

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL  
STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL SCIENCES OF COMMUNICATION**

**SUMMARY**

**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**Aspecte privind relația dintre reziliență și efectele știrilor false**

**Scientific coordinator:  
Ph.D. Prof. Alina Bârgăoanu**

**PhD Student:  
Mădălin Nicolae Sârbu**

**Bucharest  
2021**

## Argument

Recently, the European Union (EU) has had to deal with a new type of aggression, namely the exposure of its citizens to a malignant phenomenon, namely misinformation. This phenomenon has known a variety of forms of manifestation in front of which individuals and, implicitly, companies have not had the tools to counter them, and the speed with which modern technologies have developed has outpaced the ability of Member States and companies to generate, at the same rate, defenses or even countermeasures.

In this context, misinformation - seen as a complex phenomenon - has become a major challenge. A challenge to which the authorities have been forced, for a long time, to prove, on the one hand, their good faith, and, on the other hand, to dismantle the narratives launched by opponents. Not surprisingly, these (carefully crafted) narratives seem to be easier to accept than the truth itself. Although, at least rationally, this assertion (the lie seems to be easier to accept than the truth) seems to be devoid of any trace of rationality, the reality has proved that this is the case. Perhaps, the best example, in this sense is represented by the virulence of the anti-vaccination campaign, in which the scientific truth is questioned, being preferred pseudo-treatments that, unfortunately, prove their null effect. Despite this evidence (the supremacy of science and research in relation to pseudo-treatments), some individuals reject reality, remaining prisoners of the vector of misinformation.

In this context, EU Member States and NATO were forced to enter the sign of justification and combat narratives, away from the communication proactive complicated. Moreover, they were forced to allocate resources (human and material) in order to identify and neutralize the sources and channels through which false news spreads and, ultimately, influences citizens and societies.

On the other hand, citizens - captive to their own information bubbles (echo chambers) - feed (voluntarily or not) on various conspiracy theories. It seems that conspiracy theories have become true sine qua non conditions for one's own existence. Moreover, the debates based on conspiracy theories occupy the public agenda, promoting, consciously or not, various narratives that have their roots also in the area of false news. Even if, from an economic point of view, these debates are real sources of rating and, implicitly, economic income, at the level of the collective mind there are real tsunamis in terms of trust in the authorities, but also in terms of perception of reality. Moreover, modern society is experiencing a substantial alienation of its own protection mechanisms in the face of artificial, carefully crafted realities.

At the same time, starting in January 2020, the world has undergone another major change. A change that led to re-evaluate the concept of interpersonal interaction, the normality of relations, but also the identification of physiological mechanisms by which to adapt to changing conditions. Conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The major impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to mind a seemingly ignored or forgotten theme: resilience. At EU level, resilience has become an important issue again. A topic of discussion,

but also a topic on which the Member States have decided that it is imperative that they be given a budget. A generous budget to combat potentially destructive adverse events, but also actions that state or non-state entities intend to implement, affecting Member States but, above all, influencing in a dangerous direction the perception and decision citizens. All these manifestations specific to the information war, of hybrid type, initiated and maintained by various state and non-state actors, external to the European Union, came to highlight the vulnerabilities of individuals and societies; vulnerabilities arising from a low degree of individual resilience. The COVID-19 crisis and its effects on all levels (social, economic, political, individual) bring the need for a strategic approach to resilience. An effective approach for companies to have the full tools to trauma (from a pandemic to a financial crash, from a terrorist attack to a biological attack, from a pandemic to an information war, etc.) manage to return to normal before the event. Or, to a state that represents a qualitative leap following the learning process.

On the other hand, one of the basic features of societății or modern democratic is freedom of expression. Manifestation, most often takes the form dezbateril or public . Through these public debates, both the information of the citizens ( in various degrees!) And their expression on a subject are achieved. Moreover, public debates, the exchange of ideas, opinions generate a certain type of election (from the election of their national parliaments to the decision to become a member or to leave a union or alliance).

In an traditional , in this reality, the media plays an essential . On the one hand provides for the expression of public actors, giving people useful information leading to the formation propriil or views on a layout share. Moreover, as the crystallization of a point of view, individuals develop certain behavior is more or less desirable it is, but that leads to some degree involved has in society.

Unlike modern mass-media, the traditional one is subjected to a whole set of rules and regulations impartiality , plurality, cultural, the content of advertising, while new technological forms of expression are free of the control court.

On the other hand, the technological explosion, in addition to the undoubted benefits (the ability to make connections thousands of miles away, the ability to perform complex analyzes in a short time, the speed of communication, the speed of spreading a news / information, access to remote etc.) has brought a number of vulnerabilities, including the way in which citizens access understand, manage, verify and promote news .

In this context, users, especially young people, see online media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.) as their main source of information. A source of information that he characterizes as safe, credible, to consider. There are a multitude of theories that emphasize that people tend to accept and believe various information, especially since they correspond to their own point of view, their own opinion. Basically, through digital platforms, misinformation has grown

exponentially without previous creating spheres of information customized and helping to create echo chambers extremely useful for campaigns of misinformation.

Moreover, the development of smart tools (smartphones , laptops, tablets etc.) has also generated a new type of opinion generator, namely the individual. Practically, each person becomes a provider of information, the specific tools of censorship being at their own discretion, a supreme court of control or verification being free will or their own interests. Unlike this moment, during the written press the institution of censorship - seen in the key of verifying the published information - each newsroom had its own structure. Today, in the modern age, the user is the only decision maker. He appreciates the veracity of information using his own value system. He also decides on the need to share that information, in terms of usefulness.

Numerous researches have been carried out on the way in which the individual understands to analyze the veracity of information and / or sources, which have studied from the psychological mechanisms related to critical thinking to the satisfaction of an individual's own need. However, technological development has not led to a development of intimate springs, of psychological origin, through which the individual to self-censor from the desire to become a conscious and / or unconscious multiplier. Moreover, we could say that technological development, its benefits, have generated a mental and behavioral laziness of the individual, but also the entry into a non-specific comfort zone that alienates behaviors.

More and more often, the satisfaction of the need to recognize one's own faith, vision, one's own point of view appears in the discussion. And, in this context, the cognitive and emotional availability to accept partially true and / or substantiated information, but which confirms (even partially!) One's own point of view is very high. From this perspective, resilience can play a key role. Provided it exists or is formed.

Returning, at least in theory, facilitating access to various quality information can increase the rate of participation in democratic processes, generating citizen involvement and increasing the legitimacy of political decision-making.

A lot can be said about misinformation, but we appreciate that the most negative effect is that of eroding citizens' trust in institutions (state authorities, media, army, church). Also, misinformation directly and profoundly affects democratic societies by altering the ability of citizens to make well-founded decisions, even leading to a lack of involvement in democratic processes (low turnout). Last but not least, misinformation generates the emergence of radical and extremist ideas and activities . At the same time, misinformation, at the level of the citizen, produces real tsunamis on the line of altering the perception of reality. Or, an altered perception leads to modified behaviors, often less desirable.

In this context, misinformation generates, at the level of democratic societies, but also at the level of citizens, behavioral changes that are not desirable. Moreover, misinformation is a major vulnerability for the state, but also a sensitive challenge. Carefully developed

misinformation has allowed established Democrats to make major political decisions based on the views expressed by citizens, a manipulated view. With regard to the sensitive challenge, we consider the reaction of the state, which must ensure a fair balance between censorship and freedom of expression, between civil liberties (essential to any functioning democracy) and the terms of the social contract as Hobbes saw it; clauses by which the citizen deliberately cedes certain rights in exchange for collective security.

Starting from this challenge, state actors with various interests (economic, political, geopolitical, military, geostrategic) widely use online mass disinformation campaigns to generate, maintain and develop feelings of mistrust, to create social tensions, with serious consequences for national security. Moreover, misinformation campaigns developed by third countries can be part of the hybrid threats to national security with various impacts, from electoral processes to destabilizing the specific moral landmarks of a given space. In combination with cyber attacks, including critical infrastructures, they can present major vulnerabilities.

In this context, there is no doubt that democratic societies need to be proactive in combating misinformation so that, through the measures adopted, they do not limit the fundamental rights of citizens, but at the same time do not make their own societies vulnerable; democratic systems. Moreover, the measures must protect citizens from aggression, but also lead to increased trust in the authorities.

At the same time, we appreciate the importance of developing the necessary skills at the level of citizens so that the impact of false news on individuals and social groups is as small as possible.

Romania's accession to the EU, but also to NATO, the development of military capabilities on the national territory, the change of the security context, the geopolitical remodeling of the world, the various regional and international economic interests, are just some of the elements that led to various interests. state or even non-state actors. Therefore, various specific actions have been developed on the vector of influence in order to achieve their own strategic targets.

As societies have evolved, it has become increasingly clear that conventional warfare is no longer relevant. For several reasons, from those of an economic nature to those related to human resources. Of course, all this was closely related to technological development. And, if we look at history, we will find that any technological leap has led to a reduction in the use of force and human resources. Basically, technological development on the vector of information technology has generated a remodeling of the war. In developed societies, the bullet was replaced by the byte, machine guns were replaced by computers, and bombings and air raids were replaced by computer ones. In conclusion, the word has (re) become a weapon! Or, from this perspective, even the war has known essential refinements. The armies, but also the non-

state actors started to look more closely at the civilian instrumentation in order to militarize certain techniques and procedures.

On the other hand, each Member State was characterized in terms of a potential target, based on several criteria. In this context, Romania (NATO and EU member country, American strategic partner, promoter and supporter of political decisions on the line of deterrence, supporter of the European path of some former Soviet states) has also become, along with other European states, a target for misinformation campaigns. Why did it become? For the simple reason that, although it does not have a very strong voice, Romania is one of the regional actors that promotes a policy specific to consolidated democracies and the rule of law. Moreover, the recent history of Romania has certain stereotypes that are still fresh in the collective mind. Therefore, they can be exploited by other actors with opposite interests. By discussing the collective mind and its fragility, in national official documents, the concept of "security" is avoided. The reason is related to the experience of citizens with that repressive body structure. Or, all these negative experiences, fresh in the mental team, most of the times, undergo an update and are correlated with a certain context.

In this key, let us remember the failure of the Big Brother laws in Romania (2012). In essence, Big Brother laws started from Directive 2006/24/EC on the retention of data generated or processed by service providers and electronic communications networks. It is important that this directive was born out of the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid. However, the legislative package has generated tensions and major misinformation campaigns that have led to a consistent polarization of citizens. Basically, the main narrative used in Romania was the exploitation of a historical fear - the return to the communist period in which the Securitate monitored everything that moves -, given that the terrorist attacks in Spain and Great Britain not only generated terror, but also led to loss of life. Practically, every time when in the societies were approached subjects with potential vulnerability of other state actors, virulent disinformation campaigns appeared. Also in this register, let us remember the moment of Romania's accession to the EU and NATO. Obviously, at that time the evolution of social networks and the Internet did not know the evolution of now. However, the public agenda was invaded by pseudo-news that did nothing but bring to the fore various collective fears, and then to feed and empower them so that, at the end of the day, we witness a consistent polarization of the population, to the increase of the degree of tension in the society, to the erosion of the trust in the state authorities, to the erosion of the trust in the political class.

More dangerous is that, once activated, these feelings of mistrust will continue to dig, reaching the point when even in the face of an irrefutable reality citizens show a high degree of reluctance. Consequently, the level of trust of the citizens in the state - viewed as a whole - has direct repercussions on the evolution of that society. Obviously, the state is constantly obliged to explain each decision, even if some are in the field of evidence.

As a result, a concept - apparently forgotten or ignored - returns to the discussion and attention, respectively: individual resilience. In the face of the challenges set out above, individual resilience plays an important role in developing citizens in a direction that is beneficial to themselves and to the society to which they belong. That is, the development of their own psychological mechanisms through which, following a trauma, to find the intimate springs to return to their state of normalcy. Obviously, normality means the state prior to the occurrence of the event characterized in the key to trauma. From this perspective, through this paper, we aim to study the role that resilience can play in relation to the negative effects of false news. In other words, in the face of misinformation and false news - seen as a trauma resulting from altered perceptions of reality - individual resilience can be a tool to reduce the harmful effects of these campaigns.

Based on these considerations, we set out to identify some aspects of the relationship between resilience and the effects of false news.

The doctoral thesis is structured in two parts, respectively a theoretical part that includes chapters I and II and a research part that includes chapter III, respectively the part of presentation and interpretation of the results.

In this context, in the first chapter of the thesis we approached the concept of resilience, making a conceptual clarification of it.

History has recorded that the mental health of the human being has been a constant concern highlighted even in the writings of Greek philosophers. However, the scientific approach to human mental health begins in the twentieth century, becoming a distinct dimension of psychology. From this perspective, one of the concerns of psychology is how individuals can maintain their mental health in the context of the multitude of interactions with the environment. Especially in conditions where the result of individual-individual or individual-environment interaction does not always have positive effects. Often, as a result of this interaction, negative effects can appear, manifested in the form of deep emotional feelings that destruct the whole body, making it unable to continue and perform its basic functions. In colloquial language, this state is referred to by the verb "to freeze" in the sense of capturing an inability of an individual to continue their proper functioning as a result of an interaction with a stimulus with an inhibitory role. Thus, in the field of psychology, the emergence of the concept of resilience opens new lines of research.

Being resilient means being resistant to shock or trauma. Resilience means adapting to situations that the subject / citizen perceives as being very stressful, traumatic or with traumatic potential and that he / she faces throughout life or at various moments in life. Although they experience negative emotions, resilient people do not let themselves be overwhelmed by them. Moreover, they recover faster and with less emotional damage as a result of such traumas. It should be noted that being resilient does not mean rejecting emotion. On the contrary, being

resilient is a more complex process which involves internalizing without emotion take control and to influence decisions of the individual.

In this chapter we aim to address the concept of resilience and review the main research, definitions and theories, in order to highlight those aspects of it that may impose it as a useful tool in counteracting the effects of false news and misinformation. , in general.

Lately, resilience has become a very attractive concept for policy makers, practitioners and academics. Moreover, following the deep crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union launched, for the first time, a consistent financial package for recovery and resilience (IP / 20/2397, 2020) . History also demonstrates the significant versatility of this concept, which has evolved from the specific disciplines of materials science, physics, ecology to the area of psychosocial and military sciences. Moreover, the UK government has revised its specific legislation - civil law, plans, doctrines, procedures - giving significant importance to the concept of resilience (Government of the United Kingdom, 2013) .

The concept of resilience refers to the ability to recover and return to normalcy after facing a non-specific threat to a normal, alarming and, most often, unexpected context. Resilience is used to understand how governments, local authorities, and emergency services can best address a variety of threats (from terrorist attacks, natural disasters, pandemics, and other threats defined as having a destabilizing potential), without functionality. endanger the system. Basically, resilience appeals to concepts such as awareness, detection, communication, reaction / avoidance and recovery. Resilience also highlights the ability and willingness to adapt over a period of time to a changing environment with threatening potential. Despite the generosity of this concept, the existence of a comprehensive definition with a high degree of generality does not seem to be outlined yet, this is due to the multitude of approaches, but also, perhaps, to the permanent dynamics of science.

Initially, the term was identified in French, around 1430, especially in the area of legal sciences , so that in 1626, Francis Bacon gave it a completely different meaning with another meaning closely related to the observation of physical phenomena. of return, reflection and echo , thus making a first step towards the foundation of the science of physics . Subsequently, the concept is adopted in the area of physical and mechanical sciences .

Also, the concept of resilience registers a transition to the area of social sciences, being a specific notion - from the perspective of scientific approaches - and areas such as: ecology, cybernetics, economics, management, sociology, psychiatry, psychology, etc.

The concept of resilience has been a significant concern for the science of sustainability, which is not accidental, highlighting the important role it plays in maintaining and developing long-term systems, but also the capacity of resources or structural components of an entity. to do to change or actions with potentially disruptive. There are also highlighted and specific elements, in f u nctie the situation in which it is produced.

Also, the concept of "resilience" has become an intense term used in international institutions and organizations (UN, EU, NATO etc.). For EU resilience is defined as "the ability of states and societies to reform thus still be able to withstand and be able to recover from internal crises and external" (Council of the European Union, 2016, p. 6) .

The specialized literature identifies 3 forms of manifestation of resilience, respectively individual, community and national. Some studies (Cannon, 2008; Cacioppo, Reis & Zautra, A, 2011) frame national and community resilience in the concept of social resilience. On the other hand, studies have shown that all 3 forms of resilience contribute to a good management of the aftermath of events with significant traumatic potential, namely the ability of people to return to the same level of functioning compared to their pre-traumatic condition (Weinrib, Rothrock, Johnsen & Lutgendorf, 2006, pp. 856).

Resilience theories refer to the ability to adapt successfully and recover from interaction with adversity, failure, conflict, and frustration. In other words, it helps us to recover from the difficulties we faced and, implicitly, which had a negative effect. Also, resilience theories argue that it is important how we deal with difficulties compared to the nature of adversity.

In a general key, resilience is defined as the result of the interaction between adversity. Moreover, the concept does not benefit from the existence of an exact definition, with a high degree of comprehension. While for some authors, resilience is a holistic approach, for others it is an intrinsic characteristic of the individual. Some authors refer to the abilities of individuals, while others consider it a positive functioning in the face of adversity.

In the study of resilience, Block & Block (1980) developed the concept of ego-resilience, having a decisive role in the study of the process of successful adaptation of individuals. In this context, Ego-resilience refers to "the dynamic ability of an individual to change a characteristic level of ego-control, depending on the characteristics of demand in the context of the environment, to maintain or improve the balance of the system." (Block & Kremen, 1996, p. 351; Klohnen, 1996) .

In the second chapter we approached the concept of hybrid warfare, realizing a conceptual operationalization.

The timing of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by the Russian Federation, together with the undeclared conflict in eastern Ukraine, raised a number of questions among Western political analysts about the new context of global security. The concerns also focused on attempts to understand the perspective of the Russian Federation on the line of the vector of international relations, which could be a predictor of future similar actions carried out in other areas. On the other hand, this moment represented a reconsideration of NATO's defensive protocols based on the assumption that the actions of the Russian Federation represent a new, more hidden approach to war. Understanding the Russian Federation's perspective on international relations is imperative for supporting the potential targets of future Russian action

and, in particular, for updating NATO's defense protocols in response to serious military violations of the sovereignty of other states.

Moreover, the transformations of the 21st century have influenced not only the way we communicate, express ourselves or even carry out various daily activities. They - the transformations - also influenced the way conflicts took place. Today, in modern societies, wars are no longer won in trenches, physically, through classical or conventional military actions. Due to or perhaps due to technological progress, wars are won in front of the computer, through information and the confrontation of intelligence. Conventional weapons have been replaced by a varied set of techniques and means, from diversion, espionage, manipulation, misinformation, alteration of reality, while human resources have been replaced by armies of ... "trolls". What not long ago seemed like a screenplay for science fiction movies is happening today. Reality can be altered by changing people's opinions. All this is spreading through technology, and the word has (re) become the most influential weapon. A weapon that does not require production units, but only intelligence and technical means.

In other words, the whole paradigm of the conflict has changed. Therefore, the whole security paradigm also knows new models and, implicitly, new means of approach.

In the literature, in addition to the term " hybrid war " brings into question other concepts, such as hybrid conflict and hybrid threat. If the term hybrid conflict describes a context in which the parties rely on a combination of military intimidation but do not use military force, but exploit economic and political vulnerabilities and diplomatic and / or technological means to achieve their objectives, the hybrid threat is a phenomenon that occurred as a result of the interconnection of different elements and which has a complex and multidimensional character. At the same time, the concept of " hybrid threat " is a term that brings to the fore the complexities and concerns of a global security environment in a particular dynamic.

From the perspective of Hybrid CoE (European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats), hybrid threats are coordinated and synchronized actions that deliberately pursue systemic vulnerabilities of states and democratic institutions (Giannopoulos & Smith, 2021, p. 11). Moreover, the authors also point out that the main purpose is to influence the decision-making process at local and / or regional level in order to promote and / or meet the strategic objectives of the aggressor entity. From a NATO perspective, the purpose of hybrid threats is to destabilize and undermine societies (NATO, 2021).

The information war - a component of hybrid aggression - aims to alter the way in which reality is perceived by citizens, but starting from fragments of truth. Basically, at least in general, a first goal of information warfare is to change reality with another reality that will serve to achieve later goals. So, when we refer to the information war, we identify the "people's mind" as the main objectives.

In other words, information warfare , from a conceptual point of view, is not a new term, in the key to the manifestation of war. The novelty of this concept is given by the means and techniques used. The temporal landmark represented by Sun Tzu comes to emphasize this aspect. Basically, the forms mentioned by the Chinese military strategist represented the capabilities available at that time; capabilities closely related to the technological development of the weather.

When we talk about information warfare, in addition to the concepts specific to the military sciences, we often come across concepts such as propaganda , misinformation and false news . The literature also highlights the existence of three notions that produce similar effects, but between which there are significant differences, namely: misinformation, misinformation and biased information. Theoretically, the three concepts seem to emphasize the same thing, namely a distortion of reality. However, the details of the approach are just as important. Thus, if a general approach, the term of misinformation ( mis-information ) describes " false information which are not created with the intention to cause harm ", the term disinformation ( dis- information ) are concerned ' information false and deliberately created in order to harm a person, a social group, an organization or a country ", while the information biased (mal- information ) is designated" information that is based on reality, used the purpose of causing harm to a person, organization or country ". (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 20)

At the same time, conceptual propaganda has a history very far, with strong ties with the religious , it is defined as " try area deliberately complicated and systematic complicated to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and driving behavior directly to get an answer that promotes the propagandist's desired intention. " (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018, p. 7).

False news is defined as "the deliberate presentation of false or misleading statements as news, aimed at deception, misleading " (Gelfert, 2018, p. 109) , but " false news does not (always) mean false. (...) The false / true binary classification is misleading, and the phenomenon we are talking about covers a much wider spectrum " (Bârgăoanu, 2018, p. 137)

When we talk about the psychology of fake news, we have in mind to identify answers to questions such as: why does fake news affect us, how does fake news affect us, are all people affected equally? Whether we are discussing issues related to the functioning of state institutions, or whether we are discussing the effects and narratives of the pandemic, the false news has a direct influence on each individual. And this influence can take a variety of forms. From resonating with a certain narrative to behavioral change or even altering the perception of reality. All these manifestations are related to the psychic structure of each individual.

Starting from these considerations, in the second part of the thesis we set out to study the existence of the following causal links:

- I1: between the level of Ego-resilience and the manifestation of some fact checking behaviors ;
- I2: between the level of Ego-resilience and the frequency with which false news is identified ;

I3: between the level of Ego-resilience and the perception of the impact of false news on one's own opinions .

In this context, between 12.05.2020-12.06.2020 , we applied a questionnaire, which was attended by 506 people from Romania and the Republic of Moldova, aged between 18 and 68 years ( $M = 34.63$ ;  $AS = 0.50$ ), 238 are females, representing 47%, and 265 males, representing 52.4% and 3 participants who chose not to answer the question on gender, representing 0.6%.

Regarding the country of residence, 251 (49.6%) of the participants stated that they reside in Romania, while 255 (50.4%) declared their domicile as being in the Republic of Moldova. Regarding the nationality of the participants, we find that 349 declare themselves to be *Romanian* (69%), while 157 declare that they are *Moldavian* (31%).

Of the total number of participants, 209 were between 20 and 29 years old (39.7%), 158 were between 30 and 39 years old (31.2%), 66 participants were between 40 and 49 years old (13%), 60 between 50 and 59 years (11.9%) and 17 participants are aged between 60 and 69 years (3.4%). Four participants (0.8%) did not want to answer this question.

At the same time, out of the 506 participants in the study, 32.2% are graduates of university studies, 38.9% are graduates of postgraduate schools (master), and 11.7% are graduates of doctoral schools.

Regarding the level of *Ego-resilience* , out of a total of 506 participants, 296 (58.5%) obtained a *high level* , 181 (35.8%) a *very low level* , 25 (4.9%) an *undetermined level* and 4 (0.8%) a *level low* .

Compared to the frequency of identifying false news in the media, the following is found: 36.1% of those with a *high level* of *Ego-resilience* identified false news *daily and weekly* compared to 48.6% of those *with a very low level* .

## **Research hypotheses**

I. Regarding the first research hypothesis, namely the existence of a causal link between the level of Ego-resilience and the manifestation of behaviors such as *fact checking* , but also proactive behaviors of information verification, the results are as follows:

### **a. Trust in people**

We observe that there is a strong significant correlation between trust in people and the total score of *Ego Resilience* ( $r = .191$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In other words, a high level of Resilience Ego leads to a high level of trust in people.

## b. Trust in institutions

Also, on the criterion *Trust in institutions* there is a strong significant correlation, in relation to the trust in: army ( $r = .220, p < .01$ ), justice ( $r = .126, p < .01$ ) and mass media ( $r = -.162, p < .01$ ). We can appreciate that **a high level of *Ego Resilience* leads to greater trust in the military and justice**. However, there is a negative correlation in terms of media trust. In other words, the **higher the *Ego resilience* level the lower the trust in the media**.

At the same time, we find significant correlations in terms of trust in *Parliament* ( $r = .112, p < .05$ ), *political parties* ( $r = .092, p < .05$ ) and NGOs ( $r = .088, p < .05$ ). Thus, **a high level of *Ego-resilience* leads to a high level of trust in the above-mentioned institutions**.

In other words, the **higher the level of *Ego-resilience*, the higher the level of trust in the people, the army, the judiciary, the Parliament, political parties and NGOs**. Regarding the relationship between *Ego Resilience* and the media, we find a negative correlation.

## c. Verification of information

We observe strongly significant correlations between the level of *Ego resilience* in relation to the reputation of journalists ( $r = .136, p < .01$ ), being an element that generates trust.

Also, there is a strong significant correlation between the high level of *Ego resilience* and the search for the source of information ( $r = .163, p < .01$ ), as well as the comparison of several sources to verify the correctness of the information ( $r = .138, p < .01$ ), checking blogs, sites of opinion leaders ( $r = .203, p < .01$ ) and self-confidence ( $r = .133, p < .01$ ).

Surprisingly, we identified **significant correlations between the level of *Ego resilience* and consulting specialized sites** ( $r = .113, p < .05$ ), but also with **checking the impression in the relational circle** ( $r = .092, p < .05$ ). The lack of a strong significant correlation can be explained by the fact that the relationship to the intimate relational circle does not necessarily imply the existence of a high level of *Ego Resilience*, because it is assumed that the relational circle is formed over time, in multiple interactions, benefiting from a high level of trust. This aspect is also confirmed by the **level of strong correlation between the level of *Ego-resilience* and the information distributed by friends on social networks** ( $r = .099, p < .05$ ).

The results did not lead to the establishment of significant correlations in terms of the relationship with brand reputation and non-involvement behavior ( $p > 0.5$ ).

In conclusion, we can say that **a high level of *Ego resilience* determines a high level of manifestation of *fact-checking* behaviors**. In other words, the research hypothesis is verified.

- II. Regarding the second research hypothesis, namely the existence of a link between the level of *Ego resilience* and the frequency with which individuals identify news that prove to be incorrect, the results show the existence of a strong significant correlation ( $r = .179, p < .01$ ). In other words, the higher the *Ego resilience* is higher the more often identified false news is higher. In other words, the second research hypothesis is verified.
- III. Regarding the third research hypothesis, namely the existence of a causal link between the *Ego resilience* level and the perception of the impact of false news on one's own opinions, the results led to the identification of a single significant correlation between the *Ego Resilience* level and the perception of false news influence. personal opinions ( $r = -.108, p < .05$ ). Thus, we can say that a high level of *Ego resilience* decreases the influence of news information on one's own opinions.

In other words, the negative impact of false news, seen in the key of altering reality, seems to be diminished in the context in which the individual has a high level of *Ego resilience*. From this perspective, at least on the individual vector, **resilience seems to be a way to counteract the perverse effects of false news on citizens.**

The interpretation of the results also led to the identification of strongly significant correlations between the level of *Ego resilience* and the following assertions:

- False news is a problem that our country is facing ( $r = .125, p < .01$ ),
- state institutions must combat false news ( $r = .127, p < .01$ ),
- the need for a legislative framework ( $r = .161, p < .01$ ),

but also significant with:

- the creation of an entity specialized in combating false news ( $r = .094, p < .05$ ) and
- false news signaling ( $r = .105, p < .05$ ).

In other words, the **higher the level of *Ego resilience*, the more false news is perceived as a problem facing the country.**

The research data also revealed the existence of a **significant correlation between the level of *Ego resilience*** and the following sources of information:

- news agencies ( $r = -.094, p < .05$ ),
- information from the radio ( $r = -.116, p < .05$ ),
- information shared by friends on social networks ( $r = .099, p < .05$ ) and
- information from blogs and websites ( $r = .101, p < .05$ ).

In other words, the **higher the *Ego* level of resilience, the lower the trust in news agencies and information from the radio, while the higher the degree of trust in information shared by friends and information on blogs and websites. grow.**

We recorded **significant correlations regarding the level of *Ego resilience*** and the following types of reaction:

- stopping reading that media entity ( $r = .095, p < .05$ ),
- scoring that media entity in the relational circle ( $r = .134, p < .01$ ),
- informing the state institutions about the respective entity ( $r = .165, p < .01$ ),
- enforcement of legislation ( $r = .182, p < .01$ ),
- the reaction of being skeptical ( $r = .092, p < .05$ ) and
- expression of point of view ( $r = .219, p < .01$ ).

In other words, **a high level of *Ego resilience* also entails the importance of the above-mentioned measures / opinions.**

Through this doctoral thesis we set out to achieve several main objectives. First, we aimed to conceptually operationalize the term individual resilience. Secondly, we focused on the analysis of the means and techniques specific to hybrid warfare, with a focus on false news. Last but not least, we set out to study the existence of causal links between the construct of "individual resilience" and "false news"; causal links that allow the elaboration of hypotheses on the line of the vector "counteracting false news and the effects of misinformation".

From the analysis of the literature, resilience is defined as representing "*personal qualities that allow the individual to thrive in the face of adversity*" (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p. 76). The term "prosperity" suggests that resilience exceeds the stage of recovery, being rather oriented towards achieving results superior to the previous state. However, the phrase "*resilience / recovery*" has had different approaches, with some authors attempting to emphasize post-traumatic, post-stress recovery (Atkinson et. Al., 2009, p. 139), while other authors it is as the ability to stay well despite difficulties or to recover completely and quickly (Zautra et. al., 2008, p. 43).

From the perspective of other researchers (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 859; Karoly & Ruehlman, 2006, p. 93; Barber, 2013, p. 467), resilience has been addressed in the key of a specific response that individuals generate using personal characteristics to deal with contexts that have varying degrees of difficulty, different levels of *stress*. In other words, the determinant of resilience consists of personal qualities identified as protective factors despite stressful or traumatic events.

This approach in the key of a *dynamic process that evolves over time* emphasizes, first of all, the existence of an interaction between internal and external protection factors that act to change the personal characteristics of an event. Secondly, it refers to the interaction between personal characteristics, biological processes and family and social resources that can facilitate or, on the contrary, prevent the manifestation of resilience.

Some authors also define resilience as a vital motivational force of the individual that involves a continuous combative attitude and the tendency not to give up in the face of difficulties, while for others resilience is a dynamic mental state that can adapt to change.

Moreover, resilience is also seen as a process of survival and even evolution of individuals in relation to adversity, involving the existence of a set of internal qualities or traits (high self-efficacy), external factors (social support) that facilitate *coping*. ul . (Boiler & Timmins, 2016, p. 194)

Last but not least, resilience was also addressed in terms of the ability to overcome stressful situations, a context in which it presupposes the existence of psychic processes with a role in the cognitive assessment that the individual makes of the situation and which he considers to have a disruptive potential ( Hilliard et al., 2012, p. 750) . In this context, the thought processes, the emotional and behavioral responses through which resilient subjects build their personal vision of reality, lead to the adoption of decisions and behaviors that allow them to adapt to stressful or adverse conditions. (Masten, 2014, p. 14)

In this context, the literature, starting from studies and research, has identified certain individual characteristics and behaviors, along with cognitive processes, personality traits and active *coping mechanisms* (adaptation). All this mix allows the individual to develop various degrees of individual resilience. Moreover, resilience seems to be the expression of the success of a system in relation to uncertainty. Secondly, the author refers to the finality of the process, respectively the adaptation and reorganization of the system following the interaction with an event with destructive potential.

On the other hand, meaning EU, resilience is defined as "*the ability of states and societies to reform thus still be able to withstand and be able to recover from internal crises and external*" (Council of the European Union, 2016 p. 6) , while in NATO's view resilience is a tool through which the full spectrum of threats, including hybrid ones, can be combated (NATO, 2016b, p. 71).

Starting from these approaches, we proposed three research hypotheses, namely:

1. the existence of a causal link at the level of Ego-resilience and the manifestation of *fact-checking* behaviors ;
2. the existence of a causal link between the level of Ego-resilience and the frequency with which false news is identified;
3. the existence of a causal link between the level of Ego-resilience and the perception of the impact of false news on one's own opinions.

Following the interpretation of the data obtained, all 3 research hypotheses were confirmed, respectively:

1. The higher the level of Ego-resilience, the more we will identify a high level of manifestation of *fact-checking* behaviors .

2. The higher the level of Ego-resilience, the higher the frequency with which false news is identified.
3. The higher the level of Ego-resilience, the lower the impact of false news on one's own opinions.

Basically, the confirmation of the 3 research hypotheses leads us to the conclusion that individual resilience can be an element in combating the effects of false news and misinformation on individuals.

Also, the results obtained allowed to obtain additional information, respectively:

- a. **The existence of significant differences between men and women** in terms of trust in institutions, in relationships with peers, trust in information from traditional media (print, radio, TV), trust in information from online sources, in the use of sources of information, in the use of social networks as a source of information, in the promotion of information based on social networks, the identification of false news, the means used to verify information (reputation as a journalist, alternative sources, personal intuition), positioning on the source of news false (EU, NATO, Russian Federation), but also "desirable actions to be taken".
- b. **The existence of significant differences between people from Romania and the Republic of Moldova** in terms of trust in people and institutions, the choice of information sources, the use of social networks, the frequency with which false news is identified, the existence and manifestation of factual behaviors -checking, the perception of the impact of false news on state institutions and citizens, the possibility of combating false news, the source of false news and the measures that can be implemented in combating false news.
- c. **The existence of significant differences by age groups (over 35 years and under 35 years)** in terms of trust in people and institutions, sources of information, the use of specific social media applications, the reasons behind the decision to promote certain news from social media, the frequency with which false news is identified, the existence and manifestation of information verification behaviors, the perception of the impact of false news on state institutions and citizens, the possibility of combating false news, the source of false news and the measures that can be implemented. combating false news.

The interpretation of the results also led to the identification of strong correlations between the level of *Ego resilience* and the perception of false news in the key issue facing the country, the role of state institutions to combat false news, the importance of legislation, the creation of an entity with responsibilities in combating false news, but also signaling false news.

In this context, we appreciate that an in-depth study on criteria such as gender, nationality and age groups could represent a new direction of research on the subject of this doctoral thesis.

We also appreciate that an extensive study between the level of *Ego resilience* and the existence of media skills could be a new direction for research to increase individuals' ability to identify false news and therefore reduce the effects of misinformation on their own opinions, but and how it relates to state institutions.