

Negative Influence of Incorrect Information on Facebook User Behaviour: Kazakhstan Case

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Abstract

The research relevance is determined by the growing influence of social networks, in particular Facebook, on the behaviour of Internet users. The study of the impact of incorrect information disseminated through social networks is necessary and important for several reasons related to the protection of public safety, active manipulation of public opinion and disinformation of society, undermining trust in the mass media and official sources of information, and cybersecurity violations. The study aims to analyse the impact of inaccurate, manipulative, and distorted information uncontrollably disseminated through the social network Facebook on the behavioural patterns of its consumers and the impact of the results of these patterns on

the social well-being, and economic and political stability of Kazakhstan. The study used the content analysis method to determine which type of incorrect information is encountered on Facebook in the media space of Kazakhstan and which of them receives the greatest response among users. The study concluded that Facebook posts elicit an active response from readers, which causes further misinformation dissemination, even though such information is regarded as highly credible in the absence of references to the source or evidence, causing negative user behaviour, such as disregard for security rules (physical, mental, epidemiological, cyber, financial); instigation of racial, religious and gender hatred; political inertness; use of social media for manipulation, fraud, defamation of public figures, financial fraud and propaganda. The study also determined publications on conspiracy theories posts (primarily related to the geopolitical situation, as well as the Coronavirus epidemic) and the domestic political situation in the country (primarily related to corruption scandals and specific political figures) receive the greatest response. The results of the study can be used to improve the level of cyber security and information literacy of the population of Kazakhstan.

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Keywords

Media Culture • Media and Information Literacy Indicators • Cybersecurity • Misinformation • Fact-checking

1. Introduction

This study is highly relevant due to the increasingly popular use of social networks as a source of news and important information related to the daily needs of the civilian population, the activities of activists and political forces, security and social stability, and a particularly large role in this process is played by Facebook, where users actively share information and personal opinions, use it as a platform for organising public and political activity, creating personal streaming platforms. The problematic aspect of this study is the understudied role of Facebook in spreading not only misinformation and propaganda, but also incorrect information: incomplete, unintentionally, or intentionally distorted information, manipulation, fraudulent schemes, cybersecurity attacks, and erroneous information. This lack of information causes many negative consequences, such as destabilising a country, inciting national or gender strife, misleading large numbers of people, and disregarding security, ethical and moral rules. An equally important consequence of underestimating the influence of Facebook is the lack of legal tools to control the creation and dissemination of incorrect information on the network, as well as the insufficient level of media literacy of the population.

These issues were studied by various international organisations, but also this topic was widely represented by such scientists as Tandoc Jr. *et al.* (2020), Altay *et al.* (2022) and those whose works were devoted to the dissemination of incorrect information and fakes through social networks, as well as the behaviour of users of such networks concerning incorrect information; Tifferet (2021), Tandoc Jr. & Kim (2023), Sampat & Raj (2022), who studied the personality characteristics of people who tend to share incorrect and fake information through social networks, their motives and patterns of action. It is also worth mentioning the studies of Kazakh scientists, such as Izenkova *et al.* (2022), which were devoted to the study of the influence of incorrect information on the level of trust in information sources during the Coronavirus pandemic, determining the peculiarities of the existence of the institution of reputation and the tendency not to trust the state mass media and official speakers. Omirzhanov *et al.* (2017) and Husiev (2019) studied the correlation between freedom of speech and national security in Kazakhstan, and Sabitov (2016) studied the issue of information security in Kazakhstan and concluded that state institutions often exploit the national interest defence argument to limit the freedom of speech. It is also worth mentioning the study of Yelubayeva *et al.* (2023) devoted to the formation of media literacy, as well as the use of social networks to obtain educational content. At the same time, the above-mentioned studies lack a clear focus on the circulation of

incorrect (especially unintentionally created) information in the Internet space of Kazakhstan.

It is worth noting that the source analysis reveals that the topic has been insufficiently studied in the context of recent changes in 2022-2023 in Kazakhstan, beyond the topics of security, freedom of speech, COVID-19 pandemic, political manipulation and propaganda, which are predominantly the majority of existing studies, and this study will aim to compensate for this, taking into account the development of a more complete picture of all aspects of the impact of incorrect information disseminated through the social network Facebook. Accordingly, this study has the following objectives:

- analyse social networks and their impact on information consumers around the world and, in particular, in Kazakhstan;
- determine the role of the social network Facebook in the information media space of the world (and Kazakhstan);
- formulate a definition of incorrect information and outline the aspects and nuances of this problem in the context of information virtual space;
- identify specific manifestations of incorrect data on the behaviour of Facebook users in the media space of Kazakhstan.

2. Materials and Methods

To achieve the set objectives, several research methods were utilized. The analysis method was applied to study trends in the influence of social networks and their popularity among the general population. It also helped examine the use of social networks to create and disseminate messages containing incorrect information. Additionally, it analysed changes in the level of trust in information shared on Facebook, considering the age and gender of users. The historical method was used to compare historical precedents of deliberate creation and dissemination of incorrect information. This method also examined reactions to such information by users, government representatives, and law enforcement agencies. The deduction method was employed to highlight general trends and identify the most significant ones for Kazakhstan's media space. This included examining the high level of incorrect and manipulative information used to influence the authority and reputation of political forces, public figures, and activists. The induction method was applied to study the unique characteristics of individual behavioural responses by Facebook users. From these observations, general trends were formulated, reflecting the specificity of Kazakhstan's media space. The content analysis method was used to study topics

and the specifics of published materials on Facebook. This included examining posts that provoked behavioural responses from users in Kazakhstan.

The research materials included analytical reports with relevant statistical data on various aspects of the problem. These reports provided information such as the number of Facebook users, the prevalence of fake accounts, methods for combating misinformation, and the dynamics of trust in Facebook posts. They also covered user concerns regarding the spread of incorrect or fraudulent information. Additional data included analyses of user behaviour based on gender and age characteristics. Furthermore, Facebook posts containing distorted, incomplete, fraudulent, manipulative, propaganda, or intentionally misleading information from 2023 were examined (Central Asian Bureau, 2019; Dixon, 2024; Kemp, 2023; OECD, 2021; Vibrant Information Barometer, 2023).

The Facebook publications selected for content analysis were selected based on the principle of the highest number of reactions (likes, dislikes, reposts and comments), their freshness (no older than 2022) and the presence of incorrect information (obvious or hidden). Accordingly, the selection criteria were as follows: the presence of distorted, incomplete, erroneous or manipulative information; the presence of user reactions and user interaction with the publication; the presence of reposts (as an element of a mechanism for further dissemination of such information); and relevance (2022-2024 year of publication). The search was conducted based on post popularity, to which the other evaluation criteria were applied afterwards. If a publication met all of the above criteria, it was further distributed according to the topic (politics, health care, conspiracy theories), followed by an assessment of the impact of each topic in general and the content of the post in particular, which allowed us to identify trends characteristic of Kazakhstan's media space.

3. Results

3.1. Global social media user indices

The number of internet users is growing daily. In January 2023, the world's population surpassed the 8.01 billion marks, of which 5.16 billion are already Internet users, representing 64.4% of the world's total population. Of this mass, 4.76 billion are social media users, which is just under 60% of the global population and 92.3% of all internet users (Dixon, 2024).

According to the report by Kemp (2023), the number of Internet users is increasing by an average of 3% (137 million people) every year, with an average time spent on the World Wide Web of 2.5 hours, and this figure

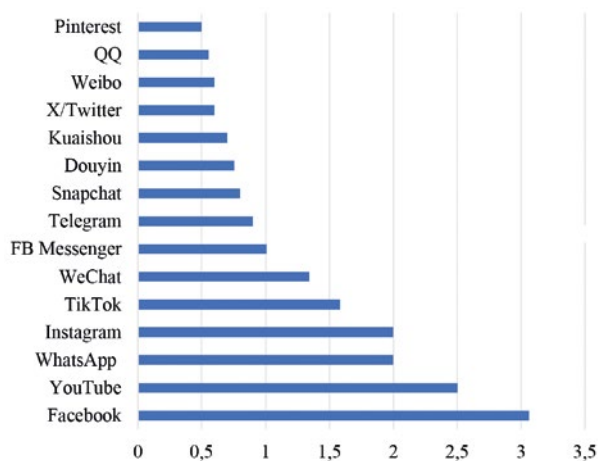


Figure 1. Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2024, by number of monthly active users (in millions). Source: compiled by the authors based on Statista (2024c)

continues to grow steadily (by 2% per year on average). Of this population, 77.8% are over the age of 18, 46.3% are female and 53.7% are male. The United Arab Emirates (10 million users, 100% of the total population) (Statista, 2024d) and South Korea (47.6 million users or 92% of the population) (Kemp, 2024c) have the highest number of social media users as a proportion of the total population, while Eritrea (10 thousand users, representing 0.3% of the population) (Kemp, 2024a) and North Korea (Kemp, 2024b), where access to social media is officially banned, have the lowest. Reports of Statista (2024c) also contain data on the most popular social networks worldwide (Figure 1).

According to the metrics, Facebook is one of the most used social networks, with 3.065 million users (surpassing the next most popular resource YouTube by 2.504 million users). At the same time, it is slightly behind WhatsApp and Instagram in popularity (in terms of personal preferences). The report on the most popular media platforms by age and gender is presented below (Table 1).

Thus, Facebook is most popular among users over 55-64 years of age (17.0% of women and 17.3% of men), with a gradual increase in usage according to the age of the users. To assess the level of spread and impact of untrustworthy information on social networks, it is also worth noting the exact purposes for which social media platforms are used (Table 2).

As can be seen in Table 2, Facebook has a fairly high credibility as a source of news and current affairs information. Figure 2 shows the global statistics regarding the use of social media as a source of news.

At the same time, the 55+ age group shows the lowest levels of trust in news from social networks. (Figure 3).

Social platforms	16-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Instagram	25.4%	26.6%	20.7%	18.8%	15.8%	11.6%	13.5%	8.7%	10.5%	6.6%
WhatsApp	12.6%	13.7%	14.0%	14.9%	15.6%	17.0%	17.9%	19.3%	20.0%	21.4%
Facebook	5.9%	8.7%	11.1%	13.7%	12.7%	15.3%	14.4%	16.0%	17.0%	17.3%
WeChat	8.6%	8.8%	12.4%	11.7%	15.7%	16.5%	14.8%	15.6%	12.8%	13.9%
TikTok	15.3%	9.4%	10.4%	6.5%	7.9%	5.6%	7.0%	5.3%	5.0%	4.2%
Douyin	6.4%	6.2%	7.6%	8.4%	9.8%	8.4%	6.7%	7.0%	6.0%	6.5%
Twitter (X)	3%	4.1%	2.4%	4.3%	1.5%	3.5%	1.7%	3.8%	1.9%	3.1%
Telegram	2.2%	3.3%	2.0%	3.3%	2.0%	2.9%	2.0%	2.6%	1.9%	2.7%
FB Messenger	1.7%	1.8%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	2.3%	2.6%	2.4%	3.0%	2.7%
Line	0.6%	0.6%	0.8%	1.0%	1.4%	1.4%	2.5%	2.2%	3.3%	3.1%

Table 1. The most popular media platforms by age and gender. Source: compiled by the authors based on DataReportal (2024)

Characteristic	Instagram	Facebook	Snapchat	Pinterest	Twitter (X)
Viewing photos	77%	65%	64%	59%	42%
Finding/shopping for products	11%	15%	5%	47%	7%
Watching videos	51%	46%	50%	21%	32%
Sharing content with everyone	45%	57%	46%	21%	32%
Sharing content one to one	31%	43%	45%	12%	20%
Networking	23%	33%	21%	10%	26%
News	18%	38%	17%	9%	56%
Promoting my business	9%	7%	6%	5%	7%

Table 2. The most common types of activity on social media platforms. Source: compiled by the authors based on Statista (2019)

The above indices confirm the high popularity of social networks as a source of news and trustworthy facts, as well as the control that Facebook has in this process. At the same time, according to the official statistics of the Meta platform (to which Facebook belongs), on average, about 50% of the content of users' news feeds contains messages from friends and content creators to whom they are subscribed (Solomons, 2024). From those, 17% of messages are defined as completely unrelated to users, not justified by the interests of the user or the chats and categorised as "alien". The researchers also note that in the majority of cases, news content does not contain links or other ways to instantly verify and validate it. Because of this, a readily available source of news and information on a wide variety of current events like Facebook is constantly confronted with content that is unintentionally or intentionally misleading and can be identified as harmful. According to data for 2023, during the fourth quarter of 2022 alone, experts

removed 1.3 billion fake accounts from the platform and 6.4 million pieces of content were prosecuted based on harmful information (bullying, racism, harassment, harassment) (Statista, 2024a). The record-breaking year was 2019, the year the COVID pandemic began when the Facebook platform removed a record 2.2 billion fake profiles. Fake accounts, according to Meta's definition, are accounts that were created to mislead, with malicious intent or to represent non-human beings or non-existent organisations. The dynamics of actions against fake Facebook accounts around the world are demonstrated on the Figure 4.

The problem is not limited to fake accounts, which are used, among other things, to disseminate untrue or distorted information, manipulation, and fakes. It is much more global and complex, as evidenced by statistics on the level of concern about the use of the Internet to mislead users, violate human rights and destabilise society. Figure 5 displays the ranking of concerns about the use

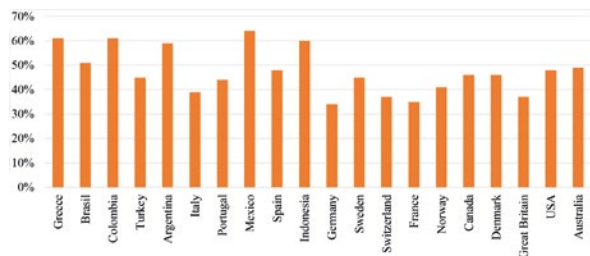


Figure 2. Using social media as a source of news. Source: compiled by the authors based on Statista (2024b)

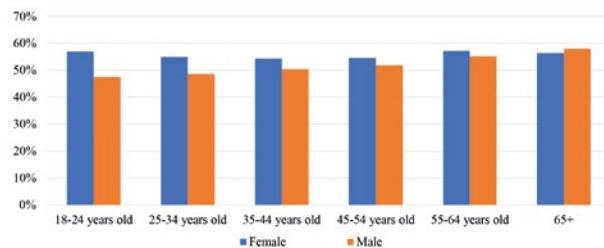


Figure 6. Concerns about incorrect information online. Source: compiled by the authors based on Statistics Canada (2023).

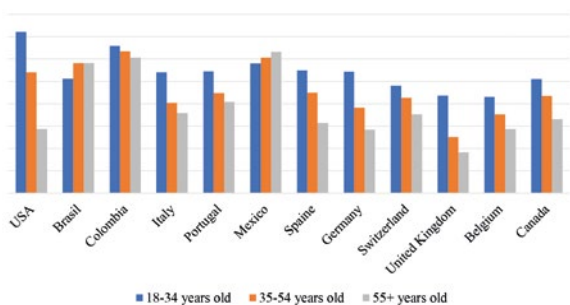


Figure 3. Level of trust in news on social media among age groups. Source: compiled by the authors based on OECD Going Digital Toolkit (2024)

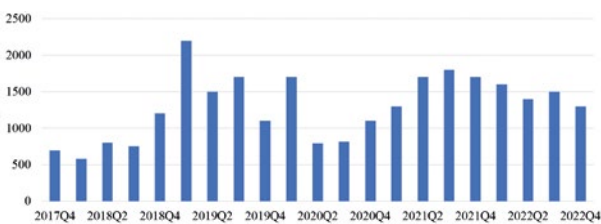


Figure 4. Actioned fake accounts on Facebook worldwide from 4th quarter 2017 to 4th quarter 2023 (in millions). Source: compiled by the authors based on Statista (2024a).

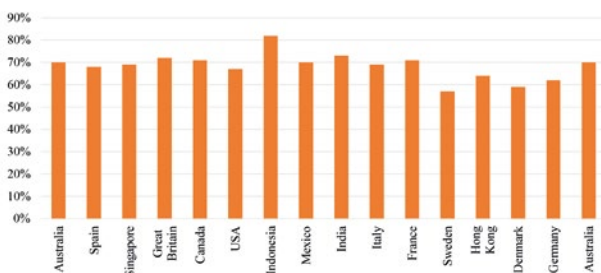


Figure 5. News consumers who are concerned about the spread of false information on social media in selected countries worldwide as of March 2023. Source: compiled by the authors based on Statista (2023)

of the Internet to spread incorrect information online by country (as a percentage of a country’s total population).

Figure 6 shows the distribution of concern regarding the use of the Internet to disseminate incorrect information online by age and gender.

It is also worth noting that the problem of using the Internet and social networks for (destabilisation of society, propaganda, and violation of human rights) was considered by Duffy *et al.* (2020), Roozenbeek & van der Linden (2021), Omar *et al.* (2024), Ren *et al.* (2023), Nistor & Zadobrischi (2022). Fundamental efforts towards understanding, conceptualising, and diagnosing problems in the information environment were carried out in the period 2020-2023. Significant contributions were made by First Draft, Computational Propaganda Project, Data and Society, Statista, Vibrant Information Barometer, and many other organisations, which devote their efforts to the analysis of misinformation and incorrect information circulating on the Internet and in social networks in particular. The situation can vary dramatically from region to region, and in regions such as Central Asia, it can be specific, which is justified by the current fundamental changes associated with overcoming the colonial past and, at the same time, the use of these countries as a platform for propaganda and manipulation by China and Russia.

3.2. Media space in Kazakhstan

In January 2023, the total population of Kazakhstan was 19.5 million. Of these, according to the data of the report by Kemp (2023), 17.73 million are active Internet users, and the Internet penetration rate in the country was 90.9%, which is one of the highest in the region. Figure 7 shows the level of digitalisation of the population in 2021-2023, which is a strong indication of the active use of internet access and social media.

Over the 10 years 2013-2023, the number of internet users grew from 10.9 million to 17.7 million, which is a fairly strong argument for assessing the impact that the internet and, in particular, social media has on the population of Kazakhstan. In January 2023, there were

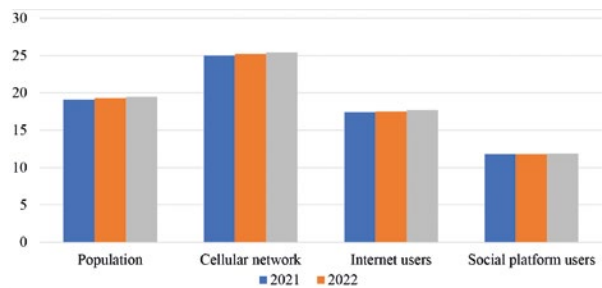


Figure 7. Key digitalisation indices. Source: compiled by the authors based on Kemp (2023)

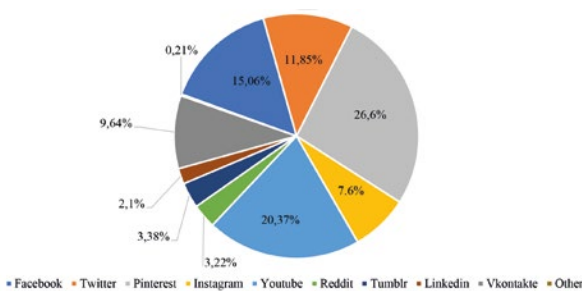


Figure 8. Social media web traffic for 2023. Source: compiled by the authors based on Kemp (2023)

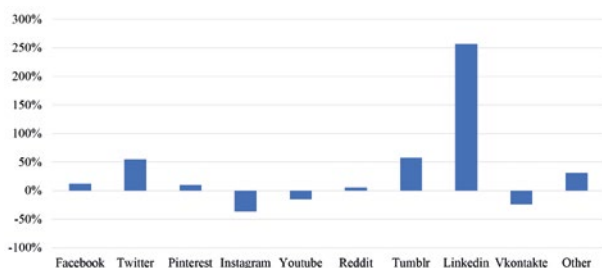


Figure 9. Change in social media web traffic over the period 2022-2023. Source: compiled by the authors based on Kemp (2023)

11.85 million social media users in Kazakhstan, equivalent to 60.8% of the total population, of whom 11.05 million were aged 18 and over, equivalent to 86.3% of the total population of that age. Of the users in Kazakhstan, 56% were female and 43.5% were male. Figure 8 shows the distribution of users according to the popularity of each social network.

At the same time, it is worth noting that although the statistics on the popularity of certain social networks fluctuate greatly from year to year, the trend of a decline in the use of V Kontakte (by -24.2% in 2023) is relatively stable, which is part of the general pattern of outflow from Russian and pro-Russian Internet resources and social networks. Figure 9 shows the changes in web traffic of social networks for the period 2022-2023.

These graphs show a slight, but stable growth in the spread of Facebook media platforms. The presented data demonstrates how widespread and popular social networks, in particular Facebook, are in modern Kazakhstan. Accordingly, the analysis of the impact of information disseminated on Facebook on the behaviour of users is relevant and appropriate. Numerous studies devoted to the consumption of information from the Internet and, in particular, social networks indicate that the information provided in social networks actively and successfully competes with official journalistic publications offline, and sometimes even surpasses them, including in the level of trust among consumers (Burnashev, 2015; Turdubaeva, 2018). At the same time, the issue of dissemination of incorrect information, especially intentional, is particularly acute, given the impact of such information on the behaviour and psycho-emotional state of users. The problems of increasing media literacy, control over the quality and truthfulness of information, and compliance with ethics on the part of content providers also become important issues.

Following the data presented in the Vibrant Information Barometer 2023 (VIBE) report (2023), since 2022, Kazakhstan's media market has become particularly saturated with "alternative media" – Telegram channels, TikTok communities, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. Young and middle-aged users are particularly focused on social networks to get information on a variety of topics, from current news and geopolitics to explanations about certain phenomena of reality (such as pandemics, international conflicts, and exchange rates). As the main source of information, the Internet simultaneously reduces the level of control over messages and publications, providing a wide space for fakes, misinformation, incorrect information, and Internet fraud (Abdrakhmanov *et al.*, 2024).

The Kazakhstan government was funding media on the Internet in an attempt to gain the attention of content consumers and strengthen information security, but this approach proved ineffective, giving rise instead to propaganda resources and overly obvious pro-state approaches to content creation. At the same time, VIBE notes the continued growth of interest in Internet sources of information and the creation of instruments of interaction between the state and citizens in this area (eotinish.kz, dialogue, egov.kz are the most representative examples). These resources, as well as platforms in social networks, often become an effective tool for defending human rights, rapid communication and solving acute problems of the residents of Kazakhstan. In addition, social media content caused several real changes, such as the reduction of illegal public procurement or the resolution of corruption scandals.

Given the existence of the mobile version of Facebook, people are becoming more and more active on this platform, demonstrating tendencies to get involved in volunteer and charity activities, discussing topical issues, and solving several acute social problems (Kovalchuk, 2024; Ronzhes, 2023). However, it is necessary to note the lack of sufficiently high-quality tools and techniques of personal data protection, which, in addition to controversial mechanisms of state blocking of undesirable content, creates dangerous precedents that threaten freedom of speech and the right to receive information, and somewhat hinders the creation of really high-quality alternative media in social networks. Regarding security, it is also worth noting that Kazakhstan has a special law that is designed to guarantee the protection of personal data, but in practice, there are regular problems with its application (Burnashev, 2015; Turdubaeva, 2018). There are occasional mass leaks of personal information, both commercial and, for example, medical, the use of personal data without the consent of their owners (as in the case of the leak of “Yandex” in March 2022, and Kazakhstan Mail (“Kazpost”) in the summer of 2022). The situation is worsened by low media literacy, which not only encourages trust in fakes and their active further dissemination but also facilitates the hacking of Facebook users’ pages for further use in disinformation of the population or propaganda.

3.3. Misinformation and disinformation

It should be immediately noted that inaccurate or false information is usually divided into two categories: inaccurate or untrue information (Misinformation) and disinformation (Disinformation). First Draft’s “Information Disorder” provides distinct definitions of information disorder, its consequences for democracy, public order, and reduced trust in the media and public institutions, and also gives clear characteristics of different types of incorrect information, which they divide into three types, of which the first two, namely Misinformation and Disinformation, are of interest (Trust but verify, 2022). The former is defined as “information conveyed without the intention to deceive”, while the latter is “incorrect information conveyed with the intention to deceive”. Both types of information have a thin line that in practice is quite difficult to distinguish, so misinformation is quite often perceived and characterised in the same way as disinformation, and in certain situations, they both have the potential to contribute to disorder, which can also be understood as contributing to the disruption of the integrity of information in political systems and discourse.

As defined in the same study, the category of misinformation includes the following categories of information:

fake content, untruthful content (created on purpose), fraudulent content, manipulative content, and fabricated content. The Oxford Internet Institute coined the term “computational propaganda” and defines the practice as “a collection of social media platforms, autonomous agents, and big data aimed at manipulating public opinion” (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). This study broadens the understanding of the threats that exist in the online space and clearly distinguishes between automated and human forms of online manipulation, as well as the intentional and unintentional acts of creating incorrect information. More importantly, this study provides insights into how behavioural, psychological and communication research not only provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of incorrect information on social media users but also what countermeasures can be most effective.

Difficulties in defining misinformation and incorrect information and calculating their boundaries affect various aspects, ranging from the legal sphere (the lack of clear terms and evaluation criteria significantly complicates legal control and measures to regulate such information) to measuring the impact of such information on the consumer (on emotional and mental state, behavioural) (Kerimkhulle *et al.*, 2023). Since the study addresses “incorrect” information, it is worth clarifying its definition. According to the definition given by Jeangène Vilmer *et al.* (2018), incorrect information is information that contains errors, false statements, or inaccuracies. Such information can be disseminated unintentionally or to mislead. Its causes may be incorrect or insufficient data sources, errors in data collection, deliberate actions, incorrect interpretation or transmission of information, human factors, technical problems or failures in information processing and storage systems. In other words, both Misinformation and Disinformation can be considered incorrect.

According to the opinions of numerous researchers, incorrect media information can have a great impact on various aspects of Kazakhstan’s society and can be marked by high levels of public safety, especially when they relate to health, security and human rights (as, for example, in the case of fake news about the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed to the spread of the virus and increased morbidity), can be used to manipulate public opinion and influence political and social processes (with the consequent increase in the incidence of the disease), and can be used to manipulate and influence political and social processes (with the consequent increase in the incidence of the disease).

In the context of studying the impact of incorrect information on users from Kazakhstan, it is worth citing the results of the study of Almaty Management University, which showed that 37% of respondents accuse the media of deliberately spreading false or exaggerated informa-

tion, 45% consider the media to be biased and partial, and 48% consider the media to be tools for supporting ideology rather than informing people (Vibrant Information Barometer, 2023). However, the peculiarities of the functioning of media resources do not contribute as much to the spread of incorrect information as social networks, which are characterised by minimal moderation. At the same time, VIBE researchers argue that the mass media of Kazakhstan, as a rule, has no such widespread deliberate spread of misinformation, as the editorial boards are officially responsible for fact-checking. The situation is the same about hate speech, where social networks are far superior to the media. As an example, the case of blogger Murat Abdild (111 thousand subscribers in TikTok, 40 thousand Instagram) received a 4.5-year prison sentence under the article “Incitement of social, national, tribal, racial, class or religious discord” (Kazakhstan: Famous blogger, 2022)

Scandals related to the topics of national enmity, national language, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and other geopolitical situations are quite common on Facebook. Publications of a political and geopolitical nature often have serious consequences. They do not necessarily have to be straightforward, such as in the case of publications: “Arabs destroyed Kazakhs through religion” (2023), the author of which “predicts” that Arabs will conquer Kazakhs through various religious movements, “Prerequisite for turning Kazakhstan into one of the provinces of Russia” (2023), the author of which used manipulative techniques to incite nationalism, “They want to turn our country into a testing ground” (2023) or the video “Russia sent troops to Kazakhstan” (2022), which had 730 thousand views.

Such publications as “Kabyrbek’s teacher was arrested” (2023), which stated about the arrest of a famous Kazakh imam in Saudi Arabia (condemning the actions of the Saudi authorities), video “Israel attacked Turkey” (2023) (condemning the actions of the Israeli authorities, fuelling hysteria about the possibility of World War III), video “Israeli children in cages” (2023) (condemning the actions of the Palestinian authorities, fuelling the possible World War III hysteria), “Egyptians deliver water and food to Palestinians in Gaza” (2023) (fuelling hysteria about the possibility of World War III), video “The United States has planned to move to the territory of Ukraine” (2022) by Belarusian blogger Yuri Uvarov, in which he talks about the US plans to create a colony in Ukraine in case of a massive eruption in Yellowstone National Park and which gathered 2.4 thousand views, 1.9 thousand comments and 1.1 thousand reposts (condemnation of US actions, exacerbation of distrust regarding the motives and geopolitical decisions of the West), post “Russia single-handedly defeats more than 50 countries of the world” (2023) (distortion of the real geopolitical

situation in the region and its consequences), and even the video “Children are sold to gay couples in Belgium at a special fair” (2019) – a fragment of a Russian central TV channel “NTV” programme, filled with false and propagandistic information about the “decaying West”.

More blatant attempts to manipulate public opinion and stir up the situation can be traced in such publications as “Putin had a heart attack” (2023), “Kadyrov died” (2023) (which collected 4,632 reposts and 3,279 saves), the post “Detainees are being tortured! 5 people had their stomachs and veins cut open” (2023). At the same time, it is worth noting that Kazakhstan lacks effective mechanisms to protect against this kind of content, as the creators and disseminators of misinformation and unverified information bear no responsibility for their actions. Some figures also claim that the state-funded project stopfake.kz is engaged in refuting only those facts that they are ordered to refute (Vibrant Information Barometer, 2023).

According to the Vibrant Information Barometer 2023, ethical standards are one of the most significant problems in Kazakhstan’s media sector. Although there are journalism courses (offered at most regional universities) and training seminars from organisations such as Legal Media Centre (“Правовой медиациентр”), Adil Soz (“Адил соз”), Internews (“Интерньюс”), Foundation for Turkic Speaking Journalists (“Фонд тюркоязычных журналистов”), Medianet (“Медианет”) and others, ethical standards are not observed even in the official media, let alone content-makers on social networks. The creators of such content often ignore facts for the sake of creating a picture that would attract maximum influence, often despite the accuracy and truthfulness of the data. On the other hand, content makers and bloggers cover information that is often silenced by the official media (such as the detention of LGBTQ+ activists), which often attracts users to them and reduces the critical reception of the content created. There is an acute lack of the institution of reputation, which is particularly evident given how quickly all ethical violations are forgotten.

Along with additional codes, the Constitution of Kazakhstan guarantees the right to freedom of speech and access to information, however, in practice, there are constant incidents of violation of the rights of journalists and content-makers. For example, there is the case of bloggers Margulan Boranbai and Danat Namazbayev, who criticised Russian policies and actions, including the invasion of Ukraine, on Facebook. As a result, both were sentenced to five-year prison terms (allegedly for inciting ethnic hatred and calling for the overthrow of the constitutional order). Social networks often serve as platforms for communication, free discussion of pressing issues in education, culture, science, and media trends (Symonenko *et al.*, 2019; Otrishko & Kharkevych, 2024).

The role of activists and internet activists is increasing, and people listen to their opinions more readily than to government representatives (Shynkar & Levchenko, 2023). The most covered topics are political and social issues, as well as the formation and expenditures of the state budget (Vibrant Information Barometer, 2023). Independent sources more often show more obvious and harsh criticism, especially when analysing the activities of akims (heads of local self-government), and spending of local budgets. However, they are forced to rely on alternative sources of information, and because of this, cases of unintentional distortion of data are not rare. Complicating the situation are laws and initiatives adopted in Kazakhstan, such as the initiative of the Ministry of Defence, proposed in 2022, which envisages criminal liability for discrediting the army and disseminating false and destructive information during “special periods”.

Another important problem is that much of the content on social media lacks any analysis or contextualisation, leaving audiences with a limited understanding or misunderstanding of events. On Facebook, there are too few analyses of events, rallies, elections, and referendums. The use of multiple sources of information, reliance on facts and objectivity in content production is perceived as the norm, but non-professional content producers very rarely follow these recommendations. In addition, a detailed study of the impact of incorrect information on Facebook on user behaviour based on the analysis of specific precedents allowed us to formulate several consistent conclusions.

This is primarily a threat to public safety. As an example, fakes about COVID-19 disease are still circulating, which contribute to the spread of the virus and significantly complicate any measures aimed at controlling and suppressing the disease (Roozenbeek *et al.*, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2022). For example, in March 2021, a video circulated on Facebook claiming that worms were found in medical masks (Worms found in, 2021), which had a marked impact on the use of masks as preventive measures and consequently negatively affected the overall incidence of the disease in the population. Furthermore, amidst a rather popular fake that COVID-19 vaccines shorten male lifespan by 24 years on Facebook, a video about the Coronavirus supposedly “choosing men” gained popularity (7 million views) (Coronavirus chooses men, 2020). Here it is worth adding that in the latter example, in addition to the direct distortion of understanding of the principles of virus functioning (which led to a marked distortion in the perception of the virus by men and women, weakening the vigilance of the latter), propaganda of gender inequality was also disseminated, which stimulated not only imbalance in social relations, but also religious unrest (the comment that the army of the Antichrist will have more women,

and the coronavirus contributes to this selection) became quite popular.

Amid the high popularity of social networks as platforms for volunteer and charitable activities, fraudulent publications frequently appear on Facebook (Tkachenko *et al.*, 2024). Despite the awareness of users of the network about such precedents, Kazakhstan police continue to record appeals regarding the transfer of funds to such fake disabled people. Among fraudulent posts are, for instance, “Pay off the loan and be happy” (2023), which urged to use the services of a financial organisation supposedly helping to repay debts, or “President Tokayev signed a decree on credit amnesty” (2022) (a news report that Tokayev allegedly signed a decree on loan write-offs for socially vulnerable populations), which incentivised Kazakh citizens to transfer money to fraudsters or to take out new loans in the hope of possible write-offs.

Rather actively the methods of providing false, incorrect, or manipulative information are used to vilify political opponents, activists, volunteers, or civic figures, such as in the case of the publication “A Thick-faced Man Who Called for shooting people” (2023) directed against Toktar Aubkarirov (and accusing him of allegedly calling on the authorities to shoot people). “Who is the director of “Oyan Kazakh”?” (2023), a video accusing the director of “Oян қазақ” of being a member of a dangerous religious movement, the post “Sanzhar Bokayev is a manipulator” (2023), aimed to tarnish the reputation of Sanzhar Bokayev post “Mittal gave a bribe of 100 million dollars” (2023), about an allegedly successful attempt to bribe Mashkevich by an Indian investor, post “Marat Beketaev testifies against Baybek” (2023), which claims that the caught ex-minister Marat Beketaev testifies against Baybek. Such publications cause considerable damage to the reputation of the people mentioned in them, as they cannot be refuted and challenged on the same principles as full-fledged and official media. Even if a retraction is published afterwards, the social media algorithm will not always allow all those who read the original post or watched the video to see the retraction. Furthermore, due to the difficulty of identifying the legal status of authors of media content, it is difficult to hold them accountable, and consumers of this content often prefer to believe a person who is trustworthy or has a certain authority, even if this author does not provide concrete evidence for claims. For a visual comparison of the mass spread of incorrect information and reactions to it, let us give examples of the three most popular social networks: Facebook, TikTok and Instagram (10 news items from each social network were selected).

Table 3 presents examples of fake and incorrect messages on Instagram.

The highest number of reactions (likes) recorded in these examples reached almost 19 thousand, which is not

No.	Post name	Contents	Statistics
1	A video of JAY-Z rapping about Tokarev has appeared online	JAY-Z, one of the most famous rappers in the world, decided to try himself in a new genre and read out a rap about the president. The lyrics of the song caused a wave of emotions in social networks. Some users thought that JAY-Z would soon become Kazakhstan's new ambassador for cultural relations with the United States.	Likes: 18185
2	What is happening in Kazakhstan?	Answer: all sorts of things, but not what you're being led to believe in this video.	Likes: 1455
3	Tips for running a fake	The post gives tips on running a fake account; what, whose and how many photos are better to publish, what name to come up with, tips on subscriptions, page content, and how to gain the trust of the interlocutor.	Watches: 1099
4	What does the vaccine do	The account publishes content about health, recipes, the dangers of vaccinations, and dangerous types of cookware.	Watches: 1606
5	Vaccination is destroying people	Materials about health, folk medicine	Watches: 6366
6	It is said that the explosion in Kostenko is based on last year's explosion in Spain		Likes: 591
7	Angry Mittal spilled the truth	Angry Mittal spilled the truth	Likes: 492

Table 3. Examples of fake and incorrect posts on Instagram of Kazakhstan. Source: compiled by the authors based on Rain of worms in China, 2023; Rally, 2023; Ren *et al.*, 2023; Ronzhes, 2023; Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2021; Roozenbeek *et al.*, 2020; Russia sent troops..., 2022

No.	Post name	Contents	Statistics
1	Kadyrov died	Video about Ramzan Kadyrov's death	Saved: 3279 Reposts: 4632
2	Check-in if you are from UzunParis) which "aul" should I do next?	A video of a European settlement is shown instead of Uzunagash	Likes: 47200 Saved: 3572 Reposts: 858
3	Girl in hijab	"Thought I would live in Kazakhstan all my life, but after hijab ban, all while ludomania, suicides are rampant in the country..."	Likes: 8542 Reposts: 153
4	The Republic of Kazakhstan has banned payment by mobile transfers	The Republic of Kazakhstan has banned payment by mobile transfers	Likes: 22800 Reposts: 11900
5	Mass	Mosquitoes with numbers launched by Bill Gates are found in Kazakhstan	Likes: 10400 Reposts: 46
6	In Almaty, Sairan was filled with water	The video is from another part of the world that is passed off as Sairan. A joke video	Likes: 41000
7	News of YarKz	Kazakhstan will increase the cost of public utilities	Likes: 11700
8	Rally	The video shows the crowds of people who supposedly came to the rally	Likes: 605 Reposts: 123
9	Scammers claiming to be from Kaspi Bank are calling me		Likes: 1702
10	UFO in the Republic of Kazakhstan	The video claims to be genuine	Likes: 41600

Table 4. Examples of fake and incorrect messages in TikTok Kazakhstan. Source: compiled by the authors based on Russia single-handedly..., 2023; Sabitov, 2016; Sampat & Raj, 2022; Sanzhar Bokayev – manipulator, 2023; Scammers claiming to be..., 2022; Shynkar & Levchenko, 2023; Solomons, 2024; Statista, 2023; Statista, 2019; Statista, 2024a; Statista, 2024b

No.	Post name	Contents	Statistics
1	Kabylbek's teacher was arrested	False information about the arrest of the famous imam of Kazakhstan Uchitel Kabylbek in Saudi Arabia (“Қазақстандағы танымал имам Қабылбек ұстаздың Сауд Арабиясында ұсталғаны туралы жалған ақпарат”)	Likes: 444 Comments: 129
2	Putin had a heart attack	Information on Putin's heart attack, However, no official information was given. Therefore, false information (“Ресей президенті В.В.Путиннің инфаркт алғаны туралы ақпарат. Дегенмен бұл туралы ресми ақпарат берілмеді. Яғни бұл да жалған ақпарат”)	Likes: 458 Comments: 105
3	Coronavirus chooses men		Watches 717000
4	The king of Tramadol	Nikolai Karpov, who calls himself the “King of Tramadol” in the Western region of Kazakhstan posted a video in which he addressed his flock, or rather directly to the authorities of Kazakhstan – the President, the government, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the KNB, the Prosecutor General's Office and the people of Kazakhstan.	Watches 1100
5	Kadyrov died	Video about Ramzan Kadyrov's death	Saved: 3279 Reposts: 4632
6	Rain of Worms in China	A video of what appears to be a rain of “worms” in China's capital city. The short video used as evidence shows cars and tarmac covered in something resembling earthworms or caterpillars, with people passing by taking cover under umbrellas.	Watches 1500
7	The United States has planned to move to the territory of Ukraine	A video of Belarusian blogger Yuri Uvarov, in which he talks about US plans to create a colony in Ukraine in case of a massive eruption in Yellowstone National Park.	Watches 2400 Reposts: 1900 Comments: 1100
8	Russia sent troops to Kazakhstan		Watches 730000 Comments: 133
9	Israeli children in cages	A video of children sitting in a cage was massively circulated on social media on 8 October. It claimed that they were abducted Israeli children	Watches: 550 Comments: 14

Table 5. Examples of fake and incorrect Facebook posts in Kazakhstan. Source: compiled by the authors based on (Coronavirus chooses men, 2020; Israeli children in, 2023; Kabylbek's teacher was, 2023; Kadyrov died, 2023; Putin had a heart, 2023; Rain of worms, 2023; Russia sent troops, 2022; The king of Tramadol, 2023; The United States, 2022).

an exception, but rather an overestimate of the average reaction of users (from 5 to 15 thousand reactions on average) and refers to entertainment content. Let's move on to the evaluation of the intensity of reactions in the social network TikTok (Table 4).

As can be seen from the table, the number of reactions in TikTok is quite high, with an average of 10 to 20 thousand likes. The maximum reaction is observed on the post evoking patriotic feelings (47.2 thousand likes), which is a rather common intensity of reaction (even within the presented table, one-third of all the selected posts had a rate of over 40 thousand likes). Table 5 presents ten Facebook posts selected for the same principle.

Compared to TikTok, Facebook is significantly inferior, but keeps pace, and in terms of policy issues, surpasses Instagram in terms of the number of reactions from

users and consumers of content. Since entertainment content, even incorrect and fake content, does not have such a significant impact on the behaviour of information consumers, it is possible to conclude the influence of Facebook as an active and effective disseminator of incorrect information.

Based on the observations generated during the implementation of this study, there are legitimate conclusions that fake information on Facebook elicits more reactions and has a significant impact on information consumers for several reasons. First, Facebook has one of the largest audiences among social networks, which increases the reach of fake information. Second, Facebook's algorithms help increase user engagement by showing content that they tend to like, comment on, and share, even if it is not true. Third, Facebook is often used for news and information, so users may be more susceptible to fake

news. Compared to TikTok and Instagram, where content is often more graphic and shorter, Facebook provides longer and more detailed posts, which may increase the likelihood of users being exposed to fake information. It is also relevant that TikTok and Instagram are more susceptible to new, fast-moving trends and switch from one news item to another too quickly, providing an unstructured stream of data on both socially sensitive topics and entertainment content, whereas Facebook content is often more static and stable and therefore easier for readers and viewers to comprehend and can have a more lasting effect on the user. To illustrate the comparison, a comparison can be made between the positioning of the news about Kadyrov's alleged death on Facebook and on TikTok (Kadyrov died, 2023). The news on TikTok lasted only 24 hours and received a large number of reactions and reposts solely because the video was uploaded to Facebook. In addition, 80% of the views of this video are dated after 24 hours on TikTok and belong to the Facebook platform, while comments on the news are found on the page with the publication even three weeks after the date of publication.

The above examples are only part of the overall picture of the use of Facebook as a platform for the intentional and unintentional dissemination of incorrect information. However, they can demonstrate the most characteristic trends, which are as follows: Facebook posts generate high interest and active reaction from readers and viewers, including further sporadic and uncontrolled dissemination of such information (to the point where it is no longer possible to find the source). Facebook posts have a fairly high level of trust among social network users, even when they lack evidence and data sources (as evidenced by high rates of reposts and reactions to such data); incorrect information on Facebook is effective in smearing the reputation of specific individuals, political and social figures, to inflame the situation, to manipulate information about the current geopolitical situation. But the most important, in the context of this study, is the behavioural indicators of consumers of such content, which include loss of trust in certain figures, volunteer and charitable foundations (and, accordingly, a decrease in the level of their financial support from the ordinary population), aggravation of the psycho-emotional state of Kazakhs and their attitude to other peoples, countries, events, disregard for the rules of safety of life activities (such as in the case of safety measures to prevent Coronavirus infection). Thus, we can reasonably conclude that incorrect information on Facebook has a high and specific (mostly negative) impact on user behaviour in the example of Kazakhstan.

As noted earlier, the level of media literacy among Kazakhstan's residents remains inadequate. Users frequently share fake messages without considering the

possibility of fact-checking or the consequences of their actions, and they are prone to believing conspiracy theories and charlatans, especially if these figures enjoy significant popularity on Facebook (Lewinski, 2015; Apakhayev *et al.*, 2017). The Vibrant Information Barometer (2023) report, based on the Internews 2021 survey, reveals that the average media literacy score among Kazakhstanis was 16.2 out of a possible 35 points. Although media literacy has been introduced into the school curriculum as an optional subject, the lack of teacher qualifications remains a serious challenge. While there are fact-checking platforms like StopFake.kz in the country, they are neither widely known nor frequently used, partly due to their perceived alignment with state interests. Facebook users in Kazakhstan can identify blatant fakes and manipulative techniques, but their critical thinking rarely extends to reflecting on their own biases and behaviours. Improving media literacy in Kazakhstan requires strengthening educational initiatives, addressing teacher training gaps, and ensuring that anti-disinformation platforms operate transparently and appeal to a broader audience. Encouraging critical thinking and making fact-checking tools more accessible can help bridge the gap.

The influence of false information on specific demographic groups is significant and varies depending on their habits and preferences for consuming digital content. For instance, older adults, who are among the most active users of Facebook in Kazakhstan, are particularly susceptible to misinformation due to limited media literacy and a tendency to trust authoritative-sounding sources. They are often targeted with health-related conspiracy theories or political propaganda that aligns with their concerns. On the other hand, younger users, who dominate platforms like TikTok and Instagram, frequently encounter brief, sensationalist content that they rarely verify due to the fast-paced nature of these platforms. Their exposure to manipulated trends or half-truths can shape their views on social and political issues without encouraging critical evaluation.

Thus, a wide array of problems related to the circulation of inaccurate information on Facebook and its control, influence on user behaviour and the level of media literacy becomes evident.

4. Discussion

The research publications of interest in this study were those related to the creation, dissemination, and impact of incorrect information on social media.

Duffy *et al.* (2020) considered the dissemination of incorrect and fake information from the perspective of the impact of this activity on the social well-being and

attitudes of a social network user. The impact of such information and the activity of its dissemination on interpersonal relations has not been studied practically before and is quite interesting, both from the position of assessing the mechanism of dissemination of incorrect information and the emergence of motivation to recognise it, and the impact on the formation of the institution of reputation, user behaviour in the network, and social well-being in the country. This study is based on 12 focus groups, which did not include representatives of the Central Asian region, and therefore the data obtained can be applied only partially, considering local specifics and such identified characteristic problems of the Kazakhstani media space as low-level of responsibility and reputational losses, low media literacy, lack of decent alternatives in obtaining information and lack of critical thinking and fact-checking skills.

Omar *et al.* (2024) devoted a study to the disclosure of external and internal factors of spreading incorrect and fake information among users of social networks and analysed fake news awareness efficiency. Among the studies, aspects of dissemination and prevention of incorrect information dissemination are considered to be quite popular topics, although much less attention is devoted to the study of factors that negatively affect such dissemination in the very process of dissemination. B. Omar *et al.* studied the motivation of users and other factors of the online environment, as well as the influence of awareness of fake news on the intensity of its dissemination. The authors revealed the dominance of the attractiveness of the online environment over the motivation of users themselves (namely, trust in the social network itself, norms of reciprocity and the attractiveness of creating social ties), as well as the fact that high awareness of fake news negatively affects the intensity of dissemination of such incorrect information, which correlates with the results of this study and indicates the urgent need to increase media literacy among the population of Kazakhstan and the introduction of a culture of fact-checking among Facebook users.

A study by Altay *et al.* (2022) can be considered as a certain addition to the previous one, as it aimed to analyse the effect of the reputation institution on the desire to spread incorrect and fake information. As a result of four experiments, the authors concluded that fear of personal reputation is indeed a very significant factor in preventing the spread of incorrect information in social networks. However, it should be noted that such phenomena as “reputation rating” and “reputation institute” are characteristic of American and European media spaces, whereas the post-Soviet countries, several Asian and Middle Eastern countries, including Kazakhstan, do not have such a tradition and are still on the way to the formation of these phenomena, so the

results obtained in the experiment are not applicable in the space under study. On the other hand, this study can serve as a model to be followed in the process of creating the institution of reputation in the countries of the Central Asian region, including not only positive aspects but also shortcomings and weaknesses of this tool, which will be appropriate to adapt according to the objective features and needs of the region.

Ren *et al.* (2023) studied a specific aspect of the dissemination of incorrect information, namely so-called “Conspiracy Theories”. The authors claim that, as study experiment results determined, people consciously participated in the dissemination of conspiracy theories for the sake of satisfying social motives, such as receiving many “likes” and other reactions. And the more socially active such theories are, the greater the chance that a social network user will share them, even if they are fully aware of the untruthfulness or manipulateness of the information provided. The authors argue that people are overly sensitive to receiving social feedback, which is especially characteristic of social network users, where manifestations of such feedback have quite real and measurable embodiments (number of followers, likes, dislikes, reactions, reposts). The authors also argue that the more distant from reality (real news) and the more fantastic such theories are, the more easily they resonate and the more reactions they receive, which stimulates their further spread. Although the topic of this study seems somewhat specific, its findings and induced data can be used to measure the level of “improbability” and “falsity” of incorrect information with further prediction of its spread based on these parameters, and, accordingly, to create the most effective tools for preventing such spread in the future (not only on the example of conspiracy theories).

Another significant impact of this study was made by Izenkova *et al.* (2022), studying the correlation between the level of trust of the population of Kazakhstan to different sources of trust (including social networks) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the course of the study, the authors found that information about the disease presented by celebrities or influencers received a significantly lower level of trust (2.08 points) compared to information from social networks, including Facebook (2.29 points). According to the researchers, the effectiveness of “useful” and constructive communication in social networks involving celebrities has certain limitations, and at the same time, the lack of trust in almost all sources of information can undermine the efforts of health professionals to communicate important information through platforms such as Facebook, which is very important to consider not only in this narrow context but also in the context of using social networks as a platform for informing the population and

disseminating information. The authors conclude that information campaigns in social networks can only be successful if trust in information sources is increased and the target audience is segmented according to their trust in that particular social network. The conclusions of this study are critical, among other things, because they raise topical issues of Kazakhstan's media space with full consideration of its specifics and the peculiarities of local users of social networks, and touch upon issues of maximum importance for society (namely, the pandemic of coronavirus infection, which is a problem for all countries of the Central Asian region). The findings of the study by the researchers can be used in further development of the topic of this study and significantly complement it.

The above-mentioned studies provide a fairly substantial base, considering the results of reports and narrowly focused studies, appeal to real historical precedents, but at the same time demonstrate several characteristic shortcomings, primarily consisting in the insufficient study of the specifics of the Central Asian region and the nuances of thinking of the local population, as well as such peculiarities as insufficient media literacy and the absence of the institution of reputation. Thus, these studies should be used only as qualitative and truly fundamental material for further study of the issues raised, which require updating and clarification by the specific features of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the impact of incorrect information on Facebook on user behaviour (using Kazakhstan as an example) carried out within the framework of this study identified the most characteristic trends. Thus,

publications on Facebook not only attract high interest and active reactions of readers but also cause sporadic and uncontrolled dissemination of information, which searches for the source almost impossible. Information on this social platform is believed even without proof and citation of sources, as evidenced by high rates of reposts and reactions. The effectiveness of incorrect information on Facebook is manifested in the denigration of personalities, politicians, and public figures, as well as in the manipulation of information about the geopolitical situation. The peculiarities of behavioural indicators of consumers of such content include loss of trust in news sources and content makers, decrease in financial support for volunteer and charity organisations, aggravation of the psycho-emotional state of citizens, as well as changes in their attitude towards other peoples, countries and events, low level of media literacy and low value of the level of reputation institute, which users are not interested in improving. Thus, we can reasonably conclude that incorrect information on Facebook has a high and predominantly negative impact on user behaviour, using Kazakhstan as an example.

Understanding the impact of Facebook on user behaviour and public opinion can contribute to the development of effective methods of managing the information environment and the formation of a healthy information society. The study aimed to analyse the dissemination of inaccurate information through Facebook and its impact on the behaviour of users of the social network has been fully achieved, but additional research could also be conducted on this topic, for example, to explore opportunities to build a reputation institute, use social media more effectively to disseminate critical information and formulate ways to more effectively improve the media literacy of users and the social network.

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