). As of 2022, not only do 24% of respondents *trust* TVP, 49% actively *distrust* it. The widespread distrust in TVP has been continuously increasing. In contrast, Poland's most trusted brand is German-owned private radio station RMF FM is trusted by 51% of respondents and distrusted by 14% as of 2022. The trust in a radio station is of particular interest given the changing media environment, and may have significance regard Polish media consumption. Given Poland's diverse media environment, it is important to note that the DNR only ranks brands already included in the report; therefore, there may be further variety than is depicted here.

Investigating individual brand trust in addition to the overall trust in news reveals important nuance in both cases that will influence how public service media should be understood in terms of resilience to disinformation. Similarly, as seen in Poland, overall trust in news is lower than individual trust in RMF FM. It suggests that trust in news may have different implications depending on what outlets are trusted, and whether the institution of media itself is trusted.

4.2.3 Audience Fragmentation

According to the Digital News Report, and compiled into Tables 11 and 12, Finland has a generally stable market share of offline and online Finnish news brands. Yle News, which is Finland's most trusted brand, is also its most watched news brand. This further demonstrates the strength of Finland's public service media, and may suggest a greater general knowledge of hard news (Curran et al., 2009).

Table 11. Finnish Audience Share Through Weekly Use Offline

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2016-2022, (Newman et al. 2016-2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Top brand	Yle News 70%	Yle News 68%	Yle News 67%	Yle News 68%	Yle News 72%	Yle News 72%	Yle News 70%
Second brand	MTV3 News 56%	MTV3 News 54%	MTV3 News 52%	MTV3 News 55%	MTV3 News 57%	MTV3 News 60%	MTV3 News 58%
Third brand	Free city papers	Free city papers	Free city papers	Free city papers	Free city papers	Free city papers	Regional /local papers

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
	28%	26%	30%	31%	25%	36%	35%
Fourth brand	Local papers	Regional papers	Ilta-Sanomat	Regional papers	Regional papers	Regional / local papers	Free city papers
	21%	18%	21%	23%	26%	35%	32%

The next most consumed brand is private MTV3 News, followed by free city papers, local, and regional newspapers. With about 70% of respondents indicating they consume news from Yle at least once a week, there is a great amount of audience overlap in Finland. About half of respondents indicated they watch MTV3 News, suggesting there may also be significant overlap between the top two news sources, demonstrating not only overlap across the country, but also overlap between sources.

In contrast, in the online media environment as outlined in Table 12, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Ilta-lehti* dominate the most viewed weekly news sources, with 61% and 59% audience share in 2022, respectively. Both are tabloid newspapers, and while both *Ilta-lehti* and *Ilta-Sanomat* are some of the least trusted brands, they are nonetheless trusted by the majority of respondents (Newman et al., 2022, p. 77). Again, trust in these brands must be considered as relative, as *Ilta-lehti* still garners around 60%.

Table 12. Finnish Audience Share Through Weekly Use Online

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2016-2022, (Newman et al. 2016-2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Top brand	Ilta-Sanomat online	Ilta-Sanomat online	Ilta-Sanomat online	Ilta-Sanomat online	Ilta-Sanomat online	Ilta-Sanomat online	Ilta-Sanomat online
	61%	61%	59%	56%	56%	58%	60%
Second brand	Ilta-lehti online	Ilta-lehti online	Ilta-lehti online	Ilta-lehti online	Ilta-lehti online	Ilta-lehti online	Ilta-lehti online
	59%	56%	56%	54%	55%	57%	58%
Third brand	Yle News	Yle News	Yle News	Yle News	Yle News	Yle News	Yle News
	43%	44%	39%	35%	36%	32%	44%
Fourth brand	Helsingin Sanomat	MTV News	Helsingin Sanomat	Helsingin Sanomat	Helsingin Sanomat	Helsingin Sanomat	Helsingin Sanomat
	30%	31%	31%	27%	30%	30%	36%

It is significant that public broadcaster Yle News is third in the most frequented online news sources. Like other Northern European countries (Aalberg & Curran, 2011, p. 198), Finland's Yle is a very strong public broadcaster, thus limiting the need

for other news brands to provide the same service. This concentrates the number of different news brands, thus further limiting audience fragmentation.

Table 13 shows increasing fragmentation and a decrease in news consumption of established Polish brands over the years in Poland, save for the Covid-related reversals of these declines. There is a variety in offline news offerings in Poland, and of the top four most frequented offline news brands, not a single one reached more than half of Polish respondents in 2022. The top used brand was private TVN News, but even this was only used by 40%. Public service media TVP was consumed weekly by only 24%. This proportion has also been on a steady decline since 2016, which, again, may correspond with PiS' maneuvers to gain control over TVP. Despite it being the most trusted brand across several years, RMF FM is not the most consumed news outlet, though it is one of the farther-reaching outlets in Poland.

Table 13. Polish Audience Share Through Weekly Use Offline

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2016-2022, (Newman et al. 2016-2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Top brand	TVN News	TVN News	TVN News	TVN News	TVN News	TVN News	RMF FM
	40%	49%	50%	50%	56%	57%	44%
Second brand	RMF FM	Polsat News	RMF FM	RMF FM	Polsat News	Polsat News	TVN News
	35%	38%	44%	42%	41%	42%	43%
Third brand	Polsat News	RMF FM	Polsat News	Polsat News	RMF FM	RMF FM	TVP News
	30%	38%	34%	36%	40%	40%	37%
Fourth brand	TVP News	TVP News	TVP News	TVP News	TVP News	TVP News	Radio Zet
	24%	26%	31%	31%	33%	38%	32%

Of the brands included in the DNR, there is greater stability in the Polish online media space. As seen in Table 14 below, platform website Onet.pl, which offers services such as email alongside news, has consistently ranked number one. The second most and fourth most used sources—Wirtualna Polska and Interia.pl—are also web platforms offering email and e-commerce services in addition to news. TVN24 corresponds with the wider TVN news outlet. Again, because the limits of the DNR's surveys, this is not all-encompassing of all online brands in Poland, however, it may give an indication of some of the most popular sources.

Table 14. Polish Audience Share Through Weekly Use Offline

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2016-2022, (Newman et al. 2016-2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Top brand	Onet.pl	Onet.pl	Onet.pl	Onet.pl	Onet.pl	Onet.pl	Onet.pl
	42%	50%	55%	54%	52%	52%	60%
Second brand	WP.pl	WP.pl	WP.pl	WP.pl	WP.pl	WP.pl	WP.pl
	35%	39%	48%	47%	48%	46%	52%
Third brand	TVN24.pl	TVN24.pl	TVN24.pl	TVN24.pl	TVN24.pl	TVN24.pl	TVN24.pl
	27%	30%	40%	38%	37%	37%	51%
Fourth brand	Interia.pl	Interia.pl	Interia.pl	Interia.pl	Interia.pl	Interia.pl	Interia.pl
	25%	30%	33%	32%	31%	29%	34%

The status of most of these top online news sources as web platforms should be of note, as their purpose is not just to provide news, but also other services. The news hosted on these sites also varies from hard news to soft entertainment news. People who visit the sites for purposes such as email may thus incidentally come across news, even if that was not the original purposes in visiting the website. This may improve news consumption on one hand, or reduce it as users do not seek it out and pay less attention to it (Boczkowski et al., 2018). This coincides with the lower proportions of consumption across news brands, as news consumption may be lower overall than in Finland, for example.

Poland has a varied and colorful media landscape with many options, even within brands, and when combined with the interventionist and partisan media environment, can cause greater audience fragmentation. However, this has not considered the quality of each news brand, thus making it difficult to pinpoint the impact of such fragmentation.

4.2.4 Public Service Media

In Finland, public service media is funded by a public broadcasting tax on business entities and individuals, which, as of 2022, amounts to 2.5% of an individual's net income up to 163 EUR (Vero, 2022). Unlike a TV license, the tax prevents obliged payors from avoiding payments, meaning the amount actually obtained from this form of public funding is much more secure.

According to Statistics Finland (Tilastokeskus), Yle News' market share has been consistently around 40-45% in the past decade, with commercial TV making up around 55-60% of the market (Tilastokeskus, 2021a). Statistics Finland's data on television company viewing shares reveals more information. Despite the increase in channels and offerings, Yle's market share has remained stable. From the early 2000s, channels increased from Yle, MTV, Nelonen Media, and miscellaneous small shares to 2021, wherein the major offerings included Yle, MTV, Nelonen Media, Discovery Networks, Disney Finland, and other companies. Despite the small increase in variety, Yle has not lost a significant portion of its market share (Tilastokeskus, 2021b).

In addition to the audience fragmentation factor, it is evident that Yle is a staple news brand and enjoys a prominent position in the Finnish news diet. When considered alongside the trust in Yle, it becomes clear that Finland possesses strong and trusted public service media.

Poland's public service media is funded by license fees, advertising, and governmental support. These fees vary from year to year and most people who own a registered television or radio receiver must pay a license fee. As of 2023, this fee is about 294 złoty. However, only about a third actually pay their license fees (Gąbka, 2023). In addition, and ascribed to the lack of license fees, the current government has paid billions of złoty in public funding aid throughout its years in power (*Polish Media Board to Grant Controversial Public TV Broadcaster €400 Million, 2022*). Indeed, as the amount paid by the public through license fees steadily decreased since 2014—though it has always been a small proportion of the population—the amount of government compensation has increased substantially. The amount of funding produced by advertising has also fallen, which may be partially accounted for by the changing mediascape and new forms of media younger generations are consuming (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, 2021). This need for advertising-based funding may have the same impact of commercialization on public media as it does for private options (Dzięciołowski, 2017, p. 29). However, Poland's public service media, while struggling with public funding, has significant government backing from PiS.

According to the Polish National Broadcasting Council, the share of public television has been falling. In 2022, the share was about 27%. In 2015, it was estimated at about 30%; in 2005, KRiTT estimated the market share to be about 54% (Reisner, 2022).

Poland's public service media may actually contribute to its weakness to disinformation. As mentioned in the prior section, Poland's public service broadcaster TVP ranks the least trusted news brand in the country. Prior to that, it ranked the second least trusted news source, behind a conservative Catholic radio program. In addition to its open bias and unequal coverage of the opposition, TVP has also openly created and disseminated disinformation. For example, in the context of climate change action—which PiS opposes—TVP published a photo of activist Greta Thunberg with George Soros as a right-wing conspiracy that she is operating with global elites that threaten Poland and PiS. To create this conspiratorial anti-Semitic message, the original photo of Thunberg with Al Gore was edited (Bush & Kurzynski, 2020; Santora & Berendt, 2019). This dissemination of disinformation goes beyond the misinformation that may occur when journalists erroneously report a story or even choose a frame to support one perspective of a story.

4.3 Economic Environments

4.3.1 Ad Market Size

The first economic environment factor is ad market size, for which Humprecht et al. (2020, p. 502) use the indicator “size of the online media market.” This indicator has clearer merit in a quantitative study than in this application of the resilience to disinformation framework.

According to the World Bank, 92% of the population in Finland use the internet as of 2021 (International Telecommunication Union. (2021a). According to the framework, this would imply that, by having a greater amount of the population on the internet, there is a larger advertising audience and therefore a greater chance for disinformation through economically-incentivized individuals.

In Poland, this is estimated at around 85% (International Telecommunication Union, 2021b). While this does not indicate how often or how extensively people use the internet, it may suggest that, simply based on greater internet usage, people may be more exposed to advertising online, and therefore more disinformation.

However, this metric alone has limited explanatory power for the influence of ad market size in resilience to disinformation. For example, Finland has a higher percentage of internet penetration than Poland, however Poland's population is so

much larger that it follows there is a greater population online. Nonetheless, this does not explicate internet usage or advertising exposure. As noted by the authors, the observation of ad market size as was originally included had most significant explanatory power for the United States, which maintains a much larger ad market than all other countries included (Humprecht et al., 2020, p. 510). Future research should identify other ways to examine this indicator, or whether or how it applies across cases.

4.3.2 Social Media Use for News

Finland's social media use for news is relatively low. Facebook remains one of the most used social media platforms for news in Finland, though the percentage of users is decreasing as compared to five years prior, as seen in Table 15 below. All other measured social media platforms have significantly lower usage for news. The Digital News Report did not include TikTok in its measurements as of the 2022 report, despite the platforms potentially far-reaching implications for voting behavior and other actions.¹ WhatsApp and YouTube are the second and third largest social media sources for news in Finland. As WhatsApp is primarily a messaging application, rather than a platform through which news outlets can share stories, for example, this seems to imply a more organic source of news shared by family and friends.

Table 15. Social Media Use for News in Finland

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2018-2022, (Newman et al. 2018-2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Facebook	31%	32%	32%	30%	33%
WhatsApp	14%	13%	12%	10%	10%
YouTube	12%	13%	15%	14%	15%
Instagram	8%	8%	7%	6%	4%
Twitter	6%	8%	8%	8%	7%
Facebook Messenger	5%	4%	5%	6%	--

¹ See *Tiktokia käyttävistä nuorista lähes kolmannes äänestäisi perussuomalaisia – kokoomusta vain joka kymmenes* (2023).

One factor for this smaller percentage of social media use for news may be the fact that Finland maintains a higher trust in news and less audience fragmentation. Because individuals are happy with the news sources they have through more traditional means or by accessing news sites directly, they may be less inclined to use social media for news. As the DNR simply measures the use of social media platforms for some form of news consumption, it does not specify the type of news, therefore individuals may still be accessing traditional outlets but from Facebook. They may also be incidentally coming across news while on social media.

Table 16 shows the percentage who share news via social media, messaging or email. These tables simply indicate the percentage of people who share news and do not specify individuals sharing false news or unverified sources, and are therefore of limited explanatory value on their own. However, according to the Humprecht et al. (2020) model, in addition to high social media news consumption, high rates of sharing news online are indicative of lower resilience to disinformation because of the greater risk of disseminating it (p. 501).

Table 16. Sharing News in Finland

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2018-2022, (Newman et al. 2018-2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Percentage who share news via social, messaging, or email	29%	28%	--	27%	30%

About 30% of respondents share news via different social media or messaging platforms, according to Table 16. This has remained consistent across the years. These results show that a significant portion of the population use social media apps to share and communicate about news online. While the sharing of news online may lead to greater exposure to disinformation simply through the act of sharing more news, the nature of sharing news online is a difficult metric through which to measure resilience to disinformation as it does not specify what kind of news is being shared, simply that it is being shared. For example, the percentages shown in Table 16 do not specify whether Finns are sharing articles or posts by their public broadcaster Yle or alternative media sites online. More in-depth research about the types of news content being shared or more specifically how it is being shared may help reveal more regarding this indicator.

According to Table 17, in 2022, almost half of Polish respondents used Facebook for news. This proportion has fallen in the past few years from a peak of 65% in 2020—perhaps coinciding with the course of the Covid-19 pandemic as is the case with news interest across the world (Newman et al., 2022, p. 5). This is a significant proportion of the population, especially when considered alongside the Finnish case. The next most frequented platform was YouTube, which more than a third of respondents used for news. Facebook Messenger has seen increased use in the past several years, with about 20% of respondents using it for news. Like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger is primarily a messaging, even if it is tied to Facebook. As such, this may imply users privately share and respond to news individually or in group chats.

Table 17. Social Media Use for News in Poland

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2018-2022, (Newman et al. 2018-2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Facebook	49%	55%	65%	61%	54%
WhatsApp	13%	12%	10%	9%	6%
YouTube	33%	35%	36%	39%	37%
Instagram	12%	13%	12%	9%	--
Twitter	--	9%	11%	10%	8%
Facebook Messenger	21%	25%	24%	22%	13%
TikTok	7%	--	--	--	--

Despite being a new form of social media, TikTok already amassed about 7% of respondents who used it to share news. This is of particular significance because of the different method of communication—very short videos—which make it difficult to provide complete perspectives and stories in a short amount of time. Similarly, traditional outlets have been slow to adopt TikTok. It may also offer partial explanation as to why use of other social media platforms has been decreasing.

According to Table 18, between 30-40% of respondents indicated that they share news on the social media they use. This is lower than the respondents who use social media for news, which may demonstrate that a significant portion do not share news or their opinions on news online.

Table 18. Sharing News in Poland

Note: Table compiled from Digital News Report 2018-2022, (Newman et al. 2018-2022).

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Percentage who share news via social, messaging, or email	34%	39%	--	43%	38%

As mentioned, Table 18 does not reveal much about disinformation resilience, save for metrics of overall usage and sharing. For example, sharing across different platforms may be valuable to consider as their algorithms, content and media of choice, and audiences lead to different dominant personalities and influencers and content types. For instance, in a report on so-called “junk news”—“ideologically extreme, misleading, and factually incorrect information”—during the EU parliamentary elections, Poland was found to be particularly susceptible to said disinformation on Twitter as compared to other countries (Marchal et al., 2019). The use of Facebook as a source of news in both countries, though more so in Poland, is also of note because Facebook has also been cited as “the main channel for spreading false information almost everywhere” in terms of self-identified sources (Newman et al., 2020, p. 9).

4.4 Media Literacy

Metrics such as the Media Literacy Index aim to rank country-level media literacy and, therefore—as noted by the authors—provide insight on resilience to mis- and disinformation as the greater the media literacy, the better a country is able to identify or resist disinformation (Lessenski, 2022, p. 2). Utilizing metrics of education levels through PISA scores and tertiary education, press freedom as measured by Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, trust in others, and e-participation Lessenski (2022) the authors outline a framework through which to measure and rank media literacy (p. 7).

Rightly so, the authors also note the difficult task this index faces as the causality between metrics and disinformation resilience is complicated and under the influence of many other individual and societal-level factors (p.8). As noted in the other indicator sections of this analysis, the metrics through which rankings and cross-country quantitative comparisons work include phenomena and complexities within each country measured. Media literacy faces a similar challenge.

According to this index, Finland ranks first in terms of its media literacy and has held this ranking since the start of the index (Lessenski, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022). It falls into the first cluster—countries which have the strongest media literacy and, therefore, are more resilient to disinformation. Poland has consistently ranked in the middle of the index at around 17-18th place (each year, the index includes more countries). It falls in the second cluster—countries which are “well performing” in their media literacy (Lessenski, 2022, p. 9). This cluster includes countries ranging from Germany, Iceland, and the UK at the high end and Poland, Slovenia, Latvia, and Luxembourg at the low end in 2022.

Considered through the critical literacy frame introduced in the literature review, media literacy is difficult to measure as it requires life-long learning and is closely entwined with conceptions of democracy and participation. The Media Literacy Index does include measures of press freedom and, in particular, its inclusion of e-participation hones in on the developments in technology as related to democratic participation. However, as demonstrated with previous indicators, and in line with Freire and Macedo’s (1987) theory, this metric is too complicated to understand fully through such a narrow focus, as it necessitates critical education of history and understandings of current events—both of which are politicized. While press freedom and e-participation begin to capture the critical theory of media literacy, there are far more factors that are relevant, such as critical education and technological education, which cannot be measured simply from PISA scores and tertiary education. Similarly, participation and democracy as related to media literacy in the digital age also require assumptions of what participation actually entails, which raises a similar issue to that of populist communication—exactly how democratic participation is defined can vary.

4.5 Exposure to Disinformation

Exposure to disinformation remains a difficult metric to track as much of the data is self-reported, and can therefore be skewed depending on polarization, trust, and how much the issue of disinformation is even spoken about (Vegetti & Mancosu, 2022).

The Flash Eurobarometer 464 measured self-reported exposure to disinformation across the EU, as well as self-reported ability to detect said disinformation. As seen from the results in Table 19, people in Poland perceive their exposure to false

information to be far greater than that of Finland, while their perceived ability to recognize it is lower.

Table 19. Perceived Exposure to False Information and Ability to Recognize it

Note: Compiled from Flash Eurobarometer 464: Fake news and disinformation online - Factsheets Finland (2018); Fake news and disinformation online - Factsheets Poland (2018).

	Perceived Exposure to Disinformation				Perceived Ability to Recognize Disinformation			
	Every day	Once a week	Several times a month	Rarely or never	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Not very confident	Not at all confident
Finland	18%	32%	18%	29%	22%	60%	11%	2%
Poland	48%	27%	7%	14%	15%	56%	23%	3%

A special report from the 2018 Digital News Report found similar results—28% of Polish respondents reported that they had been exposed to stories “completely made-up for political or commercial reasons” in the last week, in comparison to 20% of Finnish respondents (Fletcher, 2018). The Eurobarometer results show a higher weekly perceived exposure to disinformation in Finland.

As argued by Vegetti and Mancosu (2022), self-reported exposure may be higher in areas with highly polarized societies and low trust in media, as is the case in Poland, where almost 50% believed they had been exposed to false information every day according to Table 19. In combination with an interventionist journalistic culture, it may be that this high percentage is somewhat inflated due to a more partisan media and political environment.

However, if taken at face value, the contrast between the confidence in respondents’ ability to recognize false information and their perceived exposure to it suggests a weaker resilience to disinformation in Poland, in line with the findings throughout the analysis. At the same time, a lower ability to identify disinformation also brings into question self-reported data of exposure to disinformation.

Finnish respondents indicated some greater confidence in their ability to recognize disinformation and an overall lower degree of exposure to disinformation, however, a significant portion of the population still self-reported encountering disinformation every week. Some explanation for the lower amount of self-reported exposure may be due to Finland’s performance across indicators, including low polarization and high trust in news. This may be because Finns have stable and trusted news brands that

are frequently consumed; it may also be that lower polarization means fewer Finns encounter partisan media assumed to be false.

It is important to note that this Eurobarometer data is from 2018, however, and between Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, and Finland's NATO ratification, exposure to disinformation may have changed. Future research would benefit from data that includes these significant events.

5 Discussion

Applying the resilience to disinformation theoretical framework to the cases of Finland and Poland in-depth has revealed several major findings, all of which demonstrate the challenge of measuring resilience, let alone ranking it. By examining each indicator in two varied cases, this analysis revealed the importance of considering the nature of each indicator when analyzing its potential influence on resilience. Firstly, there may be many interactions within the populist communication indicator which may affect its impact on disinformation resilience. Populist communication itself is much debated and includes many different constructions of rhetoric across political parties, complicating metrics of vote shares. For example, interactions between polarization and populist communication may play a larger role than the mere existence of populist communication itself. Thirdly, journalistic standards, roles, and ethics may influence media environments through the ways in which journalists perceive of and act in their work, as well as the ethics and standards of journalism and the more general expectations of journalists in country-specific contexts. Fourthly, the political context, quality, and trust in public service media must be considered in addition to its mere existence and strength, as demonstrated with Poland's TVP. Finally, when considered through a critical pedagogy lens, the addition of media literacy offers theory through which to develop digital literacy to improve disinformation resilience and empower internet users.

As seen in both Finland and Poland, populist communication has been used by parties across the political spectrum, though right-wing parties use the most populist construction by far from the data analyzed. While PS was found to use a high degree of anti-elitist and exclusionary populist rhetoric, it may be in combination with other factors that this lessens the effect of disinformation from this indicator. For example, in combination with V-Dem's polarization of society and political polarization indices, the relatively friendly way Finnish parties interact, despite some populist communication and increasing polarization, may suggest that these indicators influence each other, and may interact to hamper resilience to disinformation.

In contrast, the Polish case demonstrates a political and media environment that is highly polarized in combination with a populist party in government and many more gaining popularity. Poland's polarized political landscape ensures that populist

communications are exacerbated and more hostile. In combination with public service media that essentially serves to broadcast favorable news of PiS and an already partisan media landscape leading to even greater audience fragmentation, one may see the way in which populist communication interacts with polarization, public service media, trust and fragmentation to not only split audiences to seek news elsewhere, but also potentially lead to news avoidance and greater exposure to disinformation and a lessened resilience to it.

In fact, Humprecht et al. (2021) suggest that “in more consensus-oriented democracies, such as Switzerland, extreme ideology seems to be a less relevant driver of the spread of disinformation. In other countries, however, where the rise of populist ideology is tearing open social rifts, extreme ideology diminishes the resilience of citizens” (Humprecht et al., 2021, p. 13). This may demonstrate a more complicated interaction between polarization and populist communication than at first visible in the original framework. There may be additional aspects to political communication and the interactions between political parties that are not highlighted in more generalized data on polarization and populist communication. Future studies should delve deeper into the political environments of consensus-oriented democracies, such as in Finland, and examine how such environments effect resilience to disinformation. Scholars have identified links between right-wing populist communication and disinformation (Bjola & Papadakis, 2020; Hameleers, 2021; Morosoli et al., 2022; Szebeni et al., 2021; Ylä-Anttila, 2018; Žuk & Žuk, 2020) but how do the wider political culture and system influence resilience in the face of such associations and parties?

Understandings of what constitutes populist communication are also debated, as exemplified from the different categorizations of PiS’ statements in Poland. This not only complicates scholarly measurements and applications of populist communication in disinformation studies, but also raises the question of whether different constructions of populist communication—people-centric rhetoric, anti-elitist rhetoric, and exclusionary rhetoric—may influence disinformation differently.

The standards, roles, and ethics of journalists likely also interact with polarization and populist communication metrics to influence disinformation. As found in the journalism standards section, Finnish journalists not only heed ethical rules and journalism associations carefully, they also see their role as “detached observers” who

strive to provide neutral reports of how events unfolded as well as give audiences a means through which to express their views. In contrast, while there are journalists in Finland who view providing opinions, motivation, and advocacy as part of their roles, the WJS found that the majority do not aim to insert such perspectives into their work. Though this does not always translate into reality, efforts to improve media accountability—particularly in the digital age—through the 2014 Guidelines of Journalists amendment to the journalistic code of ethics as well as the Council for Mass Media in Finland (Heikkilä & Väliverronen, 2019).

In Poland, an interesting dichotomy has emerged: while overall trust in news sources has historically been relatively high as compared to other countries surveyed by the Digital News Report—ranking fifth highest out of 26 countries in 2016 (Newman et al., 2016)—it is not necessarily because the media acted with neutrality. In fact, since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, Polish journalists have characteristically included their own commentary and opinions on news (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2019; Mellado et al., 2020; Stepińska & Ossowski, 2012).

According to Dobek-Ostrowska (2019), journalists, rather than taking on the neutral stance emphasized in Western journalistic standards, took on the role of supporting or rejecting candidates (p. 109). As seen in the analysis section, such standards and roles continue to color the journalistic culture in Poland, even if standards seeking neutrality are growing. These clear political stances reflect a history in which journalists acted simultaneously as political activists, such as those leading underground papers during Soviet times. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many such political activist-journalists became editors-in-chiefs or influential journalists (Dzięciołowski, 2017, pp. 19–20). This historic relationship between journalism and politics has resulted in what Dobek-Ostrowska (2019) referred to as external pluralism within the entire media system, which describes a media environment in which biased media exists throughout the system but nonetheless represents a wide variety of opinions (p. 88). However, this may also demonstrate that trust, when applied to partisan media, may nonetheless hamper resilience to disinformation because of its fragmentation and weakness to increases in polarization of society. Though the media landscape in Poland has been rapidly changing—especially with state maneuvers to limit private media as with PiS's

“polonization” efforts—it has been a vibrant and varied environment, as seen from the audience fragmentation section.

This dichotomy raises an important question that is often missing from mis- and disinformation studies, even in studies such as Humprecht et al.’s (2020) which seeks to include societal structures into the equation: how do cultural norms and historical events influence the ways in which societies are expected to resist disinformation? The within-case analysis conducted highlighted the different contexts through which environmental factors may be analyzed, and the country-specific nuances coloring both cases. It also demonstrated that direct comparisons through country rankings may inadvertently create a standard to which to compare, rather than examining country cases in their unique contexts. As such, the inclusion of the journalism standards, roles, and ethics indicator underlines this perspective and should be studied further in terms of how the historical and cultural construction of media environments may influence resilience to disinformation.

Another such example is the question of public service media. As analyzed in the public service media section, when examined in-depth, TVP demonstrates the need to consider the political context public service media exists in. TVP has always shown some favoritism to governing parties, (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2019, p. 61), however the strengthening of its position as a propaganda tool has had clear effects on trust in news and audience fragmentation in Poland.

The Polish case demonstrates the nuance in examining a country’s public service media and understanding the context through which it exists, both in terms of wider journalism standards as well as political contexts, not simply whether it is strong or financially supported through television license fees or market shares, as originally measured by Humprecht et al. (2020). It is also about the quality and transparency of the public service media and trust, as well as press freedom at large. Despite the complication with these indicators, Humprecht et al. (2020) assertion that weak public service media can hamper resilience to disinformation may nonetheless be accurate, as TVP may still be considered weak public service media because of its propagandistic bias towards the ruling PiS and the steadily decreasing viewership and trust in it. However, rather than just falling short of the public service media aspirations, it has actually negatively impacted the media environment at large.

As such, the effect of partisan media and TVP on Polish resilience to disinformation may be threefold. Firstly, TVP itself has been shown to disseminate propaganda and clear disinformation. As noted by Freedom House, it “promotes government messages and often seeks to discredit the opposition, in flagrant breach of statutory obligations to present news in a ‘reliable and pluralistic manner’” (Freedom House, 2022). Secondly, through TVP’s loss of credibility and independence and decreasing viewership, people may continue to seek alternative sources for their news, thus leading to further audience fragmentation. Audiences seek partisan alternatives, which are still driven by market incentives in an already highly interventionist society. The search for alternate news sources through private media may result in higher quality news than the public service media; however, it may also lead to more encounters with disinformation, such as through social media. Thirdly, in addition to audience fragmentation, lack of trust has also been shown to cause news avoidance (Newman et al., 2022, p. 13). As such, people may become less informed with hard news knowledge, thus further decreasing their media literacy and ability to resist disinformation. This relationship highlights the complexity Humprecht et al. (2021) noticed in the relationship between trust, public service media, and audience fragmentation.

This media environment may also suggest one reason why so many more Polish respondents use social media for news as opposed to Finnish ones. As seen from the analysis of social media use for news, a significant portion of both Finnish and Polish respondents use social media for news, however, Polish respondents use different platforms more across the board, including Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. While this may hamper Polish resilience to disinformation according to the Humprecht et al. (2020) model, it is also important to note that the results analyzed do not describe how users consume news on social media. In a nation with low trust in national broadcasters or private options, some may seek news elsewhere. Others may not seek out news at all, but rather come across it incidentally.

Nonetheless, consumers usage of social media for news may still expose them to more disinformation. Though Poland’s percentage of internet users is lower than that of Finland, it does have a greater population as a whole and a greater percentage of users seeking out news on social media apps, which may increase economic incentives for advertising alongside disinformation online.

All of these structural factors together support Humprecht et al.'s (2020) finding that Finland is more resilient to disinformation. Poland faces steep barriers hampering its resilience to disinformation linked to its high political polarization, state maneuvers and populist political communication harming trust in the media, as well as a historically partisan media environment that may serve to exacerbate growing polarization. Though they have been highlighted through analysis of political and media environments, it is important to reiterate the impact of free and independent media on resilience to disinformation. The Polish case suggests that the influence of the political environment through constraints and state capture of media may have impact on resilience to disinformation.

Critical media literacy may be one way to improve resilience to disinformation, regardless of source. Understanding disinformation as propaganda, which is both constructed by and constructs societal narratives, requires critical literacy, especially in the digital age. Such a critical standpoint would be difficult to apply at a country level, especially in highly polarized societies, because it is inherently political (Hobbs, 2020, p. 29) and deeply tied to history (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 47). However, it may nonetheless offer an interesting path of study when considering the future of the internet.

As outlined at the start of this thesis, current challenges such as the spread of disinformation need not be seen as predestined outcomes inherent to the internet. For example, while social media usage for news in addition to sharing news on social media may increase the likelihood of disinformation, social media also offers a medium through which to empower in terms of accessing knowledge and organizing power (Mosca & della Porta, 2009; Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 4). Informed by Freire and Macedo's (1987) critical literacy, media literacy may contribute to this empowerment while building resilience to disinformation. This may include understanding platform incentives alongside the social constructs behind technologies such as AI and the historical construction of narratives and propaganda. As technologies continue to develop and the digital age progresses, ensuring that individuals are able to make use of and understand how to navigate new technologies and platforms will be vital. Such initiatives may not be clearly quantifiable, especially at the country-level. Therefore, further research may seek out initiatives that aim to improve media literacy for qualitative study.

6 Conclusion

Though the Humprecht et al. (2020) model identified key indicators which may influence country-level resilience to disinformation, a critical application of it also demonstrates the difficulties of measuring such an intricate outcome through large-scale quantitative ranking. The addition of journalistic standards, roles, and ethics hones in on the cultural contexts influencing journalistic cultures, which can color entire media environments and how they interact with political and economic environments. Media literacy also seeks to include the ability of individuals to critically consume media in a way that is conscious of historical, societal, and technological factors. These additions contribute to the model, while in-depth analyses of each factor seek to develop how such factors may be understood across different country contexts.

For example, analysis of the populist communication indicator demonstrates the need to consider subfactors of this indicator, especially as iterations of populist communication are often closely tied to national history—for example, the use of communism in constructions of the enemy in Polish right-wing populism—which may influence said communication at large, and therefore impact disinformation resilience differently. Such communication must also be considered in the wider context of the political landscape.

Similarly, while public service media has been identified as a key way in which news knowledge increases, it also has the potential to negatively impact this knowledge (Aalberg, 2015). While this may be inadvertently captured in the framework, it necessitates a deeper examination of public service media in order to truly pinpoint how it may positively or negatively impact resilience to disinformation.

The same can be concluded of indicators such as trust in news and social media use for news. Trust in news, for example, may interact with polarization of society to impact overall trust and trust in specific brands in different ways. The reasons behind low trust in news must also be explored to understand the media environment more clearly. Social media use for news, may also need to be expanded to better understand where and how individuals are consuming news through social media. As found by Xiao et al. (2021), high trust in news consumed on social media may increase belief in disinformation. Newman et al. (2021) follow different opinions—from news outlets to

influencers—differently across platforms. Future research should therefore consider these elements as part of social media use for news.

The inclusion of longitudinal data in this thesis also highlights one major point of development for the Humprecht et al. (2020) model, as it did not look at these factors over time. Changes in the environment, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, election of PiS into Polish government, and the potential impact of the war in Ukraine, for example, demonstrate the importance of considering these factors over time. Each environment is subject to change—both rapid and long-term—that must be considered in order to develop an understanding into how resilience to disinformation may be hampered or improved by specific events.

With these findings in mind, this thesis contributed to the model and scholarship on disinformation in four major ways. Firstly, building off of Humprecht et al.'s (2020) study, this thesis applied the authors' original quantitative framework in an in-depth mixed methods way, which highlighted novel considerations and interactions within and between factors. Secondly, by analyzing the Polish case alongside the Finnish case, this thesis not only expanded the scope of the original study by applying it to a post-communist Eastern European context, but also pinpointed new ways of thinking about the interaction between political, media, and economic environments in countries with different cultural and historical contexts. Thirdly, through the addition of journalistic standards, norms, and ethics and media literacy this thesis highlights novel new considerations to the societal factors that may influence disinformation resilience. Finally, a major contribution of this thesis was to highlight the different avenues of future research that can be explored regarding each of these indicators as well as their interactions, particularly to be applied in other varied country cases.

To expand upon the findings here, future research is needed to further examine each of the factors of the framework. For example, the populist communication factor and the ways it interacts with other factors—such as polarization—to influence disinformation resilience stands to be further nuanced. Examinations into how different constructions of populism may impact disinformation may also be illuminating, as well as how populist communication in other parts of society, such as tabloid media, may contribute. The addition of journalistic standards, roles, and ethics also stands to be expanded upon through future research, particularly as these elements are flexible and subject to change and vary across countries and cultures

(Mellado, 2020). Media literacy is another factor which stands to be expanded upon through future research, particularly through applications of critical literacy theory. The ad market size factor was also underdeveloped in this thesis, and as such, requires future research to expand upon this factor. Finally, as was done in this thesis, applying this framework to other cultural and historical contexts is critical to glean further considerations and key nuances to the discussion of resilience to disinformation, particularly those outside of Europe.

Disinformation—and the factors that may contribute to it—is a problem that can be defined and problematized in a number of ways. With the continued development of technologies that may inadvertently aid in its dissemination, critical discussions into factors that aid in resilience to it and the ways in which disinformation is studied and spoken about will be vital in any initiatives to combat it in the future.

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