



PERCEPTIONS OF INFORMATION CHAOS IN BALTIC STATES AND CENTRAL EUROPE

2023

GAME CHANGERS



Method of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted online using a structured questionnaire.



Data Collection Period

Data collection was realized from **September 2** to **September 15**, 2022.



Target Group

A representative sample of the populations of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Austria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Total n = 8000

1000 respondents in each country

Quota selection by gender, age (18-65 years) and education.



Contacts

Michal Kormaňák

Account Director Ipsos

Public Affairs

michal.kormanak@ipsos.com




GSM: +420 739 472 302

POPULATION INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

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MEDIA TRUSTWORTHY

Population of Baltic countries more likely to trust traditional media (news online portal, print media and public media) than V4 and Austria inhabitants. Lithuanians are less likely to trust to conversation with family members and also with neighbours, friends or work colleagues.

	V4 + AT Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary (V4) + Austria	EE 	LT 	LV 
Conversations with family members	80%	85%	74 %	83 %
News online portals	65%	78%	70 %	69 %
Conversations with neighbours, friends and work colleagues	67%	69%	55 %	66 %
Print media	61%	76%	68 %	62 %
Public media	56%	71%	66 %	62 %
Private radio stations	58%	60%	62 %	49 %
Commercial TV	56%	61%	60 %	45 %
YouTube	47%	43%	52 %	55 %
Facebook	38%	38%	49 %	48 %
Instagram	32%	30%	34 %	36 %
WhatsApp	31%	22%	26 %	51 %
Twitter	30%	26%	29 %	34 %
Telegram	24%	24%	31 %	36 %
Chain emails	15%	11%	24 %	21 %
TikTok	20%	16%	26 %	26 %
VKontakte	16%	13%	17 %	15 %



- ✓ In general, people with **lower education** are less likely to trust public media, print media, commercial TV, News online portals, private radio stations. On the other hand, they more often trust **social media** such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, VKontakte.
- ✓ **Young people** (18 – 34 years) are more likely to trust **social media** than other age groups.
- ✓ The **oldest** group of population (55 – 65 years) prefers more frequent conversation with **family members**.
- ✓ **Public, printed media** and news on **online portals** are considered more trustworthy by **university** educated people.

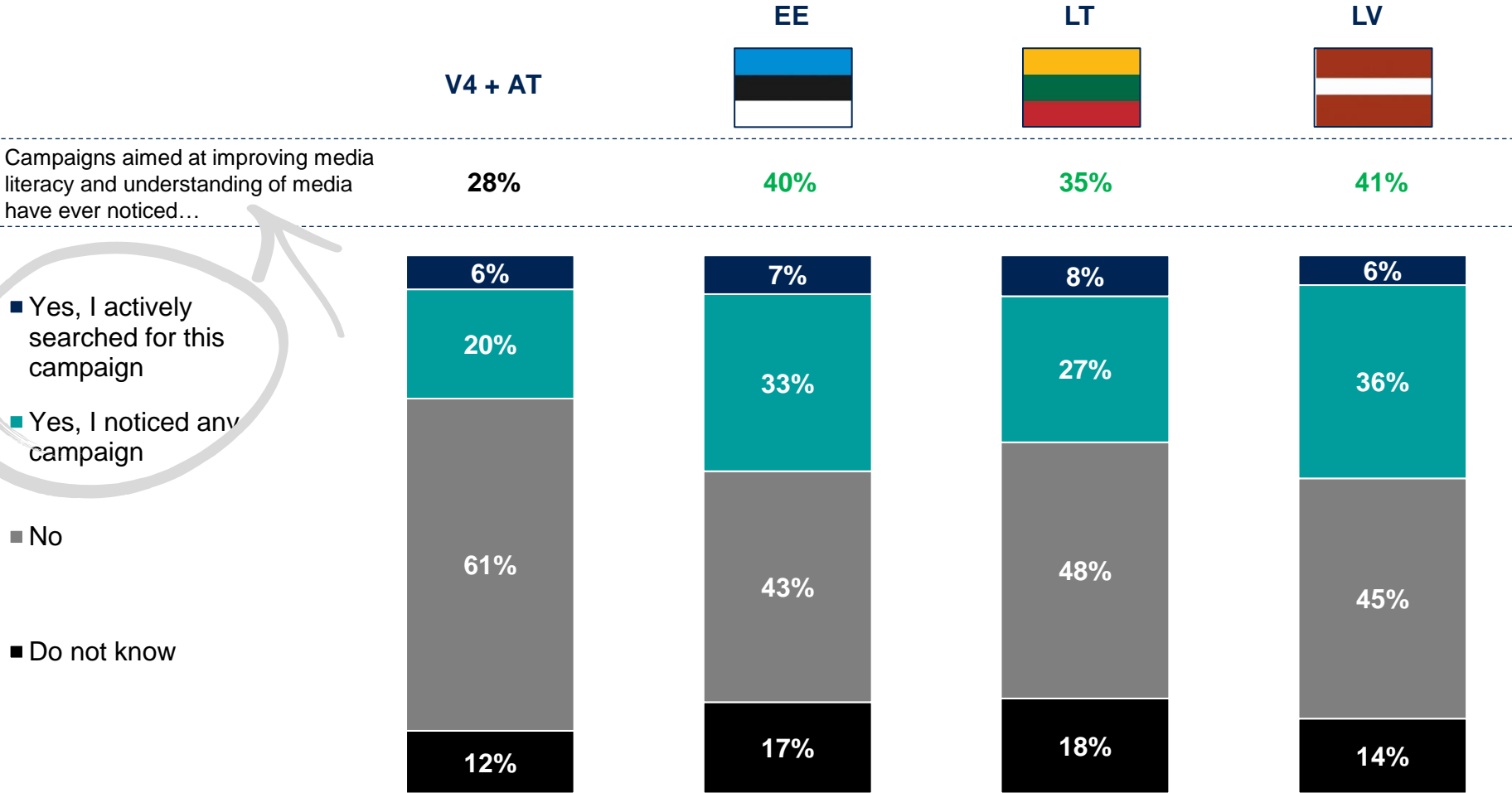
Question: Q3. Which of the following sources of information and media do you consider authoritative?
 Base: n=1000 per country
 Note: T2B displayed: (Very trustworthy + Rather trustworthy).
 Higher/Lower than average of V4 + AT

INFORMATION DISORDERS

2

CAMPAIGNS AIMED AT IMPROVING MEDIA LITERACY AND UNDERSTANDING OF MEDIA

Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians more often notice campaigns that are aimed to improve media literacy.

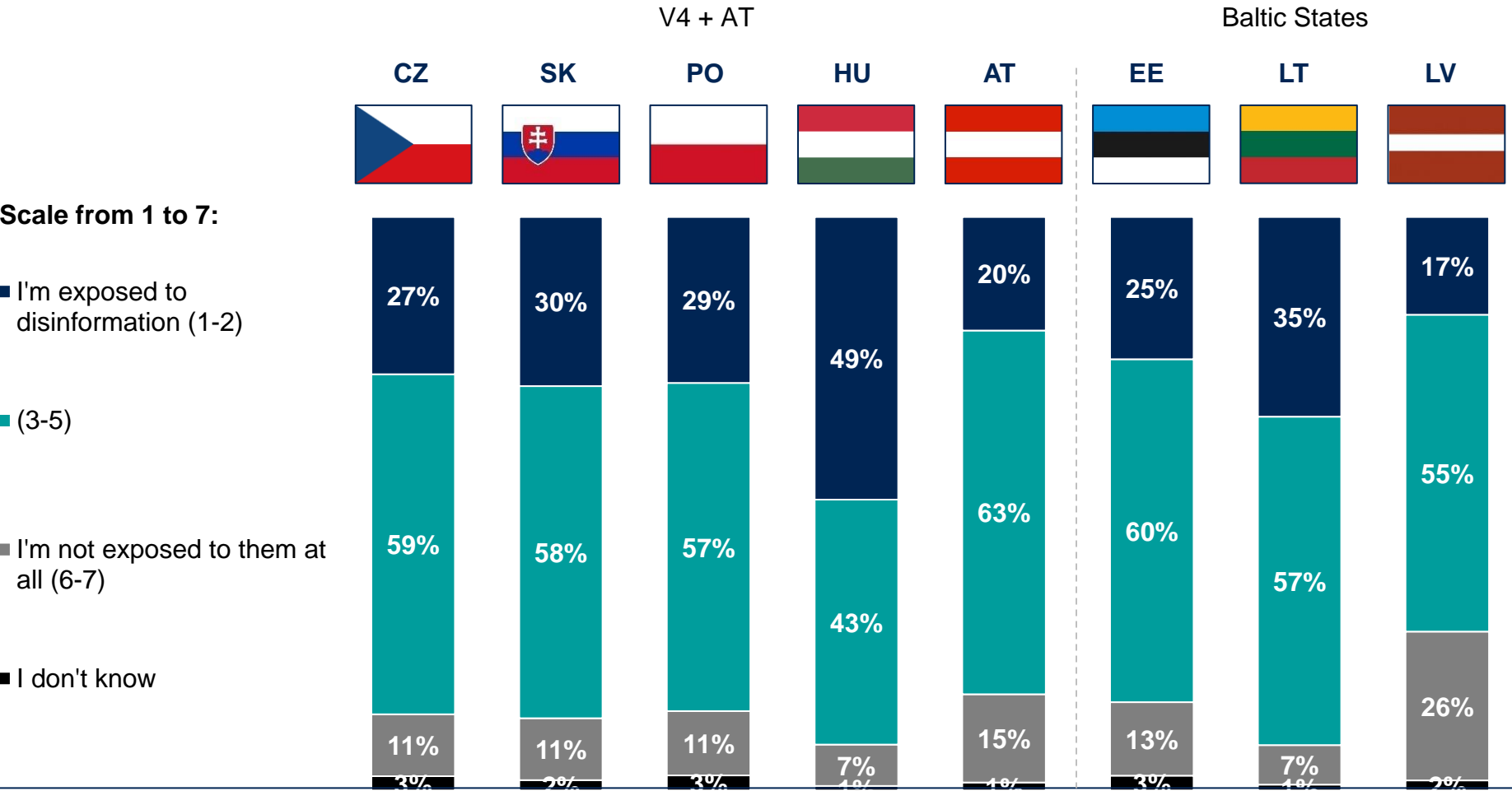


- ✓ Younger people up to 34 years old are more likely to **notice** at least some campaigns and even **actively search** for them.
- ✓ People with **university degree notice campaigns more often** than others but they actively search for them as same as other.
- ✓ The same applies for people with **high net personal income**.

Question: Q20. Have you ever noticed campaigns aimed at improving media literacy and understanding of media?
 Base: n=1000 per country
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of all countries

EXPOSURE TO MISINFORMATION IN THE MEDIA

Latvians have the lowest perceived exposure to disinformation of all surveyed countries. By contrast, Lithuanians have second highest perceived exposure to disinformation only after Hungarians.






- ✓ People with university degree say that they are **more exposed** to disinformation.
- ✓ Every **10th person with basic education** think they are not exposed to disinformation at all.
- ✓ **Over 20% of people with low net personal income** say that they are **heavily exposed** to disinformation.

Question: Q6. To what extent do you think you are exposed to disinformation (i.e. false information spread on purpose) in the media?
 Base: n=1000 per country

STEPS TAKEN AGAINST DISINFORMATION

Citizens of Baltic states are more pro-active in terms of actions taken against disinformation. But also, there is part of the population that more often say they do not do anything when encountered with disinformation on social media.

	V4 + AT	EE 	LT 	LV 
I will alert those around me that this is disinformation	44%	47%	51%	51%
I will block the person who posted or shared the disinformation	32%	38%	37%	41%
I will report the disinformation post to the social network operator to have it removed	27%	23%	29%	23%
I don't use social media	17%	10%	6%	6%
None of the above	8%	16%	11%	12%

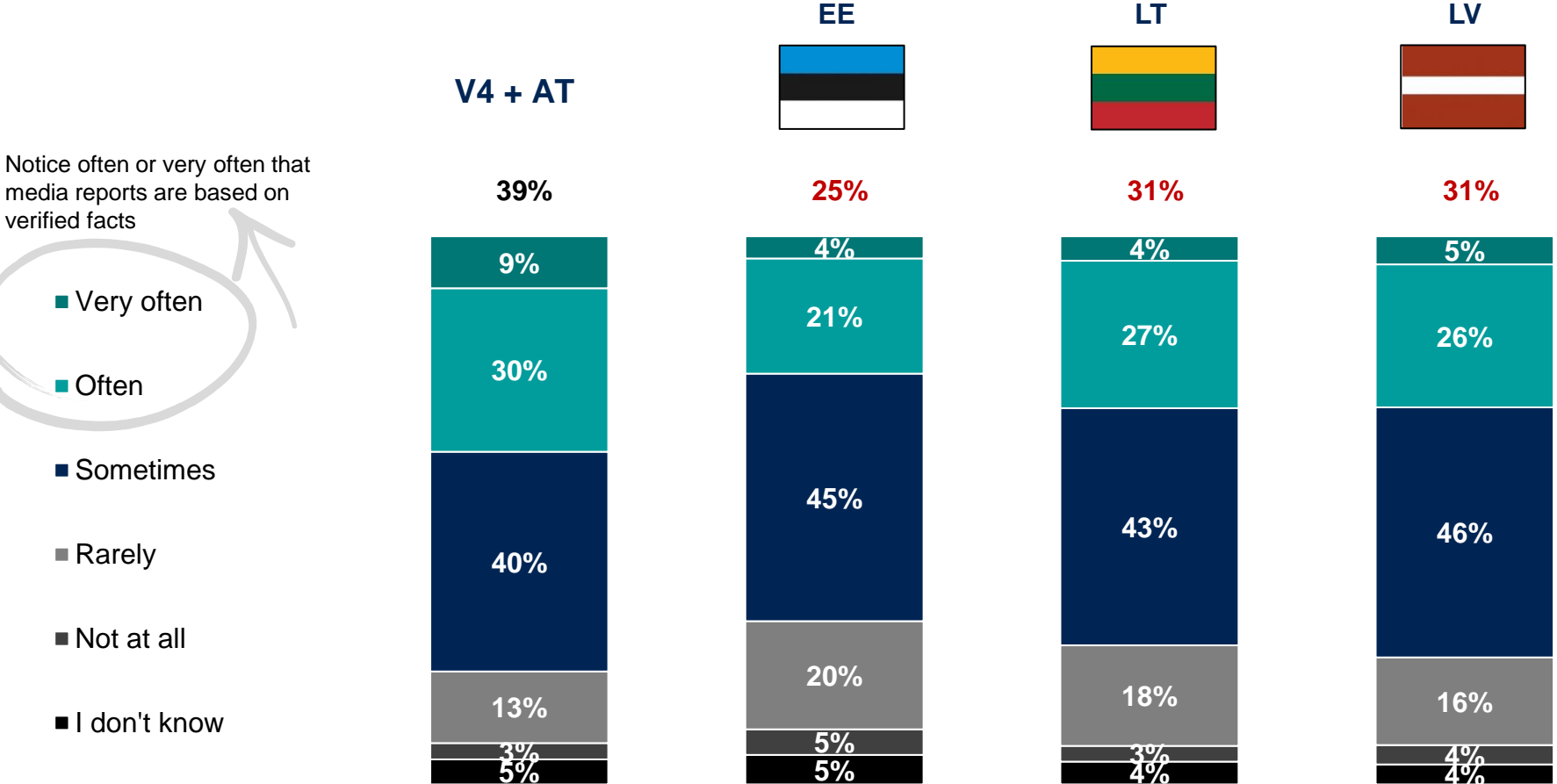


- ✓ **Women** say more often that they will alert surroundings about disinformation.
- ✓ Over **third of people up to 34 years old** say that they will **report** disinformation post to the social network operator.
- ✓ People with **university degree are more active** with steps taken against disinformation.

Question: Q8. Which of the following steps will you take if you read disinformation on social media?
 Base: n=1000 per country
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of V4 + AT

MEDIA REPORTS BASED ON VERIFIED FACTS

People in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are less likely to notice that media reports are based on verified facts. Only one in four Estonians notice this at least often.






- ✓ **Men** more often notice that media reports are based on verified facts.
- ✓ Over 10% of people up to **24 years old** later say that they **very often** notice the media reports are based on verified facts.

Question: Q10. How often do you notice that media reports are based on facts that are verified and complete?
 Base: n=1000 per country
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of all countries

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF DISINFORMATION PROBLEM

Almost half of the populations of Estonia and Lithuania think that foreign actors have significantly contributed to the problem of disinformation. In comparison, Latvians are underestimating the contribution of all factors.

	V4 + AT	EE 	LT 	LV 
High human credulity	56%	38%	56%	46%
The way politicians argue in the public space	48%	43%	45%	32%
Conspiracy theorists and supporters of conspiracy theories	48%	47%	52%	38%
Government policy on disinformation	45%	33%	43%	34%
The way news is consumed by ordinary people	44%	46%	40%	37%
Algorithms of social media platforms	41%	44%	44%	36%
Lobbying by national and multinational corporations	41%	39%	47%	38%
Identification with the content of specific disinformation	41%	43%	40%	32%
Foreign actors (e.g. foreign states and their propaganda)	39%	46%	52%	39%
Traditional mainstream media coverage	37%	37%	37%	31%






- ✓ People with **higher education** are more likely to agree that all the factors examined contribute to disinformation.
- ✓ **Older people** tend to view **High human credulity** as **greater problem** than younger generations.
- ✓ Also, older people are more likely to agree that **Foreign actors** are important contributing factor.

Question: Q7. People point to various causes of the problem of disinformation(i.e. false information spread on purpose). To what extent do you think the following factors have contributed to the problem of disinformation:
 Base: n=1000 per country
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of V4 + AT; Displayed as T2B (sum of answers "1 - Contributed very significantly" and "2")

CONSEQUENCES OF DISINFORMATION

A rather large difference exists between individual Baltic states. Estonians have a very similar proportion of answers to the mean of V4 and Austria. Lithuanians are more worried about consequences of disinformation. By contrast, Latvians are less likely to worry about disinformation.

	V4 + AT	EE 	LT 	LV 
They deepen distrust in the news media and journalism.	55%	58%	63%	51%
They threaten the functioning of democracy and democratic institutions (e.g. reduce confidence in the fairness of elections).	54%	55%	61%	48%
They strengthen distrust in politics and politicians.	54%	53%	60%	50%
They offer false/incomplete simple explanations of difficult concepts.	52%	51%	56%	40%
They take advantage of everyone's general conspiracy mentality.	51%	44%	55%	36%
They blur the boundaries between the aggressor and the attacked, as in the case of the war in Ukraine.	50%	54%	56%	44%
Deepening health crises such as the COVID-19 epidemic/pandemic.	50%	48%	55%	42%
They increase distrust of science and scientific authority.	49%	50%	54%	42%
Threaten the health of the population (e.g. increase reluctance to vaccinate).	49%	49%	55%	44%
They lock individuals into opinion bubbles.	47%	51%	59%	41%
Disagreements within families are escalating, with some topics of discussion becoming taboo.	45%	42%	45%	32%
They increase everyone's sense of information overload.	45%	45%	51%	40%
They weaken the functioning of state institutions such as the government or ministries.	42%	44%	54%	40%
Reduce the number of topics for conversations with friends and colleagues at work.	34%	30%	37%	28%






- ✓ Older people are more worried about effects of disinformation on trust of science and scientific authority.
- ✓ People with elementary education less often agree on impacts of these factors.
- ✓ Across all answers, there are no or almost no distinctions in answers of people with different net personal income.

Question: Q19. People point to various consequences of the problem of disinformation (i.e. false information spread on purpose). To what extent do you think disinformation contributes to the following impacts:
 Base: n=1000 per country
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of all countries; Displayed as T2B (sum of answers "1 – I definitely agree" and "2")



PREVENTIVE TOOLS AGAINST FALSE AND MANIPULATIVE INFORMATION

Estonians and Lithuanians are more likely to agree that all the tools examined are effective against disinformation. By contrast, Latvians are more pessimistic about preventive tools.

	V4 + AT	EE 	LT 	LV 
Responsible behaviour of social network users and not forwarding information that is not verified	50%	54%	52%	44%
Removal of harmful content (e.g. disinformation) by the operators of platforms (Google, YouTube, Facebook, etc.) on which such content occurs	49%	53%	54%	43%
Creation and support of fact-checking platforms or fact-checking journalism, which bring disinformation to the truth	46%	51%	53%	40%
Strengthening the media skills of different population groups (from children to their parents to the elderly)	46%	59%	52%	41%
Blocking of websites and platforms dominated by disinformation content by the state and state authorities	41%	52%	49%	40%



- ✓ **Females** tend to see these tools as effective.
- ✓ In the same manner, **people with university degree** more often agree with effectiveness of these tools.

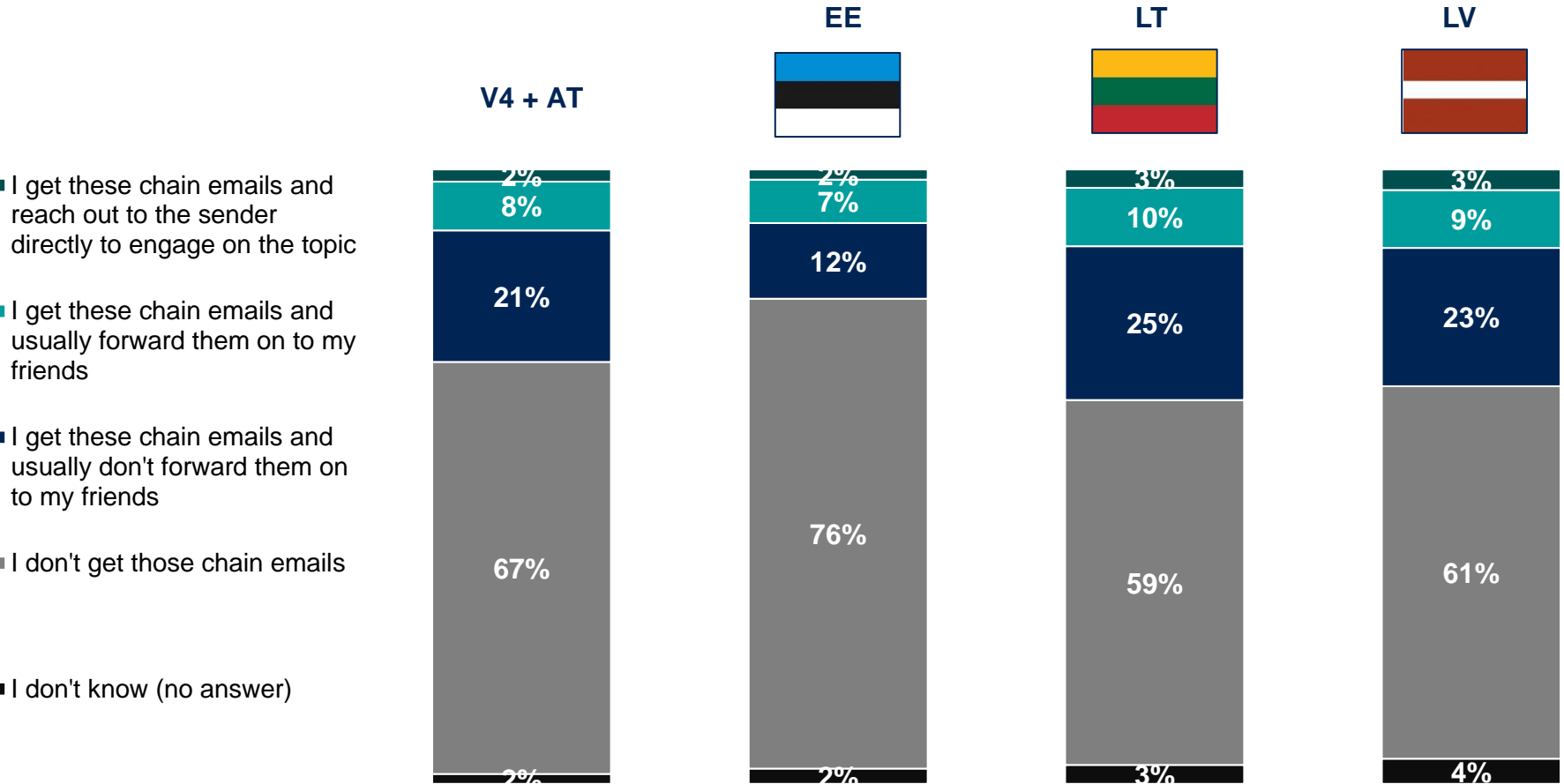
Question: Q13. To what extent do you agree that each tool is effective?
 Base n=1000 per country.
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of all countries

CHAIN EMAILS

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REACTION TO MASS FORWARDED EMAILS

Only a quarter of Estonia's population receives chain emails compared to 40% of Lithuania's and Latvia's populations. However, only one in ten citizens in these two countries forwards these emails to their friends.






- ✓ **Men** are more likely to received chain emails and even forward them on their friends.
- ✓ People with **basic education** more often forward chain emails.
- ✓ People with **middle income** are more likely to get these emails.

Question: Q11. Do you receive mass forwarded emails from your friends warning of dangers? If so, how do you most often react?
 Base: n=1000 per country

CONTENTS OF CHAIN EMAILS

Estonians and Lithuanians, who received chain emails, more frequently reported that the main topic of these emails was support for Ukraine in the ongoing war with Russia. Most emails, however, were related to COVID-19.

	V4 + AT	EE 	LT 	LV 
COVID-19 epidemic/pandemic	46%	44%	43%	47%
Criticism of the government and Prime Minister over various issues	36%	25%	24%	20%
Criticism of the European Union over various issues	29%	27%	25%	20%
Migration crisis	25%	21%	18%	11%
Criticism of Ukraine or Ukrainian President Volodymir Zelensky during the war in Ukraine	23%	22%	20%	16%
Criticism of Russia or Russian President Vladimir Putin during the war in Ukraine	21%	20%	20%	16%
Support for Ukraine or Ukrainian President Volodymir Zelensky during the war in Ukraine	21%	28%	28%	25%
Support for Russia or Russian President Vladimir Putin in the war in Ukraine	18%	20%	14%	11%
Criticism of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on various issues	16%	14%	13%	11%
I don't know (no answer)	5%	5%	4%	7%
Other	4%	4%	4%	5%



- ✓ **Males** are more likely receive emails with theme of criticism of **EU, NATO** and support for **Vladimir Putin**.
- ✓ **Female** more often get emails about **COVID-19**.
- ✓ **People over 55** more often receive emails about **criticism of their government and PM**.
- ✓ Emails for **younger people** are more focused on **conflict on Ukraine**.

Question: Q11b. What are the main topics of the chain emails you have received recently?
 Base: n=2506 (people that have received a chain email)
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of all countries

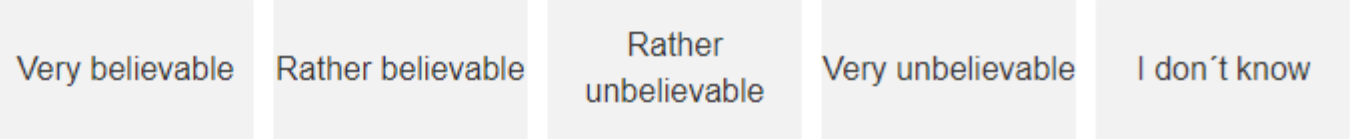
CURRENT DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES

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CREDIBILITY OF DISINFORMATION REPORTS

The used example of disinformation about liquefied natural gas.

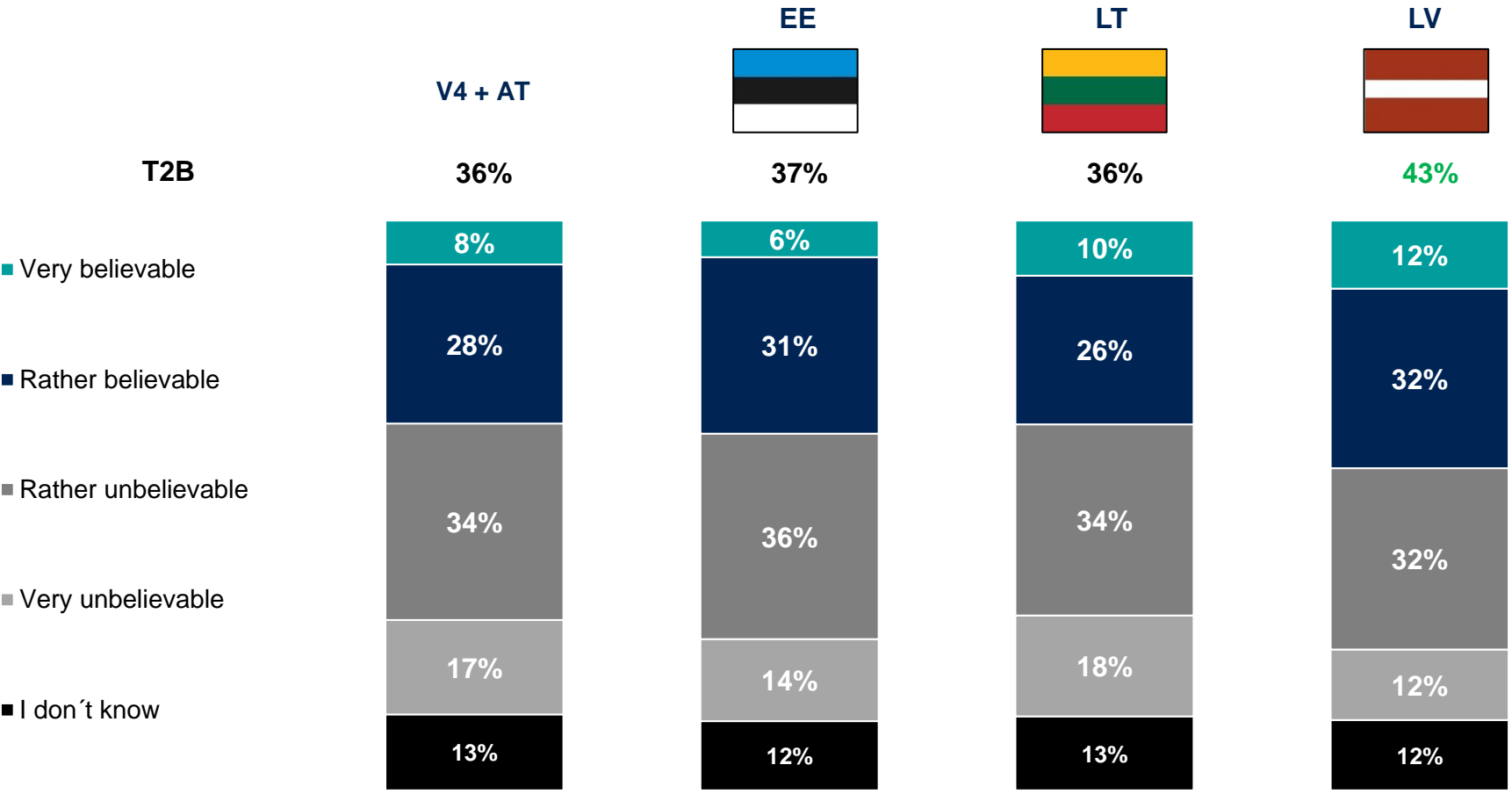
The United States (US) is exporting liquefied natural gas from Russia to Europe at a time when the EU is trying to wean itself off its dependence on Russian gas because of the war in Ukraine. This follows an investigation by the Belgian newspaper Le Soir into the activities of an offshore company called Paradise Papers. 31% of the company's shares are believed to belong to the current US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, but he has denied this.



Question: Q12. To what extent do you find the following reports unbelievable or, on the contrary, credible?
Base: n=1000 per country

CREDIBILITY OF DISINFORMATION REPORTS

Latvians are more prone to say that this particular report about the US exporting exporting liquefied natural gas from Russia to Europe during sanction regime is believable than mean of values of V4 countries and Austria.



- ✓ People over 45 years old tend to find this report less believable. However younger people up to 34 years old says more often that this report is believable.
- ✓ Similarly, inhabitants from place of residence up to 1.000 inhabitants are more likely to say this report is believable.

Question: Q12. To what extent do you find the following reports unbelievable or, on the contrary, credible?
 Base: n=1000 per country
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of V4 + AT; T2B (sum of answers "Very believable" and "Rather believable")

CREDIBILITY OF DISINFORMATION REPORTS

The used example of disinformation about Glastonbury festival.



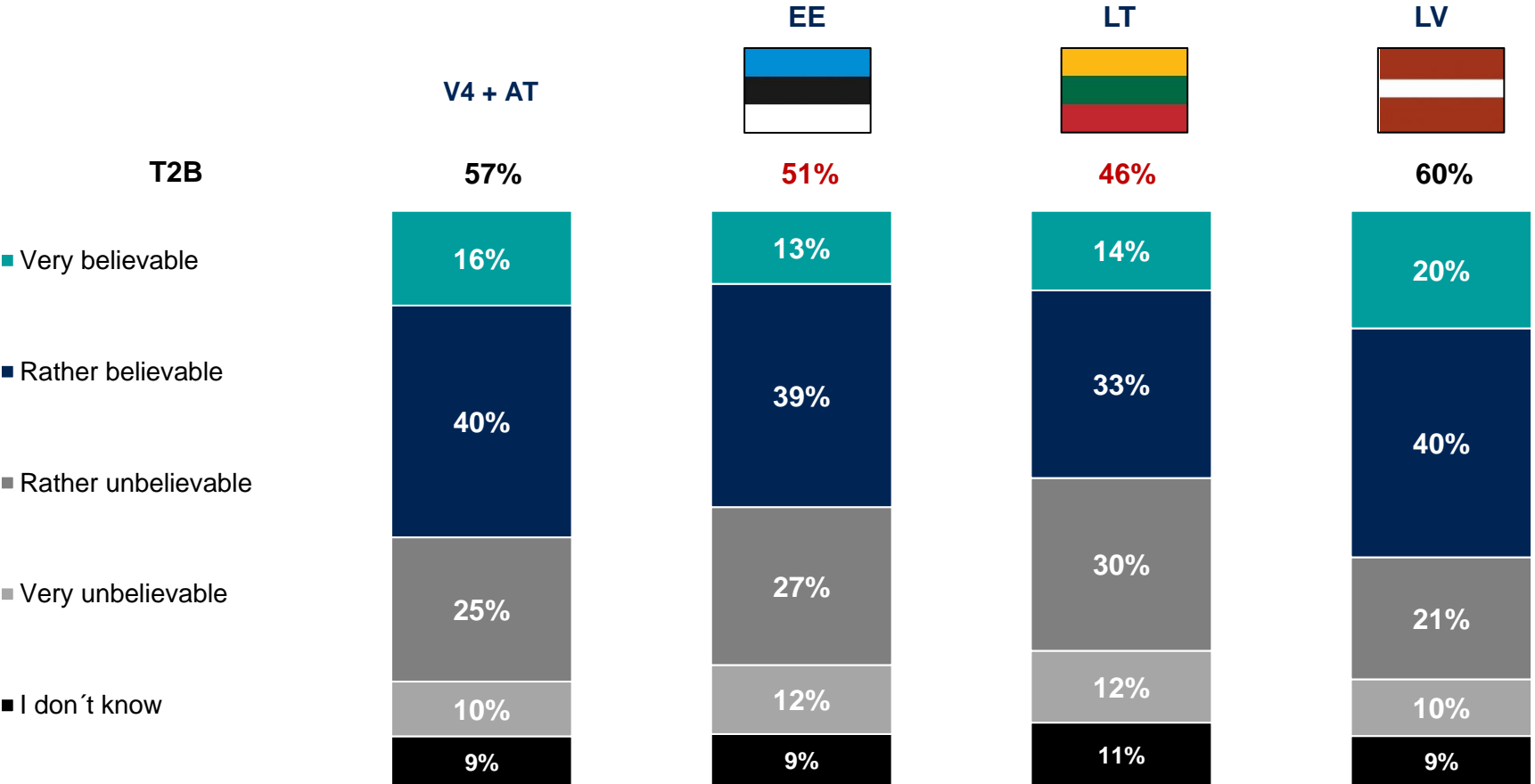
The picture in the background shows how the place turned out after the Glastonbury festival, where Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg spoke. In her speech, she criticised the use of plastics, the increase in CO2 and warned of a climate catastrophe.

Very believable	Rather believable	Rather unbelievable	Very unbelievable	I don't know
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Question: Q12. To what extent do you find the following reports unbelievable or, on the contrary, credible?
Base: n=1000 per country

CREDIBILITY OF DISINFORMATION REPORTS

When the report is supplied with visual content, people seem to find the message more credible. However, Estonians and Lithuanians are less likely to say that this report is believable than other countries even then.



- ✓ People who trust in public media are more likely to believe this report.
- ✓ Citizens with advanced digital skills find this report unbelievable more often than others.

Question: Q12. To what extent do you find the following reports unbelievable or, on the contrary, credible?
 Base: n=1000 per country
 Note: Higher/Lower than average of V4 + AT ; T2B (sum of answers "Very believable" and "Rather believable")

SUMMARY

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SUMMARY: OUTLYING LATVIA



01

Estonia and Lithuanian share overall similar view on disinformation and information chaos. However, Latvia distinguishes itself from other Baltic countries on several key levels.

02

Latvians trust new media, especially social media, more than other Baltic nations. They are skeptical about disinformation and less likely to report exposure or identify contributing factors and consequences. Additionally, they have less confidence in preventive tools to combat disinformation compared to Estonia and Lithuania.

03

On the other hand, Latvians are more prone to believe tested disinformation reports even more than mean of V4 countries and Austria. Overall, Latvians seem to be disinterested with disinformation and rather passive in comparison to Estonians and Lithuanians.

SUMMARY: VISUAL CONTENT AND DISINFORMATION



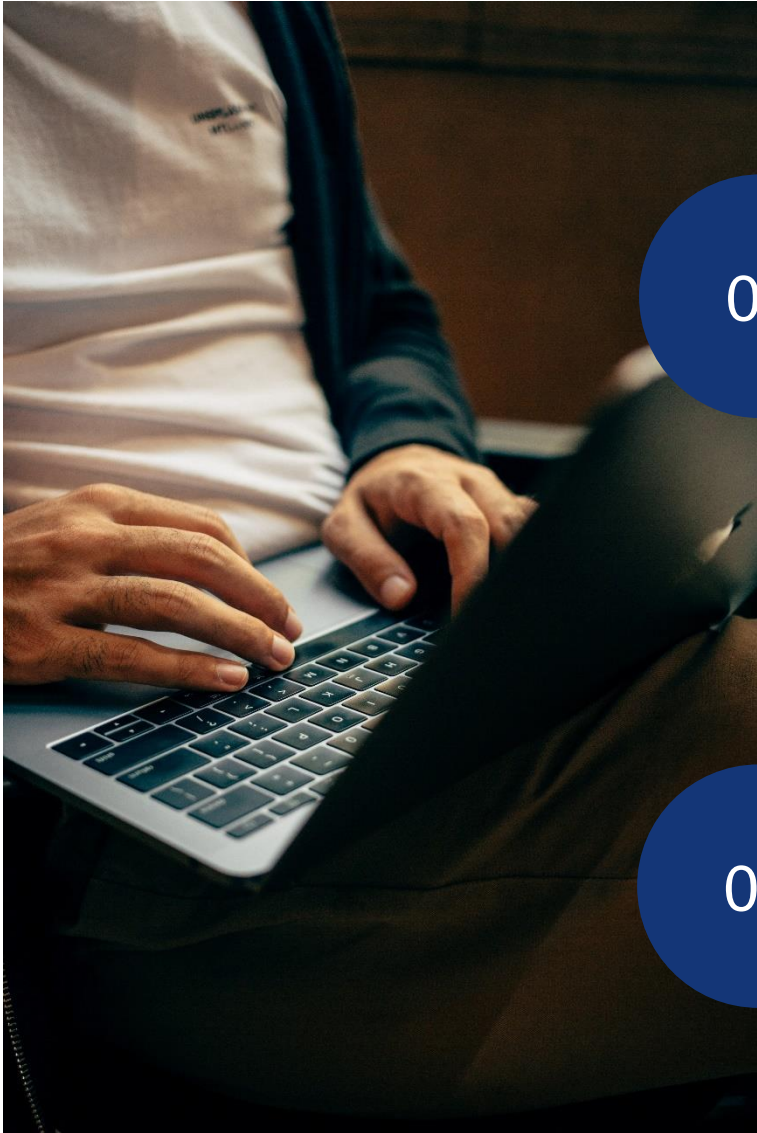
01

When testing the credibility of several current disinformation reports, those that are supported by visual content (misassigned picture) have higher credibility scores than those that contain only text.

02

It seems that the inclusion of visual content can enhance the perceived credibility of misinformation (or information). As deepfakes technology is rapidly evolving, this finding may be one of the major challenges of the near future or even present.

SUMMARY: CHAIN MAILS CONTRAOFFENSIVE



01

Chain mails are typical pro-Kremlin propaganda tool in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, Estonians and Lithuanians who received chain emails are more likely than others to report that the main topic of these emails is **NOT** a support for Russia but for Ukraine during the war in Ukraine.

02

This fact suggests that there may be some kind of succesful counter-offensive email campaign against Russian propaganda in these countries as their population say more often that contributing factor of disinformation are foreign actors.

CONTACTS

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Michal Kormaňák

Account Director
Ipsos Public Affairs
michal.kormanak@ipsos.com
GSM: +420 739 472 302