



Coping Strategies Against Information Disorder

# Guidelines for first-liners



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# Chapter 5

## Culture & Education

## Target group

These guidelines are targeted towards so-called “first-liners”. “First-liners” is an overarching term for all people in direct contact with people who are vulnerable to information disorder, focused on groups in vocational education. Examples of people who fall under the umbrella term are: educators, teachers, trainers, youth counsellors and advisors, social workers and youth workers. This is a non-exhaustive list, however. The scope of this project also includes other people working in the educational, social or health care sector.

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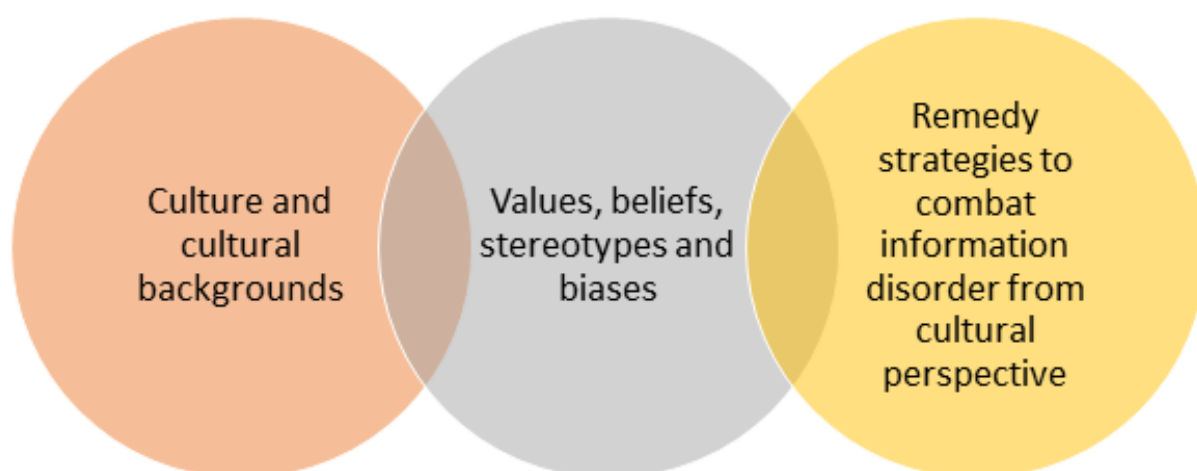
## 5.1 Introduction

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Culture plays a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions, opinions, and attitudes towards various issues. It provides a framework for interpreting information and events, and it affects how people respond to new information. Cultural norms can influence what is considered acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, as well as what is deemed credible or unreliable information. The permeability of information, which refers to how easily information can spread and be accepted within a society, depends highly on culture. The key factors in information permeability refer to collectivist and individualist reasoning, group dependence, trust in authorities, communication styles, power distance, attitude towards change, language and semantics and so on.

Hence, understanding the cultural context is essential when analysing the spread and effect of mis- and disinformation as well as when designing strategies to combat information disorder and relevant education tools. Effective interventions may require tailoring approaches that consider specific cultural norms, values, and communication patterns.

As travelling and migration across communities and borders have become integral elements of our societies, it is important to stimulate people to explore cultures and values. This is decisive not only for full-right civic participation but also for better self-understanding and perception. In all areas of life, it is vital to discern the traits that can hold a community together and the traits that mark the individual value of each member of the society.



## 5.2 Culture and cultural backgrounds

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Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been defined and interpreted from various perspectives throughout human history. Two of the most widespread definitions refer to it as:

The complex of knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society, by Edward Tyler, dating back to 1871.

The collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others, by Geert Hofstede from the 1980's.

Culture in the ancient sense of the word was represented as culture of the spirit, philosophy, or learning. In the Middle Ages, the concept drifted more towards religion, only to return to antique again during humanism and the Renaissance. It was not until the 19th century that the term culture starts to be used in the sense of cultivation, and culture came to be understood as a complex entity, encompassing knowledge, belief, art, heritage, law, morals, customs, and all the other skills and habits that person had acquired as a member of society.

Cultures may change over time as people are exposed to new knowledge (travel opportunities), beliefs, and norms. It is not possible to encompass all of the diverse cultures that make up our world. The cultures have visible and invisible elements. Visible are symbols, practices, artefacts, language, traditions, etc. But hidden cultural elements like values, assumptions, beliefs are representing a major part of cultural identities. Culture have impact on social and economic areas as: social inclusion, education, innovation, inclusion, well-being and health, and civic engagement.

Culture is socially constructed, because the culture you were raised in, the values, beliefs, attitudes, they influence the way you communicate. Every culture has its own verbal and non-verbal language. During communication, these elements complement each other, but can also be in conflict. Intercultural communication is a term referring to processes of interaction taking place in various types of situations in which the communicating partners are members of linguistically or culturally different ethnic, national, racial or religious societies. This communication is determined by the specificities of the language, cultures, mentalities and value systems of the communicating partners.

Culturally different rules influence the way members of a given culture behave in certain contexts. On the one hand, the similarities between cultures bring people closer together and make communication easier, but on the other hand, we know that differences, however small they may seem to us, distance us, because, due to their misinterpretation, they cause misunderstandings, disagreements, miscommunication and, possibly, subsequent conflicts.

When we refer to intercultural communication when individuals from different cultural contexts enter communicative situations. When these individuals interact, their mental schemas are influenced by different ways of thinking, patterns of behaviour, patterns of perception, different value orientations, etc. Geert Hofstede speaks metaphorically here of a "collective programming of the spirit".

On the other hand, cultural background can influence behaviour of individuals. For example, collectivist cultures prioritise the needs and aims of the group as a whole over the needs and desires of each individual. In such cultures, relationships with other people from the group and the bonds between people play a central role in each person's identity. Collectivism contrasts with individualism in which personal needs take preference.

In collectivist culture people define themselves as members of a community, decisions are based on what is best for the group, compromises, selflessness and common goals are favoured. Among these collectivism countries we can find China, Japan or South Korea along with South America countries. They are prone to sacrifice their own happiness for the greater good of the community. Collectivistic culture also influences the way people describe themselves: I am a good parent, sibling, friend. They express themselves within the boundaries of social relationships. One study found that in a collectivist culture, people posting online reviews are less likely to go against the average assessment or express emotion in their feedback.

Collectivism has a several pitfalls like social anxiety, hiding emotions, or conflict avoidance. On the other hand, collectivistic culture has a higher level of empathy than individualistic culture.

Individualism is focused on concerns and rights of the person, his or her well-being and goals. Individualism is a type of social behaviour in psychological science that emphasizes the individual over the group, and attributes like uniqueness, autonomy or individuality, personal goals, self-reliance, self-sufficiency. People from individualistic cultures describe themselves as smart, creative or kind. They are describing themselves in terms of personality attributes, or in terms of "I".

It is possible to measure collectivism and individualism via the Culture Orientation Scale. This is a 16-point scale that measures the extent to which people consider themselves as part of a group or a separate being. It also measures their views on whether they think that every member of the group is equal or whether there is inequality.

Research has suggested that individualistic and collectivistic cultures can be distinguished by four features: (a) independent or interdependent self-construal; (b) degree of importance given to personal or group goals; (c) priority of individual attitudes or social norms in guiding behaviours; [and] (d) orientation on exchange relationships or communal relationships.

Dependence on the group in collectivist and individualist societies is very important for understanding the channels for information sending, transmission, receipt and perception. Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone



is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family. Hence opinions are formed based on persons' individual judgement and the group's pressure is weak. On the opposite, collectivism pertains to societies in which people from birth on ward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. In collectivist societies, groups have overwhelming influence in the formation of individuals' opinions.

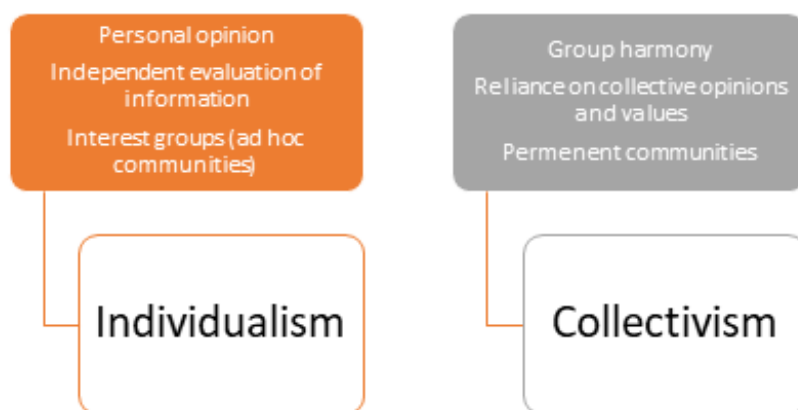
Cultures that are considered individualistic include the United States, Australia, and most European countries. Most Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and Korea, are considered collectivists.

Cultural factors can significantly influence how people respond to mis- and disinformation as well as the extent to which individuals are inclined to conform with collective norms, trust authorities, rely on established information channels, yield to community and peer pressure and so on. Certain cultural beliefs or biases may make individuals more susceptible to certain types of false information. For example, a deeply ingrained distrust of authorities may make people more receptive to conspiracy theories, while a culture that values scientific evidence may be more resistant to pseudoscientific claims. The strategies and approaches towards combatting information disorder need to consider the cultural factors to be effective.

Cultures that emphasise individualism may encourage independent thinking and a willingness to question and challenge information. People in these cultures are more likely to evaluate information independently, relying on their own analysis rather than deferring to collective opinions or authority figures. This can lead to the rapid dissemination of information within peer circles and interest groups.

On the other hand, cultures that are more collectivist may prioritize group harmony and conformity, leading to a higher acceptance of information shared by the community or social group. Information that aligns with the collective values and beliefs of the group is more likely to be readily accepted and propagated among members. This can lead to the rapid spread of information within the community.

### *Information Permeability*



## 5.3 The role of values, beliefs, stereotypes and biases

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### Cultural awareness

Cultural awareness refers to the understanding, sensitivity, and knowledge of different cultures, their customs, beliefs, traditions, and espoused cultural values. It involves being open-minded and respectful towards people from diverse backgrounds and recognising the impact of culture on individuals and communities.

Cultural misunderstanding occurs when people from different cultures perceive situations differently. Misunderstanding is a frequent part of an interpersonal conflict. The perception and interpretation of what happens around us depends on our beliefs and values, which are determined by our language, culture, and cultural background.

When we are with people who share the same language, culture, and background, there is a good chance that we can easily agree and get along well. When someone comes from a different culture, however, we may have trouble understanding them or being understood by them.

Cultural and educational policies can contribute to the development of skills needed to deal with the complexity of contemporary multicultural societies. The UNESCO and the OECD have called for a proper place for, and recognition of, art and culture in education.

Cultural awareness can help prevent misunderstandings in communication and plays a crucial role in addressing and mitigating information disorder. It empowers individuals to understand the context, be sensitive to diverse perspectives, and critically assess information. Promoting cultural awareness can contribute to a more informed, resilient, and cohesive society capable of countering the negative impacts of information disorder.

### Cultural barriers

Cultural barriers hinder effective communication due to differences in cultural ideas, beliefs, customs, etc. of people who belong to different cultures. A cultural barrier can be:

- language
- social values
- politics
- traditions
- ideas
- beliefs

- ethnic background
- religion

Combating information disorder requires addressing these cultural barriers effectively. When dis- and misinformation are intertwined with cultural narratives and beliefs the negative effects are harder to correct. Therefore, it is important to promote critical thinking and media literacy in educational environment and foster the culture of dialogue and respect.

## Stereotypes

Stereotypes are a simplistic representation of reality. They reduce people and cultures to a few familiar traits and ignore their rich diversity. Usually, a stereotype is shared by a large group of people, it is an untrue generalised belief that people have about what someone or something is like. Using stereotypes is a way how we simplify our world, but it can lead to prejudices.

Problems often start with people's inclination to generalisation. Our perception of the world is often developed through a process of categorisation and generalisation - we group what we see in order to comprehend and remember information more easily. Further, when we encounter a new item or being, we tend to assign to a group assuming that the members of the groups are alike and share common characteristics. Further, people derive their individual identity by considering themselves as belonging to groups – ethnic, religious, age, socio-economic, etc.

Generalisation can turn negative if we tend to assume that every group member avails of the common group qualities while in fact s/he might lack those. This is how stereotypes (then prejudices) are created. In fact, stereotypes can be positive – i.e. “people from X-nationality are good at hard-working and disciplined” – as well as negative – i.e. “people from Y-nationality are lazy”. In both cases, generalisation creates information disorder and misconceptions which can be very harmful as it may wrongly put cultures on different levels. Stereotypes can deepen social polarisation. Fighting stereotypes is based on critical thinking, knowledge, fact-checking, empathy, reflection, and self-reflection. Teachers could help pupils and students to train to confront stereotypes and to become more aware of their biases, which could result in better resistance to accept every news about cultural group as the truth and help them to challenge the source and uncover or mitigate the information disorder.

## Cultural communication style

Communication is a very important part of our lives, and it can both trigger and prevent information disorder. Sometimes we fail to communicate with other people because their culture and values are different. Training effective communication skills is what can help us understand better people and their nature. Intercultural communication can indeed play a crucial role in combating the spread and impact of dis- and misinformation.

You need to be able to figure out the best strategy to communicate with other people so that you can be effective in your relationship. Everyone needs to understand and embrace that there are different cultures, and they all develop their own way of communicating that is distinct from yours.

Cultural communication styles with diverse cultures, including Anglo-Saxon-Western, Black-African, Chinese, Filipino, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, South Asian, or any other, could be challenging.

Verbal and non-verbal cultural communication differs according to the culture of persons' origin, with tremendous cultural diversity between languages, geographic regions, religious traditions and social structures. Persons from western cultures tend to have an explicit and direct communication style. African cultures tend to have some hierarchical distance, meaning some members have higher status than others. People of perceived lower status do not direct eye contact to people of higher status. Muslim cultures, men and women may not wish to shake hands with the opposite sex. In Chinese culture, there is a strong emphasis on familial hierarchy. For example, following Chinese business protocol, people are expected to enter the meeting room in hierarchical order. For LGBTQ+ cultural communities can proper use of gender identity terms, including pronouns, signal courtesy and acceptance. So, be mindful of the cultural gender roles.

Remember that cultural norms may not apply to the behaviour of individuals. Persons are influenced also by one's ethnic background, family, education, personality and life experience, sometimes more than cultural norms, so cultural groups are not homogenous.

To be effective in a culturally diverse environment, one needs to avoid ethnocentric views of otherness and develop an understanding of the norms and standards that are acceptable within that specific context. Greater awareness of own stereotypes, own prejudice and particular differences in the expectations and perceptions of leadership and management styles seems crucial for predicting subordinates' behaviour and adopting a more flexible approach to changing to a more appropriate style in appreciation of cultural differences. Getting to know each fellow student and/or co-worker will help to build trust and identify the most beneficial skills and qualities needed for a productive learning and working process. Also, promoting open communication and encouraging team building may raise team spirit, rapport and respectful interpersonal relationships and prevent the spread of information disorders within collective. Educators have a role in assisting students in acknowledging the

cultural and other contexts that underlie the generation of information and to realize how context impacts the analysis of information.

## Liaising culture, behaviour and communication

Regarding culture, the degree of interdependence between the individual and the group defines the way peoples' perceptions are formed and turned into action. As mentioned, this also applied to the permeability of information. In the groups (classes, communities, schools, companies, etc.) where the collectivist views of loyalty and the importance of group achievements prevail over individual goals, group leaders should take into account that study/work tasks and competition will be less important than maintaining good relationships, while trust will be highly valued. On the other hand, the focus on individual goals and rights in individualist societies, is associated with more intense competition between the group members in completing their tasks and much less emphasis on the importance of relationships.

Communication has its own culturally based specifics that differ all around the world. Edward Hall's concept of high and low context of communication suggests that the environment in which the process takes place has an impact on the transmitted message. In high context cultures, characterised by a higher degree of group interdependence and loyalty to the position of power, the more meaningful information is encoded in body and non-verbal language, and the verbal part tends to be more implicit, indirect and carrying less meaning. Understanding of the conveyed meaning depends on already existing knowledge of the relationships and patterns of behaviour. In low-context cultures, meaning is exchanged in a more direct and explicit way, with limited use of non-verbals. The relationships and attitudes to power do not affect the encoded meaning to such an extent as in higher context cultures and understanding mainly depends on the verbal input. Ambiguity is avoided and the speech tends to be concise and clear.

Comparison can be based on five separate groups of characteristics related to interpersonal relationship, how people interact with each other, how people perceive time and space and how people learn.

### *Five Main Categories of Differences between High-context and Low-context Communication*

	<b>High context</b>	<b>Low context</b>
<b>Association</b>	Relationships depend on a long-time process of building trust. Strong differentiation between in-group and out-group. Centralised authority. Maintaining good	Relationships begin and finish quickly. Easier to enter inside an existing group. Work goals and results are most important. Decentralised structure. Decision making is not concentrated at the top.

	relationships is more important than achieving work goals.	
<b>Interaction</b>	Intensive use of non-verbals – tone of voice, gestures, facial expression. Meaning is conveyed through the context (implicit). Actual words have less meaning. Disagreement is personalised and should be avoided.	Limited use of non-verbals. Meaning is in the exact words (explicit). Context is not that important. Focus is on rational solutions and disagreement is depersonalised.
<b>Territoriality</b>	Space is shared. People can stand or sit closer to each other.	Space is private and people should be standing apart.
<b>Temporality</b>	Scheduling time is difficult as it interferes with people’s needs. Many tasks can be done at the same time. Change is slow and time is a process.	Tasks are precisely scheduled. Preference for one task at a time. Change is fast and results should be seen immediately. Time is money.
<b>Learning</b>	Deductive thinking – from general to specific. Learning happens through observation followed by practice. Group work is preferred.	Inductive thinking – from specific to general. Focus is on detail. Independent learning is preferred.

Source: Pfeiffer & Pfeiffer (1993), as cited in 1.4.6 - Context of Cultures: High and Low (n.d.).

In higher power distance societies, communication tends to rely on a top-down approach, often disregarding subordinates’ opinions. The process tends to be directed and centralised. Individuals’ advancement in the group depends on the seniors.

In individualistic, lower power distance cultures, communication is a more participatory and interactive process. Individual autonomy in decision making goes together with a relaxed view of a particular normative pattern of behaviour. Direct disagreement with seniors and collaborating in developing and implementing work will be a part of the directing and controlling functions.

It is essential for educators to include materials and examples that are relevant to the language and culture of the region or locality in their lessons.

## Socio-economic aspects of culture

Cultures are socially constructed and the decisive influence of cultures on the social and economic performance of people during their lifetimes is recognised. The group dynamics as the way people act and behave in a group and cultural contexts as the values and attitudes that are shared among a group of people are very significant. Families, schools, friends and

neighbourhoods form the environment where the perceptions of the world are formed. The influence of the adults and peers with whom children and adolescents spent their time (i.e., the role-models) play a major role in the way they see themselves and choose their activities in first at school (including school attendance and performance) and then in life and work. Last, but not least, the perceptions of success are very important. For example, in the individualist cultures success is associated with personal achievements while in collectivist societies - with the well-being of the family and community.

The cultures of the local communities and places where people live influence strongly their advancement in terms of career, employment, civic engagements, and personal well-being. Social mobility refers to change in a person's socio-economic situation, either in relation to their parents (inter-generational mobility) or throughout their lifetime (intra-generational mobility). The rates of social mobility vary across places and depend much on the elements of a place's culture. Knowledge, skills, competences (including critical thinking) allow people to become constructive and cooperative members of society (and immune to information disorders). Upward social mobility is very much dependent on the access to education, where the economic aspects and cultural aspects are equally important (the communities that prioritise education devote resources to engaging children and adolescents in education even at times of economic downturn).

It has been identified that lower socio-economic status fosters interdependence, a reduced striving for personal choice, holistic thinking, and the attribution of events and behaviour to external causes. In contrast, higher socio-economic status supports independence, a strong desire for control, self-expression through choice, analytic thinking, and internal attribution. However, because the limited access to resources and education makes it necessary to rely on other people, lower socio-economic status tends to be linked to a greater understanding of others' emotions and a tendency to act altruistically.

Thus, socio-economic status can affect levels of media literacy. People with higher levels of education and economic means are more likely to have access to quality education, speak different languages and develop analytical skills so as to be able to identify and avoid information disorder. Lower socio-economic status individuals might be more vulnerable to misleading narratives and conspiracy theories due to limited access to education, a lack of exposure to diverse viewpoints, and less experience in critically evaluating information. They may also be targeted with misinformation campaigns exploiting their socio-economic concerns or aspirations. Echo-chambers and polarisation function easily when people are confined to specific circles and communicate only with like-minded people, which is more likely to happen in economically vulnerable communities.

## Culture, education and economy connections

Within diverse communities, cultural commons encompass activities, knowledge, skills, and models of mutual support that do not rely on a monetized economy. Most Western cultures



find themselves in a series of double binds. For example, success in expanding the economy further reduces the viability of natural systems; students graduating from public schools and universities are increasingly dependent on finding a sense of community in cyberspace instead of in face-to-face, intergenerationally connected communities where they might learn skills and discover talents that lead to intangible forms of wealth and mutual support.

The present foreign policy is frequently focused on the Western transformation of other cultures, thus destroying the diversity of languages and intergenerational knowledge that have been adopted over hundreds and thousands of years of living within the boundaries and constraints of local bioregions. The role of the educator then should be that of a mediator whose responsibility is to help students make explicit the embodied and conceptual differences between their experiences in different cultural commons and market/consumer relationships and dependencies.

Also, cultural institutions, like museums, start to support the aim for cultural education. The term 'cultural revitalization' is associated with a number of recent frameworks and programs that envision the pathways in which native communities can use museum collections and archives to become re-engaged with knowledge that has become inactive or has been taken out of its original context as a result of culturally oppressive colonial, governmental, and economic policies.

Cultural revitalization is a process through which unique cultures regain a sense of identity, such as through promoting heritage, languages or reviving traditions and custom. It is advised to support this process also within the educational environment, in order to prevent students to fail to recognize fake news or misinformation due to their lack of cultural and socioeconomic knowledge or status.

Cultivating inclusive cultural commons that respect and embrace diverse perspectives can help counter information disorder. When individuals have access to a wide range of cultural expressions and narratives, they are more likely to encounter varied viewpoints, which can promote a more nuanced understanding of complex issues and reduce susceptibility to misinformation.



## 5.4 Remedy strategies

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Globalisation is connecting people from different parts of the world and intercultural relations and dialogue are becoming an important part of our lives. The coexistence of different cultures enriches our lives and need clear strategies how to promote communicate cultures and cultural diversity as assets for the communities at all levels. Combating information disorder, including mis- and disinformation, requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account cultural perspectives and sensitivities.

Cultural adaptation refers to the systematic modification of language, culture and context in a way that is compatible with other's cultural patterns, meaning and values. It includes attention to many dimensions of culture and may include understanding of the different cultural contexts, adapting the communication strategies. Involving community champions to spread important messages, respecting indigenous knowledge, using relevant examples, symbols, expressions and so on. Cultural adaptation refers to striking the balance between preserving cultural identity and nurturing intercultural understanding.

Remedy strategies to combat information disorder should be adapted to the cultural aspects of the societies and groups in which individuals' function. In individualist groups and societies, emphasis should be placed on stimulation of self-driven, independent research on a topic and on directing the efforts towards the intended investigation of objectively verifiable information. In individualist societies established media are a trusted source of information and efforts should be placed on improving the quality and objectivity of media content. The concrete actions should refer to practical strategies to retrieve and process information that is disseminated by mainstream media.

In collectivist societies, the most trusted information source is the community and social networks. In that, it is important to direct the process of information spread with the group and community towards objectivity, though this is not an easy task. In collectivist society, the influence of the social networks on forming opinions is much stronger. The situation is aggravated by the fact that there are no sanctions for content regarding objectivity and trustworthiness of information. The concrete actions should refer to the stimulation of information verification and pro-active community leadership towards objectivity.

When dealing with different cultures, conflict management can be especially challenging for people who are new to the culture. Conflict management encourages open and constructive dialogue among parties with differing viewpoints. While cultural differences can lead to conflict, these differences also make us unique as individuals and should be celebrated. The focus on finding common ground, promoting understanding, and encouraging evidence-based discussions while respecting diverse perspectives and cultural contexts can entail positive results and build trust as juxtaposition to stereotypes and information disorder.

Building a cultural awareness and expression competence is another remedy strategy. At the EU level and in the context of lifelong learning this competence is associated with the

understanding and respect for the way ideas and meaning are expressed and communication across cultures, including in the products of these cultures such as arts. The cultural awareness and expression competence refers to the persons' ability to recognise and appreciate other people's beliefs, customs, and values so as to interact and communicate with them without prejudice. At a higher level, this also refers to building the skills to communicate one's own ideas and visions in ways and contexts that are acceptable for people of other cultures and thus raising the communication efficacy. Cultural awareness has a lot to do with self-awareness and its building occurs in both informal and formal contexts, starting from the family and immediate relatives and friends, passing through school, university and work environments and finishing with deliberate personal efforts. Practising arts from an early age, volunteering, travelling and living in multicultural communities are activities that naturally develop this type of competence.

In fact, building cultural awareness and expression competence is the best cultural adaptation strategy and it should occur intentionally in all kinds of contexts. Though, this is easier said than done.

Other relevant strategies refer to:

- Engaging cultural influencers and community leaders to correct misinformation within the context of their cultural beliefs.
- Develop multilingual fact-checking efforts and collaborate with local language experts to combat misinformation more effectively.
- Cultural sensitivity in fact-checking when debunking misinformation - this involves understanding the cultural context and language nuances to effectively communicate accurate information without inadvertently reinforcing existing beliefs or culture.
- Encouraging diverse and balanced media consumption.
- Targeted education programmes for improving functional literacy and digital skills.
- Fostering cultural participation can influence the extent to which individuals engage in fact-checking or critical evaluation of information.
- Cultivating inclusive cultural commons that respect and embrace diverse perspectives.

By empowering individuals within cultural communities to be active and discerning participants in their information environments, societies can work towards mitigating the harmful effects of information disorder and fostering more informed and resilient communities. Educators can support students to deal with information disorder via providing them with opportunities to practice self-driven, independent research on a topic. This can help students develop their curiosity, creativity, and other important skills needed in mitigating the information disorders.

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