BRIF: Needs Analysis

Index

Introduction

Researchers have found many false personas on X powered by Chat GPT[1], AI Girlfriend is making money[2], according to the WEF, misinformation is going to be the biggest threat to global economy for the next 2 years[3], the Guardian highlighted romance scams generated by AI[4], Spain is working on new rules for influencers and vloggers[5], 30% of young people in France believe that AIDS can be transmitted by kissing a seropositive individual[6], TikTok has been fined by Ireland for breaches of children's data privacy[7], a CCDH's recent report[8] shows how easy it is for AI tools to create and spread electoral disinformation… Long story short, technology fosters extremely fast-paced change as well as a wide variety of potential threats on a daily basis.

The above topics can be scattered throughout the education sector and most countries have invested in developing Media and Literacy Education (MLE) skills. Since 1992, its definition has evolved. Under this umbrella term we find the ability to cross-reference information, the understanding of the motivations behind a message, the ability to avoid scams, the capacity to keep our data safe and private but also empathy building skills to better understand how thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions are activated by

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[1] Researchers Identify False Twitter Personas Likely Powered by ChatGPT, Justin Hendrix, <https://www.techpolicy.press/researchers-identify-false-twitter-personas-likely-powered-by-chatgpt/>

[2] Amouranth's "AI girlfriend" earned $34,000 in revenue during its first 24 hours of sales, Sam Gutelle <https://www.tubefilter.com/2024/01/05/amouranth-ai-girlfriend-sales-revenue-first-24-hours/>

[3] These are the biggest global risks we face in 2024 and beyond, WEF, < https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/global-risks-report-2024/>

[4] If you think only lonely middle-aged women 'fall for' romance scams, you might be the perfect victim, Becky Holmes, < https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/09/romance-fraud-scam-common-perfect-victim-money>

[5] New Spanish Royal Decree regulating influencers – Spanish government releases first draft < https://mse.dlapiper.com/post/102iw7j/new-spanish-royal-decree-regulating-influencers-spanish-government-releases-fir#page=1>

[6] Les idées reçues des jeunes sur le sida, IFOP, < https://www.ifop.com/publication/les-idees-recues-des-jeunes-sur-le-sida/>

[7] TikTok fined €345m over children's data privacy, Tom Gerken & Liv McMahon, < https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-66819174>

[8] https://counterhate.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/240304-Election-Disinfo-AI-REPORT.pdf

informational content[9]... In short, a wide array of skills, behaviors and processes that need to be developed. Hence the difficulty for policymakers, states, and education institutions to tackle it jointly.

NGOs, agencies, national/regional policymakers, education providers, media, companies and supra-national entities are all involved in the MLE game. What they do takes various forms, from short projects aiming to fix one specific issue to longer campaigns and programs with curricula rooted in formal education (Be Internet Citizens, School with Class, Lie Detectors...). Within the compounds of the sole European Union, we find a wide variety of policies and action plans tied to Media Literacy: EDMO, EMIL, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the European Democracy Action Plan, the Digital Education Action Plan, the Code of practice on disinformation... to name a few[10].

The dichotomy between an always-rising interest in MIL (Media and Information Literacy[11]) and a lack of common ground isn't the only difficulty the sector faces. Evaluation, assessment, and measurement are all limited. Whilst reports are flourishing and good practices overflowing the sector, it is extremely tedious if not impossible to find quality evaluation work in this field. The reasons behind this lack of M&E work lies within the complexity of the themes involved: measuring theoretical skills, competencies and behavioral changes is all but a simple task. The realities of the evaluation world are of no help: from the financial stability needed (both from a project as well as the independent evaluation standpoint) to potentially lackluster specific results[12] - the sector learns from evaluations, but they do not help the ones that produce them with fundraising. This is further complicated by the realities behind the wide array of audiences involved in MIL trainings – the same evaluation model can't be applied to a crowd of elderly individuals in rural Germany and young unemployed people in the suburbs around Paris.

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[9] Digital and Media Literacy Education: navigating an ever-evolving landscape, <https://tacticaltech.org/news/project-launches/mlce_research_report/>

[10] Mapping of the media literacy initiatives, landscape and industry in the context of Better Internet for Kids <https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/documents/167024/7193698/MLA_mapping+exercise_sd19022024.pdf>

[11] Media and Information Literacy, Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/media-and-information-literacy>

[12] What have schools and libraries learnt from SMILES? <https://smiles.platoniq.net/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/233/Project_SMILES_-_Effectiveness_and_experiences_of_the_SMILES_Workshops_en.pdf>

Whilst most initiatives focus on young people, with the elderly getting increasingly more attention, vulnerable crowds outside of traditional compounds often are the most difficult to reach. Whilst this is by no means MIL-specific, there is an underlying finesse needed when working with vulnerable populations where language skills can be the first barrier to entry, where some of the more top-level issues and lack of skills don't really fit in the compounds of their reality and where we lack statistics and information regarding the reality of lived experiences. Crudely, what it often means are projects imposing needs onto an audience and trying to fix them in ways that might not necessarily be adapted.

These disadvantaged communities are often mis- and underrepresented which in turn undermines their trust in media[13]. Education is a crucial factor in the integration processes of people from migrant background, the same ones who are most mis and underrepresented in the media. It is however far from proven -yet often expected- that vulnerable populations suffer more from dis and misinformation, polarization, extremism, or scamming. Yet, disadvantaged social groups systematically experience worse health outcomes than more advantaged social groups[14] and models show that education has the highest effect on individuals' attitudes towards disinformation[15]. The BRIF consortium has decided to tackle this topic by gathering organizations from France, Italy, and Spain, each working on specific Media Literacy skills for audiences which share certain critical characteristics: poorly educated, low income, mostly of immigrant origins, high sensitivity to ethno-racial discrimination, religious/ethnic community-based reasoning, and high levels of distrust towards public authorities.

In Italy, Pianoterra works in Naples to support families who live in conditions of socio-economic precariousness. The association carries out projects in Naples, Castel Volturno and Rome, focusing on mother-child relationships. Its work stems from the idea that improving a child's life from the beginning helps prevent health and development issues linked to poverty and marginalization.

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[13] Overview and key findings of the 2023 Digital News Report, Nic Newman <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/dnr-executive-summary>

[14] Health Misinformation Exposure and Health Disparities: Observations and Opportunities, Brian Southwell, Jessica Otero Machuca, Sabrina Cherry, Melissa Burnside, Nadine Barrett, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-071321-031118>

[15] Who is afraid of fake news? Modeling risk perceptions of misinformation in 142 countries, Aleksi Knuutila, Lisa-Maria Neudert, Philip N. Howard, <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/who-is-afraid-of-fake-news-modeling-risk-perceptions-of-misinformation-in-142-countries/>

In Spain, Verificat is a non-profit fact-checking platform based in Barcelona, dedicated to political and scientific fact-checking and to education for the critical consumption and production of information through its various Media and Information Literacy initiatives. Verificat's activities mainly focus on fact-checking and digital media literacy programs in and out of schools, and has done work with other vulnerable groups, like older adults for example. Superaccio is a non-profit that uses sport and educational activities as a vehicle to collaborate with young migrant newcomers in Barcelona who, for various reasons, have been mistreated by the "system", or have not had the opportunity to know or develop the necessary tools to be able to adapt.

In France, Square in a non-profit organization working on fostering digital critical thinking skills for youths in low-income neighborhoods surrounding Paris. In partnership with Google.org, Square has worked since 2020 on an experimental project aiming at developing young participants' ability to think for themselves on social media, despite narratives fostering resignation, withdrawal, and discriminations.

This needs assessment aims to contribute in better understand the specific context of each countries' state of play in terms of vulnerable populations and MIL challenges. It will dig into MIL practices in Europe, what seems to work for the different project partners and what documented issues their audiences currently face. Building from that knowledge, we intend to get a better sense of the lived experience, trends, interconnexions and specific needs of each of our audiences to best tailor pedagogical content suiting their requirements.

We will first try to better understand the vulnerable target audiences, their socio-economical contexts at large and their relationship with information (1), before diving into their Media Literacy knowledge and skills by working on existing materials, declared needs from educators and participants as well as group-work from the consortium (2).

Understanding the target audiences

Dealing with vulnerable populations often leads individuals to jump to conclusions or to have a biased perspective of their situation. We aim to get a better sense of what happens in each country, what is similar and what differs through the below review to ascertain what priorities and intervention techniques should be put in place. It is important to note that the reality of the data available differs from country to country. As a rule of thumb, the analysis will always try to be as precise as possible considering the three main target audiences of the project: Naples, Barcelona, Paris area. This might cause the analysis to jump from a global population perspective to a city-wide one depending on what data is available.

Vulnerability factors

School enrollment data

Education plays a key role in the relationship we hold with misinformation, and our reactions towards false information at large. The three countries mostly share similar characteristics when it comes to their young and foreign origin population. It is extremely delicate to tackle the issue of vulnerable audiences due to their plurality as there is no 'one size fits all' approach available here with factors of vulnerability taking many forms - poverty, origin, education level...-.

Italy for example fosters about 860 000 foreign students (about 10% of the global student population) [16]. We can also see that about 16% of young Italians aged 18-24 hold no diploma, do not study, or are not involved into education. Young people coming from immigrant families are at risk of dropping out of school at an early age (1/3 after middle school), mostly due to low income[17].

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[16] Italy: School enrollment for 2021-2022 open, mandatory for all regardless of stay permit, ANSA, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/29600/italy-school-enrollment-for-20212022-open-mandatory-for-all-regardless-of-stay-permit>

[17] Children born to immigrants: 1 in 3 drops out after middle school, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/13148/children-born-to-immigrants-1-in-3-drops-out-after-middle-school>

According to the Departament d'Educació[18], there are 14.5% students from migrant backgrounds enrolled in Barcelonian schools (40.391 students). Most of them are aged 6-10 (19.1%), followed by 11-15 (15%), decreasing at the ages of 16-20, before picking up again between 21-25. Since 2018, the city has seen an increase in the number of foreign students that reach tertiary education, along with a global increase of foreign students overall[19].

In France, most (above 98%) of the 6-17 population in Ile-de-France attends school, dropping after 17 to 61% and to 12% after 25. There are currently 1403 REP and 519 REP+ schools in the area[20], out of 4 851 and 2796 in France respectively. REP establishments stand for "priority education networks" and aim to reduce the gap between students in priority geographical schools and the rest[21]. Said gap is however far from closing, given that disparities are increasing in big cities' neighborhoods[22]. Whilst in the general population, 18,3% holds no diploma, and 44,3% have a higher education degree[23], the numbers are higher for those of migrant origins, with almost 38% of African origin holding no diploma, 40% for Asian origin, 32% for American origin and 27% for European origin[24].

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[18] Ensenyaments de règim general, Departament d'Educació, <https://educacio.gencat.cat/ca/departament/estadistiques/estadistiques-ensenyament/visualitzacio-dades/regim-general/>

[19] Population aged 15 or over. By level of education attained and nationality, Statistical Institute of Catalonia, <https://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=eep&n=14492&geo=mun%3A080193&col=2&lang=en>

[20] Etablissements de l'éducation prioritaire, data.gouv.fr, <https://data.education.gouv.fr/explore/dataset/fr-en-etablissements-ep>

[21] La politique de l'éducation prioritaire : les reseaux d'éducation prioritaire REP et REP+ <https://eduscol.education.fr/1028/la-politique-de-l-education-prioritaire-les-reseaux-d-education-prioritaire-rep-et-rep>

[22] En 15 ans, les disparités entre quartiers, mesurées selon le revenu, se son accentuées dans la plupart des grandes villes, Mathilde Gerardin, Julien Pramil, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6680439>

[23] Dossier complet, Région d'Ile-de-France, INSEE, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=REG-11#tableau-FOR_G2>

[24] Niveau de diplôme des immigrés et des descendants d'immigrés par origine géographique, INSEE, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4187349>

Unemployment and Poverty

Unemployment and poverty seem higher for the audiences targeted in the three countries, highlighting another factor of vulnerability and social exclusion. The Campania area had the eighth-highest youth unemployment rate in the EU in 2021, reaching above 34% of 15-29[25] with Naples often topping this type of lists in Italian cities.

In the meantime, out of the 62,414 unemployed in Barcelona (2023)[26], 14,299 don't have the Spanish nationality. Unemployment (both Spanish and foreign population) is higher in Nou Barris (22%) and Ciutat Vella (22.9%). The Enquesta Sociodemogràfica de Barcelona (ESDB) 2020[27] provides data on the risk of poverty or social exclusion of each district. Ciutat Vella has the highest percentage (49.2%), followed by Nou Barris (43.7%), 16.2% of the Ciutat Vella population is at risk of extreme poverty, the highest percentage, again, followed by Nou Barris with 8.5%. These are also the districts that have the highest number of parents facing difficulties in meeting the needs of their children.

In the harshest areas in Ile-de-France, only 1/3 inhabitants are currently employed[28]. The 15-64 employment rate is 64% globally, going down to 45% in QPV (priority neighborhoods), followed by respectively 14% unemployment rate and 31%. Furthermore, the part time jobs in QPV represent 22% of the jobs overall, against 13% for the global population. In Ile-de-France the unemployment rate of 15-24 reaches 23%, (against 10,8% for 25-54 and 10,1% for 55-64).

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[25] Unemployment statistic at regional level, Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics_at_regional_level>

[26] Estadística i Difusió de Dades, Ajuntament de Barcolna, <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/estadistica/catala/Estadistiques_per_temes/Treball_i_teixit_producti u/Treball/Atur_registrat/nacionalitat/bcn/actual/nacioct.htm>

[27] L'Enquesta Sociodemogràfica de Barcelona (ESDB) 2020 radiografia una ciutat amb menys pobresa que la del 2017, Ajuntament de Barcelona, <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/2022/04/16/lenquesta-sociodemografica-de-barcelona-esdb-2020-radiografia-una-ciutat-amb-menys-pobresa-que-la-del-2017/>

[28] Dans les quartiers les plus en difficulté, seulement un habitant sur trois en emploi, INSEE, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4296737>

Comparisons with the general population

Vulnerable neighborhoods show similar school completion rates between natives and immigrant students[29] in Barcelona. There are strong disparities between public (state schools) and private schools as well as a higher failure rate among students coming from immigrant backgrounds.

Academic success is heavily tied to several protection factors ranging from family support to peer and community support[30]. This phenomenon is shared by the three countries concerned by this project. The fact that teachers, families and peers understand the difficulties that the vulnerable students experience —either because they share them or because they can acknowledge them— shows a positive outcome in their academic paths. Empathy comes a long way in the development of individuals. Yet, students can't always rely on their families as a support system (either due to language barrier, issues of unemployment and poverty, or other factors...), in either of the three countries, leaving young people in complex situations, especially when coming from a migrant background.

Whilst the leap towards this vulnerability impacting digital wellbeing and relationship to information is not well-documented, although international reports have shown that they exist for refugees (highlighting censorship, cyber threats, data protection risks, disinformation and privacy harms)[31], the prevalence of a variety of online harms (including a recent research from Safe Online[32] showing that up to 20% of children were victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse in African and Asian countries) on young people specifically indicates a global necessity that needs to be addressed.

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[29] Domingo, A., & Bayona, J. (2021). Trajectòries migratòries i rendiment escolar als barris de Barcelona. Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica, 2021, vol. 67, num. 1, p. 73-102.   https://doi.org/10.5565/rev.dag.608

[30] Cano-Hila, A., Sánchez-Martí, A., & Massot-Lafón, M.. (2016). Factores de riesgo y protección de las trayectorias académicas: Voces y miradas del alumnado inmigrante en el contexto del área metropolitana de Barcelona, España. Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud, 14(2), 1371-1387. https://doi.org/10.11600/1692715x.14233290415

[31] Connecting with confidence, managing digital risks to refugee connectivity, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CWC-Managing-Digital-Risks-To-Refugee-Connectivity-Report.pdf>

[32] Disrupting Harm, End Violence Against Children, < https://www.end-violence.org/disrupting-harm>

Relationship with information and misinformation

Information consumption

In Europe, TV still holds the crown for the most used media to access news (71%)[33]. Social Media rank third overall (37%), with young people (15-24) more likely to use them (59%). The level of education has a documented impact on news relationship, with 49% of the higher educated selecting online press/news platform against 29% of the lower educated respondents. There also seem to be a trend where the higher educated access news about a broader range of topics than the lower educated respondents.

If we look through a country lens, French and Spanish crowds tend to use online press less than their Italian counterparts to access news (37% and 35% against 46%). This phenomenon looks similar for social media, with France and Spain being at 30% and 29% respectively, whilst Italy sits at 36%. TV still ranks highest for the overall population, above 74% for the three countries.

Only 9% of Europeans said that they 'never' access news online, showcasing the importance of the digital realm in Europeans relationship with information. They also tend to access news through shared content the most, underlining the importance of community shared content and exchanges, which we can only expect to be higher for individuals in vulnerable communities, where online realms can play a pivotal role on social inclusion.

Regarding social media choices, whilst Facebook and WhatsApp are still topping the game, 15–24-year-olds much prefer Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, Snapchat and X.

In terms of trust, Public TV and radio stations outrank any other media source. YouTube and other video platforms appear further down the line, only trusted by 16% of users, and influencers even lower, with only 9% of respondents trusting them.

Whilst there are unfortunately very little-known surveys about the specific audiences of this project, the consortium sheds light onto anecdotal evidence gathered by Square with their Ile-de-France's audience in 2023, showing a very different story. 91% of the respondents to Square's surveys use social media as their primary source of information, a number much higher than global surveys usually end up with. Paradoxically, 80% of

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[33] Media & News Survey 2023, Eurobarometer, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3153>

them do not trust information on social media and 32% declared getting their information only through social networks. This level of distrust isn't limited to social media, as it extends to journalists (90%), influencers (80%), scientists, and institutions. Focus groups led in Naples and Barcelona showed similar results, with a heavy distrust towards social media, but a higher level of trust towards more traditional media.

Whilst some of the numbers above can help give an overall sense of the realities from lower-educated and poorer audiences, it is essential to note that the realities can vary greatly. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism[34] has worked on how misrepresentation and underrepresentation of disadvantaged communities undermine their trust in news and found a chronic bias in reporting in Brazil, India, the UK and the US, that lead to heavy skepticism towards news media. More importantly, they highlighted that identities are immensely complex, and none of the groups studied were monoliths, but that better representation of marginalized communities goes a long way and asks of news outlets and individuals to commit into correcting and confronting errors and disparities, going beyond simple recognition of the issues. This phenomenon echoed the sentiments of the BRIF consortium members and their exchanges with young participants and their educators.

In the end, the only seemingly consensual metrics appear to be the increased amount of information accessed, the rise of social media use, and a declared lack of trust for social media content, especially so for young people.

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[34] News for the powerful and privileged: how misrepresentation and underrepresentation of disadvantaged communities undermine their trust in news, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news-powerful-and-privileged-how-misrepresentation-and-underrepresentation-disadvantaged>

Vulnerability to misinformation

Exposure to misinformation is nothing new, campaigns to disinform and propaganda can be traced back to the Roman Empire[35]. What has changed is mostly its quantity and ease of access. Indeed, the automation of data-driven advertisement and websites generated by AI[36] coupled with the informational warfare and algorithmic personalization tend to foster the rise and spread of mis and disinformation[37]. Whilst exposure doesn't necessarily translate to vulnerability, it is nonetheless a worthwhile data point towards potentially harmful situations.

IDMO (Italian Digital Media Observatory) worked on a survey involving 1079 secondary school students over 14 as well as 325 of their teachers[38]. Their perceived level of disinformation ranks high, especially on social media (traditional media gathering more perceived trust). Overall, it seems that most respondents felt that being exposed to disinformation at large is a very likely if not bound to happen risk. In France, 51% of French internet users declared having seen an information they deemed false or unreliable in 2021[39]. In Spain, past reports have shown that both younger users and low-income individuals turn out to be more vulnerable to disinformation[40].

Despite vulnerable audiences again proving difficult to evaluate or focus on at large, glimpses show that all the pieces for them to be more at risks to forms of misinformation are there. With parts of the populations in each country showing distrust towards information all the while being conscious of the risks of exposure in their daily lives, we

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[35] Izabella Kaminska, A lesson in fake news from the info-wars of ancient Rome, Financial Times, 17 January 2017

[36] NewsGuard a désormais identifié 125 sites d'information et d'actualité générés par l'Intelligence artificielle, et a développé un cadre pour définir les sources d'information et d'actualité non-fiables générées par l'IA, NewsGuard, <https://www.newsguardtech.com/fr/press/newsguard-now-identifies-125-news-and-information-websites-generated-by-ai-develops-framework-for-defining-unreliable-ai-generated-news-and-information-sources/>

[37] Désinformation en ligne : ce que dit le rapport Bronner, Vie publique, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/en-bref/283196-desinformation-en-ligne-les-preconisations-du-rapport-bronner>

[38] IDMO – Digital Media Literacy Gaps and Needs, IDMO, <https://www.idmo.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IDMO-Digital-Media-Literacy-Gaps-and-Needs_EN_final_compressed.pdf>

[39] 82% des internautes protègent leurs données personnelles en ligne, Louis Viard-Guillot (Insee), <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6475020>

[40] Estudio de los factores condicionantes de la desinformacion, Roberto Gelado-Marcos, Belen Puebla-Martinez, <https://laboratoriodeperiodismo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Estudio-desinformacion-laboratorio-de-periodismo.pdf>

can expect the situation to be the same for audiences that might show higher levels of distrust, have less access to quality digital skills and literacy trainings, and are more dependent on online platforms to communicate. These groups are indeed often mis-represented, or straight up victims of disinformation campaigns (migrant and foreign people disinformation being the most common), as highlighted during focus groups where participants mentioned being victims of the Barcelona Patrol group on Twitter, for example.

Whether disinformation is an actual cause for danger for each specific subgroup is hard to prove -most studies about the topic focused on either COVID or elections-, but there is no debating the increase of social media use, the wide variety of inequalities, the discriminations and their impact on digital skills, socio-economic integration, religious and identity factors. There is space and need for media literacy skills to at least navigate online realms, and at best participate in counter-narratives.

Media Literacy Knowledge and Skills

MIL background and perceived knowledge

Background

The three countries have developed programs focusing on Media Literacy:

- Italy has at its disposal the National Digital School Plan (PNSD) to promote digital skills and include them in the curricula of schools of all levels;
- France published it's 2023-2027 strategy for digital education, with a focus in mind: preventing schools from being left out when it comes to digital transformation and make use of the tools and resources it creates to reduce help reduce inequalities and support students' success;
- Spain has published its national strategy Digital Spain 2026, focusing on education on digital skills and addressing the digital divide in and out of schools, digital rights, digital transformation of the economy and digital infrastructure.

Italy defines the finale profile of digital competencies as "communication technologies to research and analyze data and information, to distinguish reliable information from those that need deepening, checking and verification and to interact with different subjects in the world" and incorporates the digital citizenship dimension. Without getting into the difficulties of making this type of change happen (from training teachers to finding the time within schedules to access to technology), it is evident that it is limited to young people going to school and following it actively.

Thus far, MIL has been scattered in France, facing the same issues as its neighbors: a lack of a proper curriculum, a lack of dedicated time to work on media literacy topics, a lack of teacher training (or time to do so), especially in most vulnerable schools (REP and REP+). A recent report looked at the critical thinking situation in the country[41] noticing that MIL topics often happen at the discretion of regional education sectors and are often pushed behind more pressing issues.

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[41] Développement de l'esprit critique chez les élèves, Ministère de l'Education, >https://www.education.gouv.fr/developpement-de-l-esprit-critique-chez-les-eleves-341106>

There is an abundance of MIL resources available in the three countries[42]. Unfortunately, they are unequally split across territories. In France for example, Ile-de-France centralizes most of the initiatives, while rural and vulnerable neighborhoods are left behind, once again showcasing inequalities of treatment embedded within reality.

Perceived knowledge

When asked whether they could detect false information, 51% of the participants to a recent IDMO survey[43] stated that they can against 45% stating that they can't. Ironically, when asked whether their colleagues would be able to do so, 13% stated yes, 54% maybe, and 33% no, self-perception thus ranking way higher than the perception of others. This isn't exactly news in the MIL sector (and experiences from the project partners highlighted the exact same phenomenon).

The Spanish Ministry of Education's study[44] on Media Literacy showcased the difficulty for participants to recognize an opinion from a fact, a long-lasting problem highlighted in 2019 by PISA showing that less than half of 15-year-olds in OECD countries can accurately distinguish a fact from an opinion in online sources.[45]. When tasked with discerning false from true headlines, results were similar, with 41.2% failing to identify a COVID-19 related false headline, and 46.8% failing to recognize one about immigration.

When asked about the key figures able to help you build media literacy skills, teachers ranked way lower than media educators and trained teaching staff. This can be a sign of participants being under the impression that media literacy revolves around skills that their teachers might not have, or that journalists might be biased towards traditional media. This phenomenon is further amplified by teachers not feeling confident to provide media literacy workshops without prior training. The reality of vulnerable audiences

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[42] Mission « flash » sur l'éducation critique aux médias, Communication de M. Philippe Ballard et Mme Violette Spillebout, <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/content/download/592450/file/Communication%20MI_flash_e%CC%81ducation_critique_aux_me%CC%81dias.pdf>

[43] IDMO – Digital Media Literacy Gaps and Needs, IDMO, <https://www.idmo.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IDMO-Digital-Media-Literacy-Gaps-and-Needs_EN_final_compressed.pdf>

[44] Estudio de alfabetización mediática en centros de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, <https://www.libreria.educacion.gob.es/libro/estudio-de-alfabetizacion-mediatica-en-centros-de-educacion-secundaria-obligatoria_181935/edicion/pdf-180572/>

[45] Students who are taught how to detect bias are more likely to distinguish fact from opinion, OECD, <https://oecd.org/coronavirus/en/data-insights/students-who-are-taught-how-to-detect-bias-are-more-likely-to-distinguish-fact-fom-opinion>

increases this phenomenon tenfold: due to a heavy distrust towards authorities, it takes time to build relationships strong enough for this audience to show interest and open up. Members of the consortium have fostered long-lasting relationships with local actors to ensure the best delivery of trainings possible and solve some of these issues.

Square's most recent survey[46] with vulnerable groups in France further confirmed this gap between declared competencies and ability. For example, on the ability to distinguish a fact from an opinion, 85% of the respondents said they could, but averaged 4/8 when tested. The graphic below shows young people declared skills on disinformation issue, once again, all the metrics are above 50%, with young people stating prior to the workshops that they can decrypt information, are able to identify false information and recognize conspiracy theories.

Graphique 1 : compétences déclarées des jeunes sur des questions de désinformation
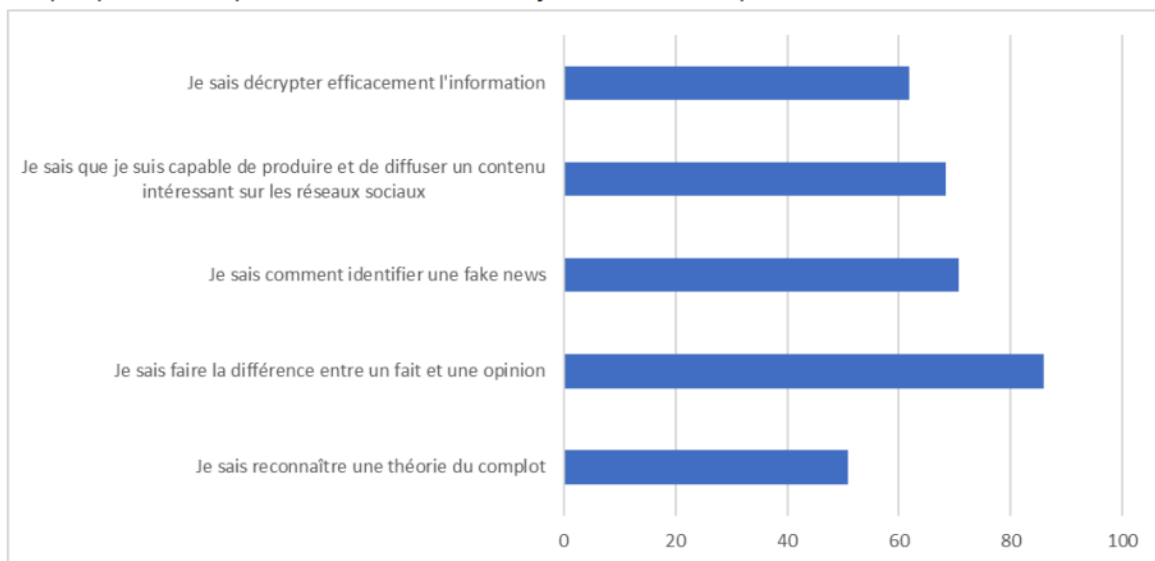
Lecture : 62% des jeunes déclarent savoir décrypter efficacement l'information en amont de l'atelier.

The three countries share similar characteristics in that they all have understood the theoretical importance of Media Literacy work in and out of school and put in place strategies to achieve this goal. Yet, they face similar challenges: overcrowded school

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[46] Square's most recent evaluation work is in currently undergoing the publication process and will be added to this document when available. It spans over 2023 and 2024, looking at 120+ participants aged 18-25 from Parisian suburbs. The numbers are analyzed by an ex-JPAL/EEP expert, and the report is being written by Melisa Basol, member of the Cambridge Social Decision-Making Lab.

curricula, lack of dedicated teacher training time, geographical inequalities, lack of centralized curricula... The situation is even worse for vulnerable audiences, where this type of work often falls behind more pressing matters (learning the language, finding a job, catching-up on the annual curricula...).

The countries also share a belief that MIL should be a dedicated subject matter, with professionals specializing in it and being able to support the education sector with this type of work. With the variety of themes MIL can uncover, from sociology, psychology, mathematics, education science, journalism... expecting untrained individuals to be able to tackle them all in one go is unrealistic.

Initial study and previous initiatives

Rare are the unanimously agreed upon facts about MIL initiatives. Tailoring them to specific needs of the audiences they target is one of them[47]. Similar type of work has been done before[48] and highlighted important aspects to consider when creating materials for different crowds. It is pivotal to avoid fostering any form of "paralysis"[49] in front of too broad topics and issues to fix, but instead to focus on creating action-oriented curricula that help solve complex problems, designed with the participants, not only for them. This in turn can help fix some of the issues surrounding the attention paid by the participants during trainings. By being involved from the get-go, it helps them keeping focused on the task at hand.

Despite the difficulty to compare successful MIL initiatives -once again depending on multiple socio-economical and geographical factors- most of the literature highlights the importance of relevant examples, relationship with the area, use of lived experience, adherence to reality, engagement with students' beliefs... Some feedback also underlines the importance of focusing on multiple environments and topics, and not be limited to the compound of one space, software, or device. This must be balanced to find

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[47] Mission « flash » sur l'éducation critique aux médias, Communication de M. Philippe Ballard et Mme Violette Spillebout, <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/content/download/592450/file/Communication%20MI_flash_e%CC%81ducation_critique_aux_me%CC%81dias.pdf>

[48] An Assessment of the Needs of Educators and Youth in Europe for a Digital and Media Literacy Education Intervention, Tactical Tech, < https://tacticaltech.org/news/insights/insights-digital-media-literacy-educational-resources-report/>

[49] Linn Friedrichs – What is the digital literacy curriculum we need? Re:publica 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH7e24b0MfU&ab_channel=re%3Apublica>

the best angle to tackle different topics. For instance, debating the Israel-Palestine conflict in France with mostly Muslim crowds yields very little results as participants are often over-invested in a specific viewpoint.

Likewise, encompassing other literacy skills (writing, reading...) might prove useful to help integrating young people that might have trouble doing so (as is the case for Superaccio's participants), or help them better understand the society they are now evolving in, or even simply helping them work on their language skills.

Focus groups highlights

Understanding the misinformation context

Educators and young people interrogated seem to give similar answers when asked what misinformation mean to them: those are information where origin and intention are hidden or hard to find. Depending on the groups, knowledge about such topics can vary, with some of the young people having never heard about dis and misinformation or MIL before. Yet, there seem to be an understanding about the importance of context: discussions pointed out the disinformation on hate speech from institutional entities (police forces, institution, administration...), showing a visible fracture and issues of representation at large.

Most of the young people we talked to have a natural understanding that there is false and manipulative content out there and they often feel confident in identifying it, whilst not necessarily being able to do so.

There exists a divide in terms of online wellbeing, with half of the young people feeling relaxed, easy, and confident about being online, with the other half feeling overwhelmed and skeptical.

Previous experience on misinformation, social media, hate speech...

In general, these themes come up here and there, but not often in an institutionalized and focused way. Previous experience of youths about hate speech or discrimination happens often (victims of the Barcelona Patrol group, riots in French suburbs...).

Therefore, whilst traditional news sources (TV...) appear to be perceived as more trustworthy (except for the French crowd where distrust transcends media) there is a

prevailing skepticism often associated to the influence of politics and the authenticity of the information.

Necessary digital skills

When asked about which skills they'd be interested to learn and what they deem necessary to navigate online safely, video creation, digital content creation came up the most during the focus groups.

Internet scams are also a topic of key importance for them, along with cyberbullying. Both are rising issues, especially for younger audiences, and need to be embedded within MIL work.

Results of our initial co-design meeting

Partners of the consortium gathered in January 2024 to begin reflecting on future materials for the project. In a very concrete manner, the goals where to:

1) Consider which aspects of digital literacies are most appropriate to bring to young people in disadvantage contexts.
2) Identify the most urgent pedagogical objectives that can be achieved for the target groups.

Through reflecting on previous initiatives, what works and what doesn't, partners focused on creating **engaging** educational content in **informal** settings to fit the realities on the ground and literary issues.

Two key areas were highlighted: the importance of **game-based** activities to keep the attention of the participants and involve them directly in the training. **Media-based** activities, where participants make use of the tools themselves, work on creation and involvement on themes that matter to them.

It is not surprising that identifying common trends and priorities has proven difficult. If we take the specific contexts at hand, the age-range of the participants vary, so does their socio-economic background, their literacy levels oscillate between barely being able to speak the language to being almost digitally literate... Despite these issues, we tried to explore themes, trends, and issues to create custom-made solutions that can fit three different socio-economic, cultural, and technological contexts in Spain, Italy and France.

Among the variety of themes discussed (empathy, disinformation, AI, isolation, information war, hate speech, manipulation, scamming, biases...) three made the cut.

1. **Hate speech** (racism, xenophobia, discrimination, prejudice, bias) – a key theme for audiences facing varying forms of discriminations in their daily lives on and offline.
2. **Social media isolation** – disadvantaged audiences tend to be out of school or out of employment, and thus have a lot of time on their hand, making them particularly vulnerable to the dangers of the attention economy. This phenomenon is amplified for those from migrant backgrounds who might have very limited social circles in place.
3. **Disinformation** at large and its role in fueling bias, prejudice, and isolation – with some of the audiences being from migrant backgrounds, false narrative about foreign people, migrants stealing jobs, habits... impacts them directly.

The content also follows the inoculation theory[50], where exposure to forms of disinformation and fallacies is used to prebunk individuals for when they face them in real-life contexts.

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[50] Jon Roozenbeek et al. ,Psychological inoculation improves resilience against misinformation on social media.Sci. Adv.8,eabo6254(2022).DOI:10.1126/sciadv.abo6254

Conclusion

Building media literacy materials from the ground up is never an easy task. In a sea of various resources, focusing on topics ranging from biases, identification of specific discourses, digital skills and competencies, empathy building, media-content creation, for audiences with different initial skill levels in different countries can seem daunting.

This work aimed at highlighting similar realities and issues faced by vulnerable audiences in France, Spain and Italy. It showed that they shared characteristics, especially in understanding the need for quality MIL education created **for** and **with** these very specific audiences, too often left behind. It highlighted the need for more funding into targeted research for disadvantaged audiences. With MIL being heavily item-specific (if we take for instance self-esteem or critical thinking levels in relation with vulnerability to disinformation or conspiracy thinking) and extremely audience-dependent, it is critical to understand each sub-audience to ensure that dedicated training takes place and serves a targeted purpose.

From scamming to cyberbullying, passing by a will to better understand media creation and literacy, we have also identified various degrees of discrimination, stereotyping, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation issues in our target audiences. They share a heavy distrust towards social media content and information at large, are often mis-represented in media, discriminated and coming from lower-income and lower-educated backgrounds. In these complex settings, the online landscape can appear both like a shelter as well as a stressful place. Participants understand very well this online dichotomy and should be supported in making the best out of what the digital world has to offer, all the while being backed in developing resilience and skills to fight against its harms and dangers.