



SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA



HANDBOOK

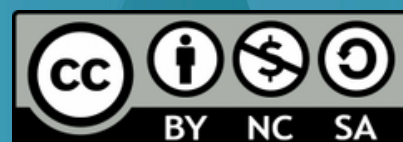
for Youth

www.safesocialmedia.org

**KA210-YOU - Small-scale
partnerships in youth Safe Social
Media: Counteracting violence
and revealing potential threats on
the Internet**



**Co-funded by
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About project

The direct goal of the project is to find, develop and disseminate good practices and useful guidelines for the safe use of social media and the Internet by young people.

The virtual world is changing dynamically, which is why we want to simultaneously teach current methods and techniques for safe use of the Internet, as well as pass on universal rules that will allow young people to be safe online.

Data released by Eurostat states that 95% of young people make daily use of the Internet. It is more than any other age range. The youngest generations were born in times when technology was accessible enough to become a part of their everyday lives. Mobile phones and personal computers were an integral element of growing up for most people born after the year of 1995. For this reason it would seem that the youth should be prepared to keep up with the constant changes in digital technology, but in reality they are the group most vulnerable to various online dangers.

Our special focus is directed towards methods of defence against online hate and violence, as well as harmful impact of unsafe social media interactions. A report “How children (10-18) experienced online risks during the Covid-19 lockdown - Spring 2020” published by the - European Commission differentiate four types of cyberbullying situations: (1) nasty or hurtful messages were sent to me; (2) nasty or hurtful messages about me were passed around or posted where other could see; (3) I was left out or excluded from a group activity on the Internet; (4) I was threatened on the Internet.



The report states that 26% of children were victims of at least one of these types of bullying and 24% of children suffered every one of these negative behaviours. Taking that into consideration, we want to address our project to young people who often may feel helpless against various kinds of online violence or hateful content.

We want to reach out to youth and social workers, educators, who need useful and accessible courses and materials for developing digital critical skills among young people. They need new tools to improve the quality of their services - a set of best practices tailored to the needs of the youth. We aim to help them by delivering knowledge about building resistance to online threats.

We care about enhancing our ability to provide quality educational products to youth, and improving staff skills through collaboration and exchange of experience at international level.

By improving the competences of young people and our employees, we want to have a positive impact in the long term.

All partner organisations implement projects using modern technologies, and their beneficiaries also include young people. Thanks to comprehensive preparation for communicating via the Internet, we can ensure future fruitful cooperation in other areas, such as ecology, social participation and life-long education.



SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA



Introduction





Introduction

The immediate target group of this activity is you - young people. The content we have prepared will be user-friendly, as even the youngest are currently using the internet. However, we will focus on young people over the age of 13, as from this age they can legally create their own profiles on most social media platforms. We will particularly focus on young people at risk of social and digital exclusion, young people with disabilities, and people from vulnerable families. These groups are particularly vulnerable to the challenges of digitalization because they are not always equipped with digital skills by their surroundings and educational institutions. Developing technological skills for your own online safety will increase your opportunities to actively participate in communities, pursue your interests, and engage in long-term learning. But there are no rules because everyone is vulnerable to fraud. All social groups are influenced by the internet.

Indirect beneficiaries of this activity will include: - Youth workers, such as educators, teachers, social workers, trainers, tutors, and organizations providing informal and formal educational services. They must be equipped with tools that increase work efficiency, proactivity, and motivation among young people, as well as tools to raise awareness of potential threats lurking online users, along with practical techniques and tips on how to avoid or even combat them. The diversity and flexibility of the formats will increase stress resistance and the adaptability of the project's deliverables in the changing online world. Employees and members of organizations participating in the project will be encouraged to develop their skills in delivering high-quality educational products to young people through international collaboration and the exchange of experiences using digital technologies.

Teachers, educators, and NGO staff are the ones you can always turn to for help with uncertainties and online problems. Don't be afraid to reach out if you have any doubts or problems. Please remember that!

This guide is also intended to help you identify online threats and avoid problems when you are using the internet. We hope this will be the case and that you will avoid the threats that are unfortunately on the rise.

The handbook (script) - available online for anyone interested - is designed for students with diverse needs and learning styles, so that every young person can benefit from it. The handbook will be available on the project website and information about it will be posted on the partner organizations' social media profiles.



SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA



The role and risks of social media





Entry

Social media is an integral part of modern life. It has transformed the way we communicate, work, learn, and build relationships. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and YouTube are used by billions of users worldwide. However, as their popularity grows, so too have the threats—from addiction to disinformation and even identity theft. The aim of this chapter is to present both the positive aspects of social media use and to warn against the real dangers that can result from its misuse.

Chapter 1: The Social Media Issue

1.1. Introduction to the concept of social media

Social media have become an integral part of modern life, transforming how we communicate, work, learn, and perceive the world. The term "social media" refers to online platforms that enable users to create, share, and exchange content in a virtual environment. The literature on the subject (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) emphasizes that social media differ from traditional media (television, radio, print) primarily in their interactivity and the ability for users to respond immediately and co-create content.

In practice, social media combine communication, information, entertainment, and marketing functions. They have become not only a tool for interpersonal contact but also a space for image-building, brand promotion, and even political and social action.

1.2. History and Development of Social Media

The origins of social media date back to the 1990s, when the first platforms enabling contact and message exchange between users emerged, such as SixDegrees (1997) and Friendster (2002). However, the real breakthrough came with the emergence of services such as MySpace (2003), LinkedIn (2003), and, above all, Facebook (2004), which dominated the global online communications market for many years.

The following years brought a dramatic development of various platforms. Twitter (2006) introduced the short message model, so-called "tweets," and Instagram (2010) focused on the visual aspect of communication.



TikTok (2016) became a symbol of a new generation of users focused on short, dynamic forms of communication. The evolution of social media reflects changing user needs and the growing role of images, video, and authenticity in online communication.

1.3. Key Features of Social Media

The most important features of social media include:

- Interactivity - users can not only receive content, but also comment on it, share it and create it.
- Global reach - information can spread around the world in seconds.
- Content personalization - algorithms analyze user behavior to tailor messages to their interests.
- Immediacy of communication - social media enable instant contact and response to events.
- Community - users form groups and communities around common themes, values or goals.

These features give social media a huge impact on shaping public opinion, social relationships and the way individuals function in society.

1.4. Social Media Typology

Social media can be divided into several basic categories based on their function:

1. Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn) - used to build networks and maintain relationships.
2. Microblogging services (e.g. X/Twitter, Mastodon) - enable the publication of short messages.
3. Visual platforms (e.g. Instagram, Pinterest) - focus on photos and graphic materials.
4. Video services (e.g. YouTube, TikTok) - focus on creating and sharing video materials.
5. Social messaging apps (e.g. Messenger, WhatsApp, Telegram) - enable private and group communication in real time.
6. Thematic communities and forums (e.g. Reddit, Quora) - used to exchange knowledge and experiences within specific topics.



Modern platforms increasingly combine various functions - for example, Instagram allows not only the publication of photos, but also video calls, live broadcasts and the sale of products.

1.5. The role of social media in social life

Social media today serves many important social functions. They are a tool for self-expression, identity building, and the creation and maintenance of relationships. In the social context, they serve as a space for opinion exchange, social mobilization, and activism. Thanks to them, many social campaigns - such as #MeToo, BlackLivesMatter, and the Women's Strike - have gained global reach and a real impact on public debate.

On the other hand, these media also generate new challenges, including those related to disinformation, internet addiction, and the privacy crisis. As Zuboff (2019) notes in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, modern platforms have become a tool for collecting data about users and monetizing their behavior, which raises questions about ethics and digital security.

1.6. The importance of social media for individuals and the economy

For individuals, social media is a source of information, inspiration, and often a work or educational tool. More and more people are using it for professional development, promoting their skills, and building a personal brand.

From an economic perspective, social media is a powerful marketing tool. Companies and institutions use them to promote products, acquire customers, and engage with audiences. According to a 2024 DataReportal report, over 93% of brands worldwide are active on social media, making it one of the most important communication channels in the 21st century.

Chapter 2: The Social Media Issue

2.1. Social media as a modern communication tool

Contemporary social media constitute one of the most important elements of 21st-century communication.



They are platforms that not only facilitate interpersonal contact but also influence the shaping of opinions, social relationships, and culture.

Their development has led to a shift in the information flow model—from a one-way model (sender → recipient) to an interactive model in which users are both creators and consumers of content.

According to a 2024 report by DataReportal , over 5 billion people use social media worldwide, meaning over 60% of the planet's population is active online. This makes social media not only a means of communication but also a platform for social influence, education, promotion, and image building.

2.2. Social media in everyday and social life

In everyday life, social media serves many functions - informational, entertaining, educational, and integrative. Users use them to maintain relationships with family and friends, keep up with current events, pursue interests, and participate in public discussions.

At the same time, social media have transformed the way society perceives the world. They blur the lines between reality and the digital world, enabling the formation of communities across geographic and cultural barriers, but also giving rise to new phenomena such as cyber addiction , disinformation, and social pressure related to online image.

Contemporary research (e.g., Fuchs, 2021; Papacharissi , 2015) indicates that social media have a profound impact on users' well-being and sense of identity. They facilitate the creation of a "digital self"—a profile that often becomes a modern form of self-presentation and social status building.

2.3. The impact of social media on interpersonal communication

Communication on social media is characterized by speed, brevity, and a high emotional tone. Abbreviations, emoticons, GIFs, and memes have replaced many traditional forms of expression. Messages are shorter, more visual, and often emotionally charged.



On the one hand, this communication model increases spontaneity and accessibility, but on the other, it can lead to a shallowing of relationships and a loss of empathy in interpersonal communication. This phenomenon is referred to as digital emotional distance.

Research (Turkle, 2016) indicates that despite the prevalence of online communication, more and more people feel lonely and isolated. Instead of connecting, social media often creates the illusion of closeness, replacing real connections with superficial contacts.

2.4. Social media as a space for creating reality

Social media is not only a place for exchanging information, but also a platform for creating reality. Users choose which aspects of their lives they choose to share, leading to the creation of a so-called distorted view of reality.

The dominance of positive content—successes, trips, achievements—creates an unrealistic standard of living, which often becomes a source of frustration and insecurities. This phenomenon is known as the social comparison effect.

According to research published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology (Hunt et al., 2018), limiting social media use to 30 minutes a day significantly improves well-being and reduces levels of anxiety and depression.

This means that social media has a real psychological impact - both positive and negative - depending on how it is used.

2.5. Social and cultural phenomena in social media

Social media has become the birthplace of many contemporary cultural phenomena. Examples include:

- Pato-streaming - live broadcasts showing controversial or violent content that are intended to attract viewers' attention and generate profits from views.
- Cancel culture - the phenomenon of "social exclusion" of people or brands that have broken ethical or social norms, often without fully understanding the context.



- Viral content - content that quickly gains enormous popularity, spreading globally thanks to shares.
- Influencer marketing - a new form of advertising, based on the trust and authenticity of internet creators who have become modern opinion leaders.

Social media also facilitates the emergence of social movements and grassroots campaigns. Examples of global initiatives like #MeToo , #BlackLivesMatter , and local ones like #StrajkKobiet demonstrate that these platforms can be a tool for real social and political change.

2.6. Ethical Aspects and Risks of Social Media

The dynamic growth of social media also brings with it a number of threats. The most important of these are:

- Disinformation - spreading false or manipulated content.
- Loss of privacy - publishing personal data, location or image without full awareness of the consequences.
- Social media addiction - manifested by compulsive checking of notifications and difficulty in breaking away from the screen.
- Cyberbullying - hate, harassment, or emotional blackmail that have real psychological effects.
- Manipulation of emotions and public opinion - platform algorithms promote content that evokes strong emotional reactions, which may contribute to social polarization.

According to research by the Pew Research Center (2023), as many as 64% of users believe that social media contribute to the deterioration of public debate, and 48% declare that they have encountered hate or hate speech online.

2.7. Social Media in the Future

The future of social media is moving toward increasing personalization and integration with artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) technologies. Platforms are developing that combine communication with immersive experiences—the so-called metaverse – where users can meet in virtual spaces, work, play, and participate in events.



At the same time, the need for legal regulations and digital education is growing. Developing media literacy, critical thinking skills, and informed use of technology will be crucial.

2.8. Summary

Social media has become one of the most powerful tools of modern times. It connects people, facilitates communication, and promotes creativity, but it also poses threats to privacy, mental health, and the quality of social relationships.

Understanding their impact—both positive and negative—is essential for conscious and responsible participation in the digital world. The following chapters will discuss practical aspects of using social media in professional work, marketing, and education, as well as strategies for navigating the web safely.

Chapter 3: Using Social Media for Work and Marketing

3.1. Introduction

Social media is no longer just a space for entertainment or socializing. Today, it serves as a key tool in the workplace, marketing, and organizational communication. It influences how companies operate, how they communicate with customers, and even how they manage human resources.

Thanks to social media, employers and employees can build relationships, promote their activities, acquire business partners, and reach a global audience quickly, affordably, and effectively. In the digital age, a lack of online presence means limited opportunities for professional development and a company's competitiveness.

3.2. Social media as a tool for internal and external communication

Modern organizations use social media not only to connect with customers but also as a tool for internal communication. For example, internal Facebook groups, messaging apps (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams), and social media-based company platforms enable rapid information sharing, consultation, and collaboration between employees across multiple locations.



External communication on social media, in turn, involves building relationships with the environment - customers, contractors, the media, and the local community. It includes activities such as:

- publication of news and information about the company's activities,
- responding to customer comments and opinions,
- conducting dialogue with recipients in real time,
- creating a positive brand image.

Social media enables organizations to move from a one-way communication model to a dialogue model in which customers become co-creators of the brand.

3.3. The role of social media in marketing

Social media marketing is currently one of the most effective promotional strategies. It involves using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and YouTube to communicate marketing and build relationships with customers.

The main goals of social media marketing are:

- increasing brand recognition,
- building customer loyalty and trust,
- acquiring new customers,
- promotion of products and services,
- analysis of consumer behavior.

One of the key advantages of social media is the ability to precisely target ads—that is, to target specific audiences based on age, gender, interests, location, or search history. This allows businesses to significantly increase the effectiveness of their campaigns at a relatively low cost.

3.4. Social Media Marketing Strategies

For social media marketing to be effective, it's essential to adopt a proper strategy. This strategy includes the following steps:

- Audience analysis - understanding the target group, their needs and how they use social media.



- Platform selection - choosing appropriate communication channels (e.g. Instagram for lifestyle brands , LinkedIn for B2B companies).
- Creating valuable content - publishing materials that are engaging, aesthetically pleasing and consistent with the brand image.
- Regularity and planning - setting a publication schedule and staying active consistently.
- Results analysis - monitoring campaign effects using tools such as Google Analytics, Meta Business Suite or Sprout Social.

An example of an effective strategy is storytelling –telling brand stories in an emotional and authentic way. Users no longer respond solely to product advertising, but to the values and emotions the brand represents.

3.5. Influencer marketing and collaboration with online creators

One of the most dynamically developing areas of modern marketing is influencer marketing - a form of promotion involving cooperation with people with large reach and influence in social media.

Influencers act as intermediaries between brands and their audiences, building trust and credibility through personal communication. Their authenticity and connection with their followers make them more effective than traditional advertising.

There are several types of influencers :

- mega-influencers (over 1 million followers),
- macro-influencers (100,000-1 million),
- micro-influencers (10,000-100,000),
- nano-influencers (up to 10,000 followers).

Research (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024) shows that collaborations with micro-influencers often result in higher engagement levels than campaigns with celebrities because their audiences are more loyal and trusting.



3.6. Social media in recruitment processes and employer image building

The phenomenon known as employer branding has become a key element of human resources management. Companies use social media to showcase their values, organizational culture, and the daily lives of their teams.

Posting photos from the office, event reports, videos featuring employees, or job offers helps build a positive image of the employer and attract candidates who identify with the company.

On the other hand, social media have become a recruitment tool - employers are increasingly analyzing candidates' profiles on LinkedIn or Facebook to assess their competences, communication style and professional commitment.

3.7. Examples of how companies use social media

- **IKEA Polska** - runs campaigns based on humor and storytelling , combining product promotion with family and ecological values.
- **Żywiec Zdrój** - promotes pro-ecological attitudes by engaging users in social campaigns and online competitions.
- **L'Oréal** - uses TikTok and Instagram for beauty campaigns with influencers , achieving high engagement rates.
- **LinkedIn** - the platform itself is an example of a brand that builds a community around professionalism and the exchange of industry knowledge.

3.8. Challenges and threats of social media marketing

Despite the numerous benefits, social media marketing activities also involve risks:

• **Image crises** - negative comments or ill-considered publications can destroy a brand's reputation in a matter of hours.

• **Fake influencers** - buying followers and artificially increasing reach threatens the credibility of the campaign.

• **Privacy violations** - misuse of user data leads to loss of trust and legal issues.

• **Overload of advertising content** - too many advertisements cause fatigue and a decrease in communication effectiveness.



That is why more and more organizations focus on ethical marketing, transparency and authenticity in relationships with their recipients.

3.9. Summary

Social media has become an integral part of the modern world of work and business. However, using it effectively requires strategy, knowledge, and digital communication management skills.

Thanks to them, companies can build lasting relationships with customers, strengthen their image, increase sales, and reach new audiences. At the same time, it is essential to maintain a balance between commercialism and social responsibility, and to ensure the ethical dimension of the message.

4. Fake accounts, bots, and manipulation of public opinion

The problem of fake accounts and bots on social media poses one of the greatest threats to the credibility of information online. Bots are automated programs capable of publishing posts, reacting to content, or creating the impression of mass support for specific ideas or products.

Manipulation of public opinion is carried out through:

- generating false political or social discussions,
- promoting specific narratives,
- artificially increasing the popularity of entries,
- impersonating famous people or institutions.

According to a 2024 report by the Stanford Internet Observatory, as much as 15-20% of activity on popular platforms like X (Twitter) and Instagram may come from automated or fake accounts. Such activities distort public discourse and lead to social polarization.

Platform algorithms are not always able to effectively detect bots, so users should be critical of content that arouses extreme emotions or seems too sensational.



4.1. Grooming and threats to children and adolescents

Children and adolescents are a particularly vulnerable group of users, often lacking adequate digital skills and awareness of the risks. One of the most serious phenomena is grooming , or the act of an adult contacting a minor for the purpose of sexually exploiting them.

The grooming mechanism includes:

- 1.gaining the child's trust,
- 2.isolating him from family and friends,
- 3.emotional manipulation,
- 4.forcing the transmission of sexually explicit material or offline meetings.

According to Interpol data (2023), the number of reported grooming cases in Europe has increased by 42% over the last 5 years, and social media is the main channel of contact between perpetrators and victims.

That's why digital education plays a crucial role - both in schools and at home. Children should know not to share private photos or information with strangers online.

4.2. Dehumanization and the Impact on Mental Health

Constant exposure to social media also leads to the dehumanization of interpersonal relationships. Users often treat others as avatars rather than real people, which fosters a lack of empathy and aggression.

Additionally, comparing oneself to idealized images online contributes to the development of:

- body image disorders (body dysmorphia),
- reduced self-esteem,
- anxiety and depressive disorders,
- digital burnout syndrome.

Research Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology (2022) found that limiting social media use to 30 minutes a day can significantly improve mental well-being and reduce stress levels.



Social media should be a tool, not the center of your life - maintaining a balance between the online and offline worlds is key.

4.3. Protection against threats - recommendations and good practices

To minimize the risks associated with using social media, it is worth following a few safety rules:

1. Manage your privacy consciously - regularly check your account settings and limit the visibility of your posts.
2. Don't share too much personal information - even seemingly harmless information can be exploited.
3. Verify information sources - before sharing, check that the content comes from a reliable source.
4. React to hate and violence - report offensive comments and support victims of online violence.
5. Set time limits for social media use - especially for children and teenagers.
6. Use two-step login verification - it's one of the most effective methods of protecting your account.
7. Digital education - a key element of prevention that should be included in the school and family system.

Online security depends largely on user awareness - even the most advanced protection systems cannot replace common sense and critical thinking.

4.4 Summary

Social media is a powerful tool for communication, development, and education, but it also carries real risks of addiction, violence, manipulation, and loss of privacy. Understanding these threats is the first step to mitigating them.

Modern society should strive not to abandon social media, but to use it sensibly, ethically, and safely. Digital education, platform responsibility, and user vigilance are the three pillars on which a safe internet environment of the future should be based.



Chapter 5: Positive Uses of Social Media in Work and Marketing

5.1. Introduction

Despite the numerous threats described in previous chapters, social media also offers enormous potential for professional development, communication, education, and business promotion. The contemporary job market and marketing cannot function without the effective use of social media platforms, which have become not only a communication tool but also a source of knowledge, inspiration, and personal branding.

This chapter will discuss the positive uses of social media in the context of professional work, building relationships with customers, and conducting effective marketing activities.

5.2. Social media as a professional communication tool

The modern workplace demands efficient communication, and social media plays an increasingly important role. Platforms like LinkedIn, Slack, Teams, Facebook Groups, and X (Twitter) enable information exchange, team collaboration, and networking.

Benefits of using social media in professional communication:

- fast flow of information between employees and departments,
- easy contact with industry experts and the possibility of consultation,
- building an employer brand (employer branding),
- recruitment - searching for talents via LinkedIn and other portals,
- international cooperation - thanks to real-time communication.

Harvard Business Review research (2023) has shown that companies that actively use social media for internal communication increase team effectiveness by an average of 25%.

5.3. Building a personal brand (personal branding)

One of the key positive aspects of being present on social media is the opportunity to build a personal brand. A well-curated professional profile allows you to stand out in the job market, showcase your competencies, and gain the trust of potential employers and clients.



Elements of effective personal branding:

1. Professional photo and profile description - the first impression is extremely important.
2. Publishing valuable content - e.g. articles, industry analyses, expert opinions.
3. Being active in discussions - commenting and providing support to other users.
4. Authenticity - building a brand based on real values and experiences.

Platforms like LinkedIn, X (Twitter), and Medium provide the perfect environment for creating and promoting a professional's personal image. According to a 2024 Forbes study, as many as 84% of recruiters evaluate candidates based on their social media presence.

5.4. Social Media in Marketing and Promotion

Social media has revolutionized the world of marketing. It allows companies to reach customers directly, build relationships, and engage audiences in ways that traditional methods simply couldn't achieve.

Most popular marketing platforms:

- Facebook / Instagram - perfect for visual campaigns, contests and storytelling ,
- TikTok - a dynamic channel for a younger audience,
- LinkedIn - B2B marketing and business networking,
- YouTube - building brand awareness through video,
- Pinterest - promoting creative and visual products.

Advantages of social media marketing:

- low cost of reaching recipients,
- precise advertising targeting,
- the ability to analyze campaign effectiveness in real time,
- building customer loyalty through interaction and storytelling .

HubSpot report (2024), 73% of companies consider social media marketing to be the most effective channel for acquiring new customers.



5.5 Relationship Marketing and Brand Community

Modern marketing increasingly relies on relationships rather than one-way messaging. Social media enables the creation of a community around a brand—a loyal audience who not only purchase products but also engage in their development and promotion.

Elements of relationship marketing:

- constant contact with the customer through comments, chats and live broadcasts,
- loyalty programs and rewards for active users,
- engaging customers in the product development process (e.g. tests, surveys),
- publishing customer success stories (so-called user stories).

Building a community based on trust increases the authenticity of the brand and its resilience to image crises.

5.6. Education, Development, and Networking

Social media is also an invaluable tool for personal and professional development. Platforms like YouTube, LinkedIn Learning, Coursera , and Facebook and Discord groups provide access to free knowledge, courses, and connections with professionals from around the world.

Educational benefits of social media:

- access to current industry knowledge,
- exchange of experiences with experts,
- inspiration for development and innovation,
- building a network of professional contacts.

Thanks to social media, you can participate in online conferences, webinars and workshops without having to travel, which significantly increases the accessibility of education.

5.7. Social media in the activities of organizations and NGOs

Not only businesses, but also non-governmental organizations and public institutions are increasingly using social media for communication, education and promotion of social activities.



Applications include:

- social and information campaigns,
- fundraising (e.g. via Facebook or Instagram),
- recruitment of volunteers,
- education in the field of human rights, ecology and health.

According to research by the European Communication Monitor (2024), as many as 78% of NGOs in Europe consider social media to be a key channel for contact with audiences.

5.8. Data Analysis and Market Research

Social media provides a vast amount of data that can be used to analyze consumer behavior, purchasing preferences, and brand opinions. Tools like Meta Business Suite , Google Analytics , Hootsuite , and Brand24 allow you to monitor social sentiment and campaign effectiveness in real time.

Analysis of social media data (so-called social listening) enables:

- early detection of image crises,
- matching content to audiences,
- better understanding of market needs,
- planning effective marketing strategies.

5.9. Summary

Social media, when used appropriately, is a powerful tool in professional work, education, and marketing. It enables communication, skill development, brand building, and the creation of relationships with customers and communities.

The key to success is a conscious, ethical, and strategic approach—understanding both the capabilities and limitations of these platforms. Combined with the ability to critically analyze content, social media can become the foundation of professional and business success in the 21st century.



Chapter 6: Responsible use of social media and risk prevention

6.1. Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of modern life - serving communication, work, entertainment, education, and self-development. However, its mass and uncontrolled use carries the risk of addiction, manipulation, and loss of privacy.

That is why it is so important to use social media responsibly, allowing you to reap its benefits while limiting the risks.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the principles of conscious use of social media, preventive methods and educational activities that support the safety and mental well-being of users.

6.2. Principles of responsible use of social media

Responsible use of social media requires awareness, moderation, and critical thinking. It's not about completely abandoning these platforms, but rather developing healthy habits.

Basic rules:

1. Set time limits - limit the time spent on platforms daily, e.g. to 30-60 minutes.
2. Separate your private life from your professional life - do not publish content that may negatively affect your image or work.
3. Verify information - before sharing a post, check the source and publication date.
4. Maintain a civilized manner - remember that there are real people on the other side of the screen.
5. Respect your privacy and the privacy of others - do not share personal information or other people's photos without consent.
6. Don't react impulsively - think before posting an emotional comment or photo.
7. Maintain digital balance - don't let social media replace offline relationships.



According to the Digital Wellbeing Report (2024), people who consciously manage their time online show 40% lower digital stress levels and better sleep quality.

6.3. Digital Hygiene and Online-Offline Balance

Digital hygiene is a set of actions aimed at maintaining a healthy relationship with technology. It includes controlling screen time, mindful device use, and protecting mental and physical health.

Practical tips:

- turn off push notifications in applications,
- set specific times of day for using social media,
- introduce so-called "screen-free hours" (e.g. before bed),
- remove applications you don't use,
- Once a week, do a "digital detox" - a day without your phone.

APA research (American Psychological Association, 2023) confirms that regular breaks from social media significantly improve concentration, mood, and interpersonal relationships.

6.4. Media education as a preventive tool

A key element of preventing internet threats is media education - the process of developing critical thinking skills, content analysis and safe navigation in the digital space.

Goals of media education:

- developing the ability to recognize disinformation and fake news,
- building awareness of the influence of media on emotions and decisions,
- developing empathy and responsibility for words,
- learning the principles of digital ethics and privacy protection.

Media education should be introduced from an early age - both in schools and at home. Parents, teachers, and public institutions play a key role in this regard. Many countries, including Poland, are working on curricula that incorporate digital and media literacy.



6.5. Prevention of social media addiction

Social media addiction is an increasingly common problem, especially among young people. Prevention should focus on developing self-control, self-awareness, and healthy digital habits.

Effective prevention methods:

1. Online time monitoring - applications such as “Digital Wellbeing”, “Forest” or “Freedom”.
2. Developing alternative interests - sports, music, reading, offline meetings.
3. Limiting the number of social media apps to those you really need.
4. Conversations about emotions related to the media - especially in families and among young people.
5. Psychological support - in case of addiction symptoms (e.g. anxiety after disconnecting from the network, lack of control over time).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), digital prevention in schools and families is the most effective tool in counteracting behavioral addictions.

6.6. Privacy and data security

Conscious privacy management is one of the pillars of responsible use of social media.

Basic principles of digital security:

- use strong, unique passwords and enable two-factor authentication,
- do not publicly share information about your place of residence, work or travel plans,
- regularly check the privacy settings on your accounts,
- do not click on suspicious links and messages,
- use up-to-date antivirus programs.

In Poland, the protection of user privacy is regulated by the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), which guarantees the right to delete data and control over its processing.

However, it is the user who has the greatest influence on what information about themselves they reveal.



6.7. Emotional Support and Mental Health in the Online World

Responsible use of social media also includes taking care of your mental health. Excessive exposure to negative content, hate, comparing yourself to others, or the pressure of a perfect life can lead to a decline in well-being.

How to maintain mental balance online:

- follow profiles that inspire and motivate you,
- avoid toxic discussions and accounts spreading negative emotions,
- don't compare yourself with others – most of the content on the internet is an idealized reality,
- if you feel overwhelmed, take a break from social media,
- talk about emotions with a trusted person or specialist.

Research by the European Digital Health Institute (2024) shows that implementing the principles of digital mindfulness improves mental well-being and reduces stress by over 35%.

6.8. The role of public institutions and social organizations

The state, schools and non-governmental organizations have a huge role to play in creating a safe digital environment.

Their task is not only to respond to threats, but above all to carry out preventive and educational activities.

Examples of activities:

- social campaigns (e.g. "I don't hate - I react", "Click wisely"),
- cybersecurity workshops in schools,
- psychological support for victims of cyberbullying ,
- monitoring and reporting dangerous content to appropriate institutions (e.g. NASK, CERT Polska).

Effective prevention requires cooperation between the public, private and social sectors, as well as the involvement of users themselves.



6.9. Summary

Responsible use of social media is not only a technical issue, but above all an attitude to life - based on awareness, moderation, respect and empathy.

Thanks to media education, digital hygiene and reflection on one's own behavior, it is possible to function safely and constructively in the online world.

Social media is neither “good” nor “bad” - it is a tool whose value depends on how it is used. A responsible user can use them in a way that enriches their life, not replaces it.

Social media has become one of the most important phenomena of the 21st century, significantly influencing the functioning of modern society.

Thanks to them, communication, education, entertainment, and professional work have gained a new dimension - immediate, global, and interactive. Portals such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter) have become spaces for the exchange of ideas, promotion, image creation, and even a place for conducting business.

On the other hand, the mass use of social media has revealed numerous threats - from digital addiction, through disinformation and cyberbullying, to pathological phenomena such as patostreaming or manipulation of public opinion.

For this reason, conscious and responsible use of social media, based on the principles of ethics, respect and critical thinking, is crucial.

The modern Internet user must understand that every action he or she takes online leaves a trace - both technical and social.

That is why media education is extremely important, teaching how to navigate the digital world safely, verify information, protect privacy and take care of mental health. Conscious shaping of digital attitudes, both among young people and adults, is the foundation for building a modern, responsible information society.

The role of public institutions, schools, parents and non-governmental organizations, which should jointly carry out preventive and educational activities, cannot be overlooked.



Implementing programs to increase digital competences, organizing social campaigns, and promoting digital well-being are activities that genuinely contribute to improving the quality of life in the digital age.

Social media, despite its risks, is a tremendous tool for development, collaboration and creativity.

It is up to us whether they become a space of authentic communication and development, or a place of manipulation, hate and addiction.

To sum up, the most important message of this study is:

Use social media so that it serves you, not you serve it.

A conscious user is one who is able to connect the online and offline worlds, maintaining balance, respect and responsibility towards themselves and others. Only then will social media be a tool for progress - and not a source of threats.



SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA



Handbook for youth





CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL LITERACY

WHAT IS DIGITAL LITERACY?

Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies. Here are three expert definitions:

UNESCO (2018). Digital literacy encompasses the ability to navigate digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes competences that are variously referred to as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy and media literacy.



These are the key components of digital literacy:

Computer literacy. The knowledge and ability to use computers and related technology efficiently, with skill levels ranging from elementary use to computer programming and advanced problem solving.

ICT literacy. Knowing how to use information and communication technology (ICT) to solve problems, manage data, and understand the technical aspects of digital tools. It also involves basic troubleshooting and understanding how to stay secure online.

Information literacy. Knowing how to search for information, assess its credibility, and use it appropriately. For instance, when doing research for schoolwork, understanding the difference between academic sources and blogs or opinion-based articles.

Media literacy. This involves understanding the impact of media on individuals and society.

It means recognizing biases in the news and advertisements, and knowing how to evaluate whether what you see or hear in the media is true or designed to manipulate you.



ITU (2010). Digital literacy consists of equipping people with ICT concepts, methods and skills to enable them to use and exploit ICTs. The related concept of information literacy consists of providing people with concepts and training in order to process data and transform them into information, knowledge and decisions. It includes methods to search and evaluate information, elements of information culture and its ethical aspects, as well as methodological and ethical aspects for communication in the digital world.

European Commission (2016). Digital literacy lays out five digital competence areas and a total of 21 digital competencies. The digital competence areas include information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving.

WHY IS DIGITAL LITERACY IMPORTANT?

Digital literacy is a crucial skill for navigating today's online world. Here are real-life examples of its importance:

- Helps you to avoid misinformation and fake news. Imagine you see a shocking headline about a celebrity scandal. Without checking the facts, you share it - only to find out later that it was fake news! Digital literacy helps you check sources and avoid spreading false information.
- Protects your personal data and online identity. A teenager posts a picture of their new apartment on social media with the address visible. Later, they receive unexpected visits from strangers who found the address online. Understanding online privacy helps prevent unwanted attention and potential safety risks.
- Enables responsible and ethical online behavior. Cyberbullying and hate speech are serious problems. Digital literacy can help you engage in positive interactions online and recognise when to report harmful content.
- Empowers you to stay safe from online threats. Have you ever received an email saying you won a prize, but you never entered a competition? Digital literacy enables you to recognize phishing scams and avoid suspicious links.



EU POLICIES ON DIGITAL LITERACY AND SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA

The European Union has implemented several policies to ensure that young people can navigate the digital world safely and responsibly. Here are the key policies you should be aware of:

1. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Regulation (EU) 2016/679

- Protects your personal data and online privacy.
- Gives you the right to control, delete, and manage your information on social media.
- More info: <https://gdpr.eu>

2. Digital Services Act (DSA)

- The DSA regulates online intermediaries and platforms such as marketplaces, social networks, content-sharing platforms, app stores, and online travel and accommodation platforms.
- Its main goal is to prevent illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation.
- It ensures user safety, protects fundamental rights, and creates a fair and open online platform environment.
- Makes platforms more transparent about how algorithms work.
- More info: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_en

3. EU Code of Practice on Disinformation

- Helps fight fake news and misinformation.
- Encourages platforms to label or remove misleading content.

4. Safer Internet Day (SID)

- A yearly initiative to raise awareness about cybersecurity and digital responsibility.

Why does this matter to you?

- Helps you stay safe online and avoid scams.
- Ensures that social media companies protect your rights.
- Gives you tools to report and remove harmful content.



ESSENTIAL DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS

To stay safe and responsible online, mastering these skills is essential:

1. Fact-checking and media literacy:

- Always verify information from multiple reliable sources before sharing.
- Use fact-checking websites like Snopes or Google Fact Check.
- Look for credible sources (.gov, .edu, or well-known news outlets)

2. Privacy settings and online security:

- Adjust privacy settings on social media to control who can see your posts.
- Use strong passwords and enable two-factor authentication.
- Understand the concept of “digital footprints” – once something is online, it can be difficult or impossible to remove. Be cautious with what you share.

3. Recognizing scams and phishing attempts:

- Be cautious of messages asking for personal or financial information.
- Check URLs before clicking - scammers use fake website links.
- Don't download suspicious attachments or respond to unknown emails.

4. Online reputation management:

- Think before you post - everything online can be permanent.
- Google yourself regularly to see what information is available about you.
- If you find harmful content about yourself, report or request removal.

TEST YOUR DIGITAL LITERACY: 4 QUICK QUESTIONS.

1. How can you verify if an online news story is true?

- a. Trust any website that looks professional.
- b. Check multiple reliable sources.
- c. Share it quickly before others do.

2. What should you do if you receive a suspicious email?

- a. Click the link to check if it's real.
- b. Reply and ask for more details.
- c. Ignore it and delete it.



3. Why should you be careful about what you post online?
 - a. Employers or schools might check your online presence.
 - b. It disappears after 24 hours.
 - c. Only your close friends can see it.

4. What's a good way to protect your social media accounts?
 - a. Use the same password for all accounts.
 - b. Enable two-factor authentication.
 - c. Share your password with friends for safekeeping.

(Correct answers: 1.b; 2.c; 3.a; 4.b).

TIPS TO REMEMBER

- "Think before you click!"
- "Not everything online is true - check before you trust."
- "Your online posts can follow you forever!"

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CHAPTER 2: DEALING WITH CYBERBULLYING.

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is bullying with the use of digital technologies. It can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is repeated behaviour, aimed at scaring, angering or shaming those who are targeted.

Digital bullying can take many forms. It might be a one-time incident, but more often than not, it is a continuous pattern of hurtful online behavior. Understanding the signs, effects, and response strategies is crucial for everyone.

Examples include:

- Spreading lies about or posting embarrassing photos or videos of someone on social media.
- Sending hurtful, abusive or threatening messages, images or videos via messaging platforms.
- Impersonating someone and sending mean messages to others on their behalf or through fake accounts.
- Engaging in sexual harassment or bullying using generative AI tools.

Remember that face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying can often happen alongside each other. But cyberbullying leaves a digital footprint - a record that can prove useful and provide evidence to help stop the abuse.

Some common types include:

- **Harassment:** Repeated, hurtful messages that are intended to intimidate or shame the victim. These messages can take the form of insults, threats, or hate speech.
- **Impersonation and Catfishing:** Someone pretends to be another person online to hurt or manipulate others. This might involve creating fake social media profiles or sending messages pretending to be someone else.
- **Trolling and Flaming:** Posting hurtful or offensive comments online to provoke or annoy others. This can happen in comment sections, forums, or social media platforms.



- **Outing:** Revealing private or embarrassing information about someone online without their consent. This can include photos, videos, or personal details.
- **Spamming:** Sending large amounts of unsolicited messages, often for commercial or malicious purposes.
- **Gaslighting:** Psychological manipulation online to make someone doubt their own memory, perception, or reality.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JOKING AND CYBERBULLYING?

All friends joke around with each other, but sometimes it's hard to tell if someone is just having fun or trying to hurt you, especially online. Sometimes they'll laugh it off with a "just kidding, " or "don't take it so seriously."

But if you feel hurt or think others are laughing at you instead of with you, then the joke has gone too far. If it continues even after you've asked the person to stop and you are still feeling upset about it, then this could be bullying.

And when the bullying takes place online, it can result in unwanted attention from a wide range of people including strangers. Wherever it may happen, if you are not happy about it, you should not have to stand for it.

Call it what you will - if you feel bad and it doesn't stop, then it's worth getting help. Stopping cyberbullying is not just about calling out bullies, it's also about recognizing that everyone deserves respect - online and in real life.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE CYBERBULLYING AND RESPOND SAFELY

Signs of cyberbullying:

- Being targeted by hurtful messages or threats online.
- Seeing hurtful content posted about you without your permission.
- Being excluded or targeted in group chats.
- Fake accounts created to impersonate or embarrass you.

How to respond:

1. **Don't engage:** Responding may escalate the situation. It's better to report and block the person rather than arguing online.



2. Take evidence: Always take screenshots of harmful content to have proof when reporting the bullying.
3. Report and block: Use the reporting and blocking tools available on most social media platforms to prevent further harm.
4. Talk to someone you trust: It can be difficult to deal with bullying alone. Talking to a parent, teacher, or counselor can help you get support.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CYBERBULLYING?

When bullying happens online it can feel as if you're being attacked everywhere, even inside your own home. It can seem like there's no escape. The effects can last a long time and affect a person in many ways:

Mentally, cyberbullying can cause anxiety, depression, and fear. Victims often worry about being targeted again or humiliated publicly. The constant negativity can lead to feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and a diminished sense of self-worth. Additionally, the fear of being attacked online, whether through messages or public posts, can leave a person feeling on edge and scared.

Emotionally, victims may experience shame and guilt, even though the bullying is not their fault. The feeling of being judged or mocked publicly can leave someone embarrassed and emotionally drained. It can also lead to a loss of interest in the things they once enjoyed. The constant attacks can make it hard to focus on hobbies or activities that used to bring joy. Some might also feel incredibly lonely, believing they have no one to turn to for support.

The effects of cyberbullying can also take a physical toll. Stress from being bullied online can lead to sleep problems, making it hard to rest and causing tiredness during the day. Some victims may experience physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches due to the stress and anxiety. Additionally, eating habits can change; some may overeat to cope, while others may lose their appetite entirely.

Cyberbullying also affects a victim's social life. Victims might withdraw from friends and family to avoid further hurt, leading to isolation. This emotional withdrawal can also damage relationships, causing misunderstandings or arguments.



If the bullying is severe, it can lead to a lack of trust in others, making it difficult for victims to build healthy relationships in the future.

In summary, the effects of cyberbullying extend beyond online interactions, affecting the mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being of victims. It's important to be aware of these effects and offer support to those who are suffering from online bullying, whether by listening, seeking help, or encouraging them to speak up.

HOW TO GET HELP

Hotlines & Support Resources:

National Helplines.

- Cyprus Helpline 1480 or 1480helpline@cyearn.pi.ac.cy
- Poland Helpline for children and youth 116 111, Helpline for parents and professionals 800 100 100
- Germany Nummer gegen Kummer (Germany), Helpline for Children and Adolescents: 116 111, Helpline for Parents: 0800 111 0550

Social Media Reporting Tools. Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have reporting options. Check them and see how to do it.

Facebook/Instagram/Threads

- Block or mute people, including new accounts they might create.
- Limit interactions by hiding comments or message requests from strangers.
- Use "Restrict" to protect your account without notifying the person.
- Moderate comments and adjust settings to control who can message you.

TikTok

- Control who can comment on your videos (friends, everyone, etc.).
- Filter or delete offensive comments in bulk.
- Use Comment Care Mode to automatically filter inappropriate comments.

X (Twitter)

- Choose who can reply to your posts (everyone, people you follow, or people you mention).
- Mute, block, or report harmful accounts and comments.○
- Safety Mode temporarily blocks accounts using harmful language.

Teachers & School Counselors - Schools can take action to stop cyberbullying.

**TEST: 4 scenario-based questions.**

1. What should you do if someone sends you threatening messages online?

Possible answers:

- Do not reply or engage with the person.
- Take screenshots of the messages as evidence.
- Block and report the sender on the platform.
- Inform a trusted adult, teacher, or counselor.
- If the threats are serious, consider reporting to the authorities.

2. A friend is being bullied in a group chat—how can you support them?

Possible answers:

- Reach out to your friend privately and offer support.
- Encourage your friend not to respond to the bully.
- Suggest to report and block the person responsible.
- If comfortable, speak up in the chat and call out the bullying in a respectful way.
- If the situation is serious, tell a teacher, counselor, or a trusted adult.

3. You see someone posting false rumors about a classmate—what's the best response?

Possible answers:

- Do not share, like, or comment on the false information.
- Report the post to the social media platform.
- Privately check in with the classmate to offer support.
- If safe to do so, speak up and say that spreading false rumors is harmful.
- Encourage others to stand against misinformation.

4. How can you report cyberbullying on social media?

Possible answers:

- Use the reporting feature on the platform (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Facebook).
- Block the person who is bullying.
- Adjust your privacy settings to limit who can interact with you.
- Save screenshots of the harmful content before reporting.
- If the situation continues, seek support from a teacher, counselor, or a trusted adult.

**REMEMBER!**

"If you wouldn't say it in person, don't say it online!"

"Think before you type - your words have power."

"Support, don't spectate. Stand up against cyberbullying."

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SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA



**Protecting the
Value System
from Fake
News and
Hate Speech**





1. Introduction

A value system is the foundation of every society. It is formed by beliefs and norms that regulate interpersonal relationships and give meaning to shared life. Fundamental values include truth, dignity, freedom, solidarity, justice, and responsibility. These values bind communities together, inspire legislation, and shape customs. The foundation is, of course, human dignity.

However, modern times bring new challenges. The digital revolution, social media, and the globalization of information flow have weakened existing mechanisms for protecting values. Fake news—false content disseminated for the purpose of manipulation—and hate speech—language that denies people dignity—have become tools of unprecedented influence. Both phenomena undermine social trust and question the accepted value system. Both impact communication and interpersonal relationships. Fake news is intellectual manipulation, while hate speech is the emotional emanation of something that gnaws at human existence. Main assumption: Protecting the value system against fake news and hate speech requires not only legal regulations but also grounding in moral, religious, and customary norms, as well as fostering dialogue and community.

2. Background

A. Characterization of the Threats

1) Fake News as a Challenge to Western Values and the Global Order

The rapid circulation of content on social media, lacking traditional verification filters, facilitates the spread of fake news. This phenomenon undermines democracy, freedom of speech, and social trust, destabilizing political systems and interpersonal relationships—from the international arena to families.

Macroscale: Disinformation interferes with democratic mechanisms and the international order. Disinformation campaigns—a component of information warfare—undermine trust in state and global institutions. Examples of interference in electoral processes and manipulation in the context of migration crises and pandemics demonstrate how disinformation shapes public opinion and political decisions contrary to the facts.



The democratic capacity for rational choice is weakening, and forums like the EU and the UN increasingly argue not about solutions but about the very interpretation of reality. Truth is being relativized, and public debate is being replaced by a battle of narratives.

Microscale: Disinformation is fracturing social bonds. Local communities and families are becoming polarized not by real interests, but by conflicting worldviews. Information bubbles isolate people, intensify hostility toward "others," and undermine the authority of doctors, teachers, and scientists. The social fabric is weakening, and the ability to act together in crises is diminishing.

Global: Fake news catalyzes existing fractures: it reinforces anti-Western narratives, deepens distrust between North and South, and exacerbates the dispute between globalists and defenders of local identities. Thus, it accelerates the fragmentation of an order previously based on cooperation, reasoned debate, and shared values. Conclusion: Fake news attacks the three pillars of modern societies—truth, trust, and community—weakening resilience to crises and eroding value systems.

2) A Historical Overview of Fake News

For centuries, false information has been used as a tool in the struggle for power and influence.

- Ancient Rome. Emperor Octavian Augustus spread false information about Mark Antony, portraying him as a traitor collaborating with Egypt, gaining public support and legitimizing the war.
- Middle Ages. Fake news took the form of religious rumors and superstitions (e.g., accusations of ritual murder against Jews), leading to pogroms. It was also used in the Church's fight against heresies and to consolidate power.
- Modern Period. The advent of printing, leaflets, and newspapers facilitated the spread of manipulation. During the Reformation, both Luther's followers and the Catholic Church used libels to denigrate their opponents.
- 19th century. The "yellow press" in the US published sensational, often fabricated reports (e.g., about alleged Spanish crimes in Cuba), which contributed to the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898.
- 21st century. The internet has given disinformation a new dimension: information spreads faster than denials; algorithms amplify messages consistent with the user's views (information bubbles). Fake news has been used, among other things, in political campaigns (USA 2016, Brexit referendum) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., narratives about "chips in vaccines" or "plandemic"), which has reduced trust in science and healthcare and cost thousands of lives.



Consequences: Fake news leads to polarization, increased hatred, and a loss of trust in the media and public institutions. They can influence electoral decisions, weaken democracy, and destabilize states. Today, they are a component of information wars, in which countries or interest groups use lies as a weapon.

Conclusion: History shows that false information can lead to wars, persecution, and social crises. Combating fake news requires not only technology and fact-checking, but above all, critical thinking, media education, and responsibility for one's words.

3) Hate Speech—From Words to Violence

Like false information, hate speech has serious social consequences. Dehumanization begins with language. Words can change the mindset of entire societies—teaching fear, contempt, and indifference to the suffering of others.

Examples:

- Nazi Germany. Goebbels' propaganda portrayed Jews as "subhumans," creating an ideological justification for the Holocaust.
- Rwanda (1990s). RTLM radio called Tutsi "cockroaches," paving the way for genocide (~800,000 victims).
- Contemporary. The internet is rife with offensive comments directed at migrants, LGBTQ+ people, women, and members of religious minorities.

Hate speech doesn't have to immediately lead to physical violence—it simply accustoms society to contempt. The boundaries of what's considered "normal" shift imperceptibly. Words become tools of exclusion, ridicule, and intimidation. Empathy and compassion disappear—indifference appears, the first step to accepting violence.

Conclusion: responsibility for language rests with each of us. Civil courage, education, and empathy are needed.

B. The Problem of Defining Hate Speech

1) Lack of a Uniform Definition

Unlike fake news, which can be quite precisely defined as the deliberate dissemination of false information, the concept of hate speech remains vague. Different legal systems and cultural traditions define it differently, making it difficult to apply in practice.



Council of Europe: Hate speech includes all forms of expression that "spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed through aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities" (Recommendation R(97)20).

- UN (Rabat 2012): includes public incitement to hatred, discrimination, or violence against specific groups.

The problem lies not in the definition itself, but in its practical application. The line between legitimate criticism and dehumanizing speech can be thin. Not only the wording of the words is assessed, but also the intent, context, social perception, and the potential to cause harm. While fake news can be factually verified, assessing the emotional and moral dimension of the statement always carries an element of interpretation.

2) Risk of instrumentalization

The vagueness of the concept carries the risk of abuse. Accusations of "hate speech" are sometimes used as a political tool—to silence critics, ridicule opponents, or create an impression of moral superiority. This "label inflation" phenomenon blurs the concept's meaning and weakens its protective function.

A tension arises between protection against discrimination and freedom of speech. Excessive criminalization of expression risks a chilling effect. The goal of combating hate speech cannot be to suppress controversy, but to protect human dignity from symbolic violence.

3) Example and Limitation—Context Matters

Example: the President of the Republic of Poland's speech during the commemoration of the outbreak of World War II at Westerplatte, in which he referred to the "bad word of a German." The intention was to condemn the historical language of contempt that led to war and genocide. However, taken out of context, the sentence could be interpreted as a general accusation against the German nation—a dangerous generalization. Conclusion: The classification of a statement is determined by its content, historical context, the sender's intention, and how it is interpreted in the public sphere.



4) Where is the line drawn?

A statement becomes hate speech when:

- it generalizes: it attributes negative characteristics to an entire group (e.g., "refugees are criminals," "women are unfit for politics");
- it denies dignity: it compares people to animals, parasites, or diseases (e.g., "they're not people, they're a plague");
- it attacks identity: it stigmatizes based on race, religion, orientation, gender, origin, worldview, or social status;
- it calls for exclusion or violence against "others."

However, criticism of actions, ideas, doctrines, or policies—even harsh ones—is within the bounds of freedom of speech, as long as it does not escalate into a personal attack on identity.

5) Conclusions

How can we protect a community from symbolic violence without violating freedom of speech? There is no single solution. Every society must find its own balance between tolerance for difference and intolerance for hatred. Key criterion:

Criticism of ideas is the foundation of democracy; dehumanization of people is its negation.

C. Consequences for the Value System

Disinformation and hate speech strike at the core of the value system that sustains the democratic community. Their consequences include the breakdown of trust, the erosion of truth, and the undermining of human dignity.

1) Truth – the condition of community

Truth is the condition for dialogue and trust. Fake news shatters cognitive community: instead of shared facts, parallel worlds of opinions exist. Truth becomes a tool in the struggle for symbolic power (H. Arendt: "a world devoid of facts").

2) Human dignity – the ethical foundation

If fake news attacks truth, then hate speech attacks dignity – the source of human rights in the European and Christian traditions. Dehumanization in language precedes violence in action and weakens the moral sensitivity of the sender and recipient.



3) Solidarity and trust – social bonds in crisis

Lies and contempt replace solidarity with suspicion and hostility. Algorithms reinforce polarization and information tribes. The loss of trust paralyzes institutions. 4) Authority – a crisis of moral guidance

The relativization of truth and the normalization of hate devalue authority figures (experts, teachers, clergy, politicians). Society is losing its capacity for moral orientation.

5) Summary

Fake news and hate speech undermine the three pillars of a democratic community: truth, dignity, and trust. When they weaken, democracy becomes an empty mechanism of competing interests.

D. Systems of norms protecting values (existing)

1) National level – Polish law

- Art. 212 of the Penal Code – defamation: protecting the reputation of individuals and institutions against false information.
- Art. 216 of the Penal Code – insult: criminalizing offensive, derogatory statements against a specific person. • Article 256 of the Penal Code: prohibits the promotion of a totalitarian system and incitement to hatred based on nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, or lack of religious affiliation.
- Article 257 of the Penal Code: criminalizes public insults against individuals or groups for the aforementioned reasons, as well as violations of personal inviolability for the same reasons.

Addition: Civil Code (Articles 23-24) - protection of personal rights; Broadcasting Act - obligation to counter discriminatory content. The purpose of these regulations is not to suppress criticism, but to protect debate from hatred and lies.

2) European Level - Digital Standards and Regulations

- Digital Services Act (DSA, 2022): systemic obligations for platforms (rapid removal of illegal content, counteracting disinformation, transparency of recommendations and advertisements, appeals procedures). Platforms are recognized as actors co-responsible for the public sphere. • AVMSD: obliges media service providers to prevent the dissemination of hateful content.



- Code of Conduct on Disinformation: a voluntary self-regulatory mechanism (including Google, Meta, X/Twitter) limiting the reach of fake news and supporting fact-checking.

3) International Level - Universal Standards

- ICERD (1965): obliges the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred.
- ICCPR (1966), Article 20: prohibits propaganda for war and hate speech that incites discrimination, hostility, or violence.
- ECHR, Article 10: guarantees freedom of expression with the possibility of proportionate restrictions. ECtHR case law emphasizes proportionality and the protection of debate.

4) Directions of Development and Challenges

- Closer Cooperation in Combating Cross-Border Disinformation (propaganda, deepfakes, information warfare).
- Rapid response mechanisms in crises (wars, pandemics, migration, disasters).
- Global standards of platform accountability while maintaining pluralism and transparency.
- Supporting media and digital education.

Principle: proportionality - counteracting demonstrably harmful content while protecting the right to criticize.

5) Partial conclusions

A system of norms protecting against hate speech and disinformation is not intended to restrict freedom, but to preserve the conditions for its existence. Law, ethics, and education must work together - otherwise, Popper's warning about the "paradox of tolerance" will be fulfilled.

E. Proposed systems of norms (new solutions)

1) Expanded accountability of digital platforms

- Audits of recommendation algorithms for the promotion of disinformation and hateful content.
- Transparency of moderation policies and reporting of removed content.



- Accountability for the amplification of harmful content by platform mechanisms.
- Independent user redress (e.g., a "platform court").
- Transparency of political advertising and labeling of AI-generated content.

2) Media education and digital ethics

- Developing critical thinking and source verification.
- Understanding the mechanisms of influence (algorithms, bubbles, clickbait).
- Emotional resilience to provocations and hate.
- Participatory ethics: responsibility for the real impact of words.

3) Strengthening the role of institutions and public media

- Full editorial and financial independence of public media.
- Support for fact-checking projects (in collaboration with universities and NGOs).
- European Early Warning Network Protecting against disinformation campaigns.
- Promoting standards of reliable journalism.

4) International cooperation and regulation of artificial intelligence

- Global standards for the ethical development and use of AI (e.g., in the spirit of UNESCO 2021).
- Transparency of training data and content sources in language models.
- Labeling and tracking AI-generated content.
- International cooperation in information cybersecurity.

5) Rebuilding a culture of dialogue

- Social codes of public debate.
 - Promoting the language of empathy, respect, and argumentation in the media and schools.
 - Dialogue initiatives between groups with different worldviews.
 - Rewarding attitudes that restore a culture of conversation and trust.
- ## 6) Conclusions
- Three Pillars of Future Systems

Pillar Goal Instruments

Law Protection against abuse and symbolic violence, platform regulations, sanctions for hate, transparency Education Education for responsible freedom, media education, digital ethics, critical thinking Culture Rebuilding a community of dialogue and trust, codes of debate, common communication standards As John Paul II wrote,



"freedom does not mean arbitrariness, but responsibility for the good." In the digital age, this means responsibility for every word that shapes the social world.

F. Moral Norms

Law operates primarily reactively; morality plays a preventive role, protecting the community from within through education and habits.

a) Morality as Internal Regulation

Moral norms operate in the sphere of motivation and intention. In the context of digital communication, this means:

- responsibility for words and their consequences,
- honesty in the circulation of information,
- civil courage in opposing lies and contempt.

b) Morality as a Culture of Dialogue

Democracy requires the ability to differ with dignity. Principles: pluralism, tolerance, argumentation without contempt. Habits:

1. Recognizing the other as an equal participant in the conversation.
2. Trusting the interlocutor's good will.
3. Responsibility for the tone and consequences of words—offline and online.

c) Morality as Social Resilience

Communities that value truth and solidarity are less susceptible to propaganda.

"Ethical resilience" is based on:

- critical thinking and verification of information,
- solidarity with victims of hate,
- empathy for the excluded,
- rejection of cynicism and moral relativism.

d) The Relationship between Law and Morality

Law and morality are complementary (Kotarbiński: "law without morality is dead, morality without law—can be powerless"). Synergy occurs when regulations (e.g., the DSA) meet individual attitudes (reporting content, refraining from sharing lies).

e) Tensions and Perspectives. The limits of freedom of speech are defined differently by lawyers and ethicists. Ethical education is needed to shape awareness of the effects of speech: responsibility for online expression, understanding the psychology of hate, informational honesty, and communicative empathy.

f) Conclusion

Morality is the first line of defense for values: the law can punish, but it does not educate; morality educates before punishment is necessary.



G. Religious Norms

Religions shape language, culture, and the ethics of communication, influencing from within—through the formation of conscience and community patterns.

a) Functions of Religious Norms

- Preventive: prohibition of lying, backbiting, slander, blasphemy, and hurtful speech.
- Formative: truth as a cognitive and spiritual value.
- Integrative: Religious communities are based on trust and responsibility for one's words.

b) Christianity

Eighth Commandment: "You shall not bear false witness..." Speech ethics: truthfulness, love of neighbor, love of enemies. Pope Francis warns against gossip, backbiting, and fake news as "spiritual terrorism."

c) Other religions

- Islam: condemns ghiba (backbiting) and namima (gossip); requires verifying information (Sura 49:6).
- Judaism: speech ethics (lashon hara); even truthful information can be morally wrong if it degrades.
- Buddhism: "right speech"—truthful, kind, and helpful words.
- Hinduism: satya (truthfulness) as a virtue consistent with dharma.

d) Contemporary Perspective

The role of religion in rebuilding the culture of speech: interfaith cooperation, religious education on responsibility for speech, pastoral care responding to hate, support for families and communities.

e) Conclusion

Religious norms share a common message: speech is binding. Freedom of speech without responsibility is empty freedom, and truth without love is cruelty.

H. Customary Norms

Alongside law, morality, and religion, there are customary norms—unwritten rules established by social practice. They operate through expectations, reputation, and mutual control.

a) The Role of Customary Norms

1. Regulating interactions on a microscale: politeness, reserve, and the ability to listen—"social lubricant."
2. Reputational pressure: loss of credibility and ostracism due to lies, manipulation, and verbal aggression.



b) Contemporary communication customs - netiquette and dialogue

- prohibition of spam and trolling,
- marking sources and citations,
- Respect for the interlocutor,
- Avoiding CAPS LOCK and aggression,
- Distinguishing between jokes and irony,
- No acceptance of insults and ridicule in public debate.

c) Reinforcing Customs in the Future

- The "check before you share" rule,
- Reputational sanctions against accounts spreading hate and fake news,
- Social disapproval of hate,
- Technological support (e.g., reminders: "Have you checked the source?", "Read before sharing").

d) How to Achieve This?

- Education from an early age,
- Elite role models (politicians, teachers, journalists, opinion leaders),
- Social control—stigmatizing hate and rewarding accuracy,
- Technological support for platforms.

e) Meaning

Customary norms connect law, morality, and religion, translating values into everyday behavior. When they weaken, the law must intervene; when they are strong, society regulates itself.

f) Conclusion

Customary norms are the silent guardians of values. If nurtured, they restore civility of conversation and respect for the truth.

I. Final Conclusions – Words as Values and Responsibility

1) Community of Words

Disinformation and hate speech are symptoms of an axiological crisis. They attack truth, dignity, and solidarity. In the digital age, words have unprecedented power; responsibility for words becomes a form of citizenship.

2) The System of Values and Its Protection

Systems for protecting values operate on four levels: law, morality, religion, and custom. Their interaction creates a protective network that balances freedom and responsibility. Neglecting any one weakens the entire system.



3) Directions of Action – from Reaction to Prevention

- Media and Ethical Education: case studies, recognizing manipulation, fact-checking tools, transparent algorithms; education as an element of state security and social health.
- Social and interreligious dialogue: intergenerational initiatives, a school of empathy and understanding.
- Authorities and opinion leaders: modeling attitudes: transparency, empathy, dialogue.
- Promoting good practices: netiquette, verification checklists, Oxford debates, "microcultures of dialogue."
- Transparency and fact-checking: open sources, AI content labeling, limiting anonymity that spreads hate, moderation reports, and algorithm data.

4) The future – a culture of responsible speech

A new speech ethic should combine three principles:

1. Truth over emotions – I check facts before speaking or sharing.
2. Respect over reason – in a dispute, I do not deprive another of their humanity.
3. Community over clicks – relationships have greater value than reach.

5) Conclusion - The Ethics of Responsibility.

As Max Weber wrote, politics and citizenship are based on the ethics of responsibility - awareness of the consequences of one's actions. In the digital age, this means responsibility for every word, click, and share. Words can build bridges or walls. The maturity of a democracy is measured by the quality of dialogue combining freedom with truth and diversity with dignity. Only words spoken with love for truth and respect for humanity can be truly free.

Final Summary: A value system is not static - it is a living tissue requiring care. Fake news undermines truth, and hate speech undermines human dignity. While fake news can be relatively clearly defined and combated, hate speech requires a precise distinction between harsh, acceptable criticism and the dehumanizing language of contempt. History teaches us that disregarding these phenomena leads to tragedy - from the propaganda of totalitarian regimes to contemporary ethnic conflicts. Therefore, counteraction cannot be limited to law or algorithms. It is a test of moral maturity and responsibility for the community. Protecting truth and dignity is a condition for the survival of democracy and social peace; wisely distinguishing between freedom of criticism and hate speech remains one of the most difficult but important tasks of contemporary culture.



SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA



Conclusion





Conclusion

The development and dissemination of a series of educational and promotional materials aimed at young people on social media safety is a fundamental element of achieving the project's objectives. We have created a network of posts, videos, and other forms of communication on social media and the internet with a transnational reach to ensure young people's safety online in an accessible, sustainable, and scalable way, based on the project's results. The videos are still available on the project website and can be viewed.

Our activities and the resources provided by each partner represent a valuable investment in the future of each of our organizations in serving society by combating online injustice and hate among young people. Our activities will enable young people to learn how to use the internet safely and actively combat harmful content, making the internet a safer place even for users who are not directly targeted by our project. Our activities will also contribute to fostering discussion among teachers and youth workers actively combating cyber threats and protecting their students by providing them with additional educational and promotional materials.

We also want to ensure a better understanding of the motivations and prevention of harmful content, which is unfortunately widespread, even among young people. The specialists and trainers present during the project's development, as well as all other individuals involved in the project, will hone their skills in many areas. This will also be a key step in the exchange of best practices between members of partner organizations and external entities. In line with the principle of lifelong learning, we want to continuously improve our skills in delivering the best possible educational products.

Giving materials a visually appealing, readable, and accessible format will help young people use the internet safely, and will also help our employees develop skills in conveying knowledge and experience in a way tailored to the needs of the audience—in this case, young people.

We invite you to visit the project's Facebook page, where materials and project information are available, and to the project website, where you can download the script. It is publicly available.

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61570368969963>

<https://safesocialmedia.org/>



It's important to remember the essence of values and the nature and developing personality of young people. Young people are curious, often emotional, and prone to unusual behaviors, but when their value system is clear, they will be less vulnerable to traps in the virtual world and beyond. This is where educators, families, and the process of raising young people play a crucial role.

Our project and script are just one of many attempts to help people in the virtual world distinguish good from evil, fake news from real news, and resist populism and hate speech. This is a contribution to the discussion on how to avoid negative influences when using the internet. We must remember this, because the problem won't go away on its own.

We would like to thank the project partners and all those who cooperated with us.

SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA



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