

**Source Criticism as a Countermeasure: Strengthening
Resilience Against Malign Information Influence**
An Experimental Study on Education in Source Criticism as a
Countermeasure Against Malign Information Influence

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Abstract:

The rise of technological advancements, the internet, and globalisation have enabled antagonistic states to spread illegitimate information across borders. This harmful use of information, known as malignant information influence (MII), threatens liberal democracies and requires effective countermeasures. However, prior research on countermeasures highlights dilemmas and shortcomings, such as increased scepticism that undermines trust in all media. Addressing this gap, this study examines whether education in source criticism offers a more effective and democratic alternative by enhancing resilience to MII.

Using a survey experiment with 192 Swedish respondents, this study examined the impact of education in source criticism on Swedish citizens' ability to detect, mistrust, and refrain from sharing Russian media while still maintaining trust in Swedish news. Although results were statistically insignificant, notable patterns were seen: the education in source criticism appeared to increase resilience against Swedish media and decrease resilience against Sputnik. Additionally, respondents consistently rated the Swedish articles higher than the Russian ones, suggesting that Swedish citizens may already possess source criticism skills. These findings highlight the potential of source criticism to counter MII while safeguarding democratic values. However, the statistically insignificant results emphasise the need for further research to improve the results and better understand the role of education in source criticism in enhancing resilience to MII.

Keywords: survey experiment, malign information influence, source criticism, critical thinking, resilience, Sweden, Russia.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introducing Malign Information Influence

The current era is characterised by evolving security threats, conflict, and aggression, where technological advancements enable antagonistic states to exploit liberal democracies' freedom of expression, manipulate public discourse, and sow division from afar. This harmful use of information, known as malign information influence (MII), encompasses various forms of manipulation such as 'propaganda,' 'disinformation,' and 'strategic narratives', all aimed at distorting audiences' understanding (Wagnsson, 2020:409-410). MII has two key characteristics to keep in mind: it refers to information projected across state borders, and the term *malign* underscores the information influence's damaging intent (Wagnsson et al., 2024:2). Scholars suggest these tactics aim to deepen social tensions, divide public opinion, destabilise political climates, and weaken trust in institutions (ibid.).

To address the harmful effects of MII, states have adopted various countermeasures, including blocking, confronting, naturalising, and ignoring (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017). However, each of these approaches presents dilemmas. They may infringe by censoring media, compromise the democratic self-image, or risk passivity (ibid:159-163). Thus, it risks threatening the very democratic values they aim to protect. On the other hand, failing to respond or being overly passive risks enabling MII to exploit social tensions, polarise public opinion, destabilise political environments, and erode institutional trust. This highlights how countermeasures can backfire, allowing antagonistic states to undermine democracy, regardless of the chosen response. States that ignore MII or are too passive in their response risk internal destabilisation, while banning it risks violating democratic values. This paradox demonstrates how either approach can unintentionally serve the antagonist's interests, underscoring the need for alternative strategies that balance national security with preserving democratic values.

The complexity of addressing MII without compromising democratic principles makes it crucial to explore alternative countermeasures. Bjola and Pamment (2019:174) note that, at the time of their publication, research on countermeasures accounted for only 1% of all studies in the MII field, underscoring the need for a shift of focus. Research on addressing MII has often been deprioritised in favour of studying the threats posed by MII itself, resulting in limited knowledge of effective countermeasures. Although this research is almost five years old, it highlights how studies on countermeasures have previously been de-prioritised within the

research field. Advancing research in this area is essential as inter-state aggression grows. For example, MII is in Russia's portrayal of the invasion of Ukraine as a 'special military operation', an effort to influence the perceptions of its motivations (Oleinik, 2024:527-528). Moreover, empirical evaluations of countermeasures through methods like real-world case studies or experiments could provide insights as empirical evaluations validate practical usefulness (Manheim et al., 2012:22). Thus, a more empirical approach within this field of study could facilitate the development of evidence-based policies that translate research findings into practical strategies.

1.2. The Research Gap, Research Aim, and Research Question

Previous experimental studies on the impact of countermeasures on illegitimate information have shown promising results in enhancing individuals' ability to detect fake news and misinformation. Clayton et al. (2020) found that general warnings and tagging sources as 'disputed' or 'rated false' decreased trust in fake news. Similarly, Freeze et al. (2021) demonstrated that disinformation warnings improved people's ability to identify misinformation. However, both studies observed an unintended consequence: these interventions also reduced trust in credible media sources.

While the studies mentioned highlight the effectiveness of such countermeasures, they also reveal critical shortcomings that call for new approaches. Interviews with Swedish citizens suggest that education in source criticism may be a better-suited option to counter MII (Wagnsson et al., 2024). Source criticism, a methodology developed by Scandinavian historians, evaluates a source's authenticity, reliability, bias, and temporal proximity to assess its trustworthiness (Bertilsson, 2021:2 & 8). It is seen as a vital tool for interpreting information, especially in the digital age, as it aims to enhance individuals' ability to analyse information critically and reject unreliable sources. Additionally, the method is actively promoted by Swedish authorities and educational systems to encourage the population to be cautious when consuming information online (Krisinformation, 2024; Psychological Defence Agency, 2024; The National Agency for Education, 2024).

To distinguish the previously mentioned general warnings from source criticism, general warnings aim to alert readers about potential MII sources, while source criticism emphasises individuals' critical thinking skills to navigate the online information landscape (Bertilsson,

2021:2 & 8; Clayton et al., 2020; Freeze et al., 2021). However, the general warnings approach inadvertently fostered pervasive distrust in all media, leading civilians to question credible information sources. In contrast, source criticism highlights the individual's responsibility to critically assess the origin of information (Bertilsson, 2021:2 & 8), promoting independent evaluation of a source's reliability. This approach encourages individuals to develop a nuanced understanding rather than a general distrust of media. By accessing information critically through its source, individuals may better navigate the information landscape without needing directives on what is accurate or false.

Research fields, such as media- and information literacy, support the idea that education in source criticism may be an effective countermeasure against MII. Studies show how enhanced media literacy positively influences individuals' critical thinking skills to identify propaganda and misinformation (Dame Adjin-Tettey, 2022; Hameleers, 2022; Schmitt et al., 2018). But what distinguishes media- and information literacy from source criticism? Source criticism is *a specific skill* focused on critically evaluating the origin and credibility of information sources (Bertilsson, 2021:2 & 8). In contrast, media- and information literacy covers a *broader set of skills*, such as engaging with, interpreting, and creating digital media and information, while also including source criticism (Hobbs, 2016:137-140). In other words, source criticism is a specific tool within the broader framework of media literacy (Carlsson, 2018:33). While media- and information literacy equips individuals to navigate the modern information landscape, source criticism narrows in on evaluating whether a particular piece of information can be trusted based on its origin and context.

Research indicates that geography, history, political systems, and other contextual variables influence how states address antagonistic actors and determine which countermeasures to adopt against security threats (Pamment, 2022). Examining how Swedish citizens respond to education in source criticism is particularly relevant, as this approach is already integrated into the Swedish government's efforts against MII (Bertilsson, 2021:1-2). However, despite its potential and current application by Swedish agencies, the effectiveness of education in source criticism as a countermeasure against antagonistic states' MII has yet to be empirically tested.

Existing research provides a foundation for investigating this question. Studies on digital source criticism, media and information literacy, and civic online reasoning have examined how these tools shape individuals' abilities to evaluate information critically. In the Swedish context,

findings suggest that education fostering critical thinking improves skills in sourcing news, evaluating content, and identifying misleading information (Guath & Nygren, 2022a, 2022b; Nygren & Ecker, 2024; Nygren et al., 2019). However, this research focuses on combating misinformation and fake news domestically, addressing challenges that arise primarily within a single state. This distinction reveals a gap: can educational approaches used for domestic misinformation effectively counteract cross-border MII without eroding trust in credible news sources? MII poses a challenge by targeting democratic states and manipulating information flows across national boundaries, threatening national security. While existing research offers insights into strengthening domestic critical thinking skills, the efficacy of these measures in addressing transnational information threats remains unclear.

To address this gap, this study explores one tool within the media literacy toolbox: source criticism. It examines whether education in source criticism can effectively teach individuals to critically evaluate the origin, bias, and credibility of news sources, helping them detect, mistrust, and stop the spread of MII. To investigate this, the focus is on Russian state-funded news articles as examples of MII, given research indicating Russia's use of MII against Sweden (Wagnsson & Barzanje, 2021). While Swedish agencies have promoted source criticism as a countermeasure to MII (Bertilsson, 2021:1-2), empirical research assessing its effectiveness remains scarce. Through an experimental study, this thesis aims to examine the causal relationship between education in source criticism and resilience to MII, addressing the research question: *What effect does education in source criticism have on Swedish citizens' resilience against malign information influence?*

By conducting an experiment, this thesis will provide insights into the causal relationship between education in source criticism and Swedish citizens' resilience against MII. The findings of this study may offer important observations on the impact of education in source criticism, contributing to the advancement of research in the MII field. Additionally, these insights will help policymakers assess the effectiveness of source criticism education as a countermeasure against MII.

2. Background and Literature Review

In this chapter, I will review existing literature to examine three key areas: 1) the concept of malign information influence, 2) Russian malign information influence as a security threat, and 3) the challenges of countering malign information influence. The aim is to provide a comprehensive overview of the research field and to provide context for Chapter 3, which focuses on the theory of education in source criticism and its role in building resilience against MII.

2.1. The Concept of Malign Information Influence

States have, throughout history, used information as part of their war and conflict tactics. It is often said that the first casualty of war is the truth (Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2021:242). However, with the rise of technology, the internet and globalisation, antagonistic states can now spread malign information across borders, harming other states from afar (Walker, 2016). As a result, lies, propaganda, and disinformation are not merely aspects of war and conflict; they have become securitised issues (Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2021:246).

The broad use of illegitimate information has led scholars to adopt different terms to describe it. The literature includes concepts such as fake news, propaganda, strategic narratives and information warfare, all of which overlap and are used to examine different aspects of how information can be employed as a security threat (Wagnsson, 2020:398). Two common terms within the field are disinformation and misinformation (Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2021:242). The multiple definitions of disinformation all refer, in some way, to “the sharing of incorrect, inaccurate, or misleading content” (Hameleers, 2023:6). While misinformation is defined as the accidental sharing of inaccurate or misleading information (Armitage & Vaccari, 2021:38). The key distinction between the two lies in the intent behind the communication. While disinformation is generally intended to "cause harm, sow discord, or create financial and/or political gain" (Hameleers, 2023:2), misinformation is unintentional (Armitage & Vaccari, 2021:38).

This study focuses on how states deliberately share information to harm democracies from afar and whether education in source criticism could serve as a countermeasure. While disinformation might seem a suitable term, its use is complicated by two factors: its definition

does not specify cross-border communication, and it emphasises the actor's motives (Armitage & Vaccari, 2021:38). In the context of Russian disinformation, there is a lack of consensus regarding how the state utilises it. Some argue that disinformation is a strategy to undermine citizens' ability to make informed political decisions (Hameleers, 2023:3), while others consider disinformation as a war tactic designed to promote poor decision-making among adversaries (Doroshenko & Lukito, 2021:4683). Hence, ascribing intentional motives behind these actions is challenging, as we do not fully understand why Russia spreads illegitimate information. This uncertainty makes the term difficult to apply effectively. To avoid these limitations, this study instead chose the concept of malign information influence (MII).

MII is a broad and flexible term intended to not focus exclusively on how information influence may become a military or diplomatic issue (Wagnsson, 2020:409-410). Instead, the term allows for a more adaptable examination of the security issue without being too narrow or limiting. To define the term and set necessary conceptual boundaries, Wagnsson suggests attaching the word *malign* to it, as 'information influence' by itself is not inherently negative (ibid). By emphasising how information influence is malign, the term refers to how information influence may "inflict damage in some way" (ibid). Additionally, another defining characteristic of MII is its focus on the projection of information across borders (Wagnsson et al., 2024:2). In this way, MII provides flexibility and allows for the incorporation of literature on related terms such as propaganda or strategic narratives.

However, MII faces a similar challenge as disinformation, as both involve communication with harmful intentions. The key difference lies in their definitions: disinformation specifically refers to the intentional sharing of incorrect information, while MII is broader and focuses on communication intended to cause harm in some way. Therefore, MII encompasses communication that does not necessarily have to be factually incorrect but can be distorted or manipulated. This distinction is important, as research suggests that antagonistic states do not always provide incorrect information; rather, they may skew information to serve their interests (Elsawah & Howard, 2020:630).

In the context of this study, MII is useful because it offers a flexible framework for exploring how Russian news articles, though not entirely false, can be distorted or selectively presented to harm democratic states from afar. Previous empirical studies on countermeasures to illegitimate information have largely focused on misinformation and fake news (Clayton et al.,

2020; Freeze et al., 2021), primarily examining how the countermeasure affects the interpretation of information within a single state. In contrast, this study explores how to counter the illegitimate information projected by antagonistic states across borders. Thus, malign information influence provides a more suitable conceptual lens for this research.

2.2. Russian Malign Information Influence as a Security Issue

As previously stated, there is ongoing debate among scholars about the motives driving the actions of antagonistic states. Interviews with former journalists at RT, a Russian state-funded media outlet, suggest that Russia's motives may be less coordinated than often portrayed in scholarly discussions. These journalists reported being instructed to create chaos in other countries (Elsawah & Howard, 2020:631). They were deliberately directed to skew information, support far-right movements, and promote the Russian narrative to project an alternative image and foster disorder. One of the journalists admitted being aware of how the projected content consisted of lies and admitted not necessarily agreeing with the message (ibid:633). This research reveals how journalists at a Russian state-funded outlet intentionally disseminated misleading information to sow chaos abroad. However, what exactly does MII threaten, and why is it considered a security issue?

Wagnsson et al. (2024:2) identify two key reasons why MII should be considered a security threat. First, it exploits societal divisions, weakens state institutions, and interferes in elections. Second, it undermines democracies by distorting the truth, hindering rational debate, and eroding the morale necessary to defend democratic systems. In other words, MII seeks to undermine liberal democracy by targeting aspects that are fundamental to its functioning. Democracy, while recognised globally as a political system, encompasses diverse and complex definitions. Nonetheless, its core principles generally include representation, legitimacy, free and fair elections, and the protection of liberties, legal rights, and the free exchange of ideas (Diamond, 2002:21; Sen, 2017:9-10). Consequently, social division, weakened institutions and elections, along with hindered debate and democratic morale, can undermine these principles in various ways.

Societal division weakens democracies by creating dichotomies and increasing polarisation within the targeted state. Research has shown that Russian MII is often used to support far-right movements and opposition on social media, potentially sowing division among civilians in

various countries (Glazunova et al., 2022; Wagnsson, 2020). This weakens states for two primary reasons: First, it intensifies polarisation and normalises anti-democratic ideas, thereby contaminating the democratic environment (Hameleers, 2023:3). Second, it undermines social cohesion, which is essential for democracy, as it can complicate policymaking and hinder compromise (Wagnsson, 2020:405). A notable example of Russia fostering division occurred during the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Research indicates that Russian media amplified both sides of the debate to deepen societal division and conflicts (Bradshaw et al., 2023). In other words, Russia used MII, media, and the internet to harm the state from within. Furthermore, the social division may also risk damaging the public debate and democratic morale as dichotomies and polarisation may be increased. Harming public debate, in turn, risks undermining the free exchange of ideas, a fundamental cornerstone of democracies.

Additionally, weakening state institutions and elections undermines the very foundation of democracies. Such harm risks fuelling corruption and damaging the quality of governance, both of which are essential for ensuring free and fair elections, as well as safeguarding liberties and legal entitlements (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008:167-169). This erosion of democratic principles harms democracy by not only harming the state's policy output but also diminishing citizens' legitimacy and trust in the state. An example of this was during the election of 2016 in the United States. Scholars, journalists, intelligence agencies, and investigators have examined how Russia used different methods to influence the election to affect public opinion and electoral outcomes (Benkler et al., 2018:235-236). This is concerning because it seeks to undermine liberal democracies, benefiting Russia by emphasising the vulnerabilities within Western political systems. The authors also raise the question of whether Russia played a significant role in events such as Brexit, the increasing tensions in Spain, or Italy's Eurosceptic rise, suggesting that if true, it would mark one of the most successful assaults on democracy since World War II (ibid).

2.3. The Challenges of Countering Malign Information Influence

Research indicates that Russian MII uses various forms and strategies, including impersonating civilians on social media (Innes et al., 2021) and spreading tailored messages in multiple languages to fit specific narratives (Glazunova et al., 2022). Consequently, MII not only threatens democracies but also presents challenges in developing effective responses. To

combat MII, Hellman and Wagnsson (2017) propose a framework comprising four ideal types of how democratic states may respond to MII: confronting, naturalising, blocking, and ignoring. These strategies are categorised into two groups, outward and inward, and are designed to project and construct narratives targeting domestic or foreign audiences (ibid:157). However, each model presents dilemmas when applied to combat MII.

The confronting model involves creating and spreading counter-narratives to oppose false or manipulative stories (Wagnsson & Hellman, 2017:158-159). These counter-narratives are aimed both at domestic audiences (to influence attitudes) and at external groups, including opponents. They often disprove the MII by using reliable evidence and attempting to promote positive images while contrasting the other as the "enemy". The dilemma of this approach is that critics argue that it risks mimicking the behaviour it seeks to counteract (ibid). The state risks appearing undemocratic and fostering tensions within and outside the state, which, in turn, risks hurting the self-image of the state (ibid:153). Thus, harming the self-image and democracy may hinder alliance dialogue and worsen security issues.

The naturalising strategy, on the other hand, focuses on projecting a positive, appealing image of the state to foreign audiences without directly confronting or countering the MII (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:159). Unlike the confronting strategy, it does not actively contrast itself with the opponent but instead emphasises its values, credibility, and worldview as universal and trustworthy. It differs from the confronting method as it does not directly involve damaging other narratives (Archetti, 2017:219). The goal is instead to 'tell the story of the self' rather than directly opposing others' narratives (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:159-161). However, the dilemma of this method is that it may seem overly passive, especially in the face of aggressive MII campaigns. It could also unintentionally signal moral superiority, which may provoke negative reactions from its audience.

In contrast to the more passive naturalising strategy, the blocking approach involves direct action to suppress MII. The blocking strategy focuses on protecting the state by restricting or blocking the MII without actively promoting an alternative (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:161). This inward-looking, defensive approach aims to maintain the status quo rather than engaging in public debates or countering with a new narrative. An example of this strategy is the European Union's sanctions that banned Russian state-funded media after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 (European Council, 2022). However, critics argue that blocking

content conflicts with democratic values like freedom of speech, making it seem authoritarian (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:161). Consequently, this approach risks infringing on freedom of speech and potentially harming democracy.

Lastly, the ignoring strategy is described as an approach that avoids engagement entirely and simply ignores the MII (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:162). It is considered an inward-looking approach, as it pays no attention to the MII. By trusting the democratic constitution of the state and its institutions, the model seeks to uphold a society founded on honesty, transparency, and justice. Proponents of the model believe that defending freedom and liberty is the best way to counter the MII (ibid.). However, critics argue that this strategy may lack coherence, overestimate individuals' ability to critically analyse information, and place excessive trust in the media as unbiased watchdogs.

As shown, all of the presented countermeasures pose dilemmas for states. However, combating MII involves more challenges than just democratic dilemmas. One major challenge lies in how individuals tend to believe information that aligns with their preexisting worldviews (Flynn et al., 2017:137; Lewandowsky et al., 2012:107). These worldviews, shaped by prior knowledge and experience, act as filters through which new information is interpreted (Archetti, 2017:224; Sadler, 2018:3270). As a result, alternative perspectives to the MII may never be fully absorbed, as individuals selectively accept the parts that resonate with their prior understanding (Archetti, 2017:224). Sadler (2017) supports this, arguing that narratives exist not only in texts but in the mind of the reader, with mental frameworks guiding interpretation. Information only "takes on life when it is realised [through the act of interpretation]" (ibid.: 20). This suggests that even when states offer alternative perspectives to MII, citizens may only accept the parts that align with their existing beliefs. It creates a dilemma, as efforts to promote correct information may backfire, reinforcing the MII among those already aligned with it and failing to persuade those who need exposure to counternarratives. Consequently, states might inadvertently reinforce and spread the antagonistic narrative instead of countering it, complicating efforts to combat MII (Archetti, 2017:233-234).

Given all this, is it possible to counteract MII without harming democracy or unintentionally spreading the MII? In interviews with Swedish citizens, Wagnsson et al. (2024:15) found that respondents favoured a countermeasure beyond the four previously presented ideal types. Specifically, 89% of the participants called for education in source criticism. As a result, the

researchers updated their four models of countermeasures to include a fifth: fortifying. The fortifying strategy includes methods like education in source criticism and strengthening the capabilities of authorities and journalists to more accurately present events posed by antagonistic actors. It aims to empower individuals to build resilience (ibid:17-18). In other words, it offers a more democratic countermeasure.

In this study, I focus on education in source criticism as a potential countermeasure to MII, given its capacity to foster vigilance and enhance civilians' resilience (Wagnsson et al., 2024:18). This approach, as proposed by Swedish citizens, balances responsibility between the state and individuals. Additionally, education in source criticism would not lead to government control or discipline, which could undermine democracy; instead, it would empower the population and encourage critical thinking (Bertilsson, 2021:4).

3. Theory

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for this study by exploring the interplay between three concepts: critical thinking, media and information literacy, and source criticism. While critical thinking serves as a broad cognitive skill necessary for evaluating information, media and information literacy is a set of skills argued to help individuals critically and effectively engage with information. This study focuses specifically on source criticism, which is a tool within media and information literacy. Source criticism provides a practical framework for assessing the reliability, bias, and origin of information sources. Critical thinking is seen as a necessary underlying *cognitive skill* that provides the foundation for evaluating information, while source criticism is a *methodological tool* for assessing the information's credibility, objectivity, and trustworthiness. In other words, critical thinking forms the core of the theory, enabling source criticism to function as an effective countermeasure. Together, these concepts form a theoretical lens through which this study explores how education in source criticism may enhance individuals' resilience against MII.

3.1. The Interplay Between Critical Thinking and Source Criticism

Critical thinking enhances individuals' capacity to assess new information independently, which is crucial in today's media landscape, where misleading or manipulative content is pervasive. Ennis (1985:2) defines critical thinking as "reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do". This definition is often utilised by scholars studying interpretations of information (Orhan, 2023:2; Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:6), as it highlights the role of critical thinking in enabling individuals to make informed decisions about the reliability of new information. It serves as a filter for determining information's trustworthiness. Due to the reflexive and reasonable thinking linked to critical thinking, the skill helps individuals to question MII and prevents it from spreading. Additionally, research shows how individuals lacking critical thinking skills are more likely to share information without verifying its accuracy (Orhan, 2023:3). Hence, critical thinking skills help individuals understand the effect of disseminating false information, which could prevent its spread. Consequently, enhancing individuals' critical thinking skills is necessary for creating a resilient society with citizens who question MII and resist spreading it further.

Previous research suggests that building critical thinking skills may offer better protection against the spread of MII than warnings. Research on countermeasures against fake news and misinformation, such as general warnings and tagged sources, has shown that these can negatively influence how individuals perceive both fake and credible news (Clayton et al., 2020; Freeze et al., 2021). The results indicate that individuals became sceptical of all information, leading them to question the credibility of credible news. As a result, the scepticism fostered distrust in *all* media, not just illegitimate information sources. Instead, research within media and information literacy indicates that promoting critical thinking skills may offer better protection against MII (Bronstein et al., 2019; Puig et al., 2021; Lutzke et al., 2019). The research results show how reduced engagement in analytic reasoning and critical thinking diminishes people's ability to detect fake news (ibid). Reduced critical thinking skills are seen as one of the reasons why individuals may be vulnerable to fake news, as they lack the knowledge on how to critically assess information (Lutzke et al., 2019:2).

The importance of individuals' critical thinking skills in relation to illegitimate information is shown when looking at how UNESCO advocates for media and information literacy (MIL) to counteract misinformation (Nygren et al., 2020:64). They introduce it as a "pioneering curriculum" which features "various detailed modules covering the range of competencies needed to navigate today's communications ecosystem" (Grizzle et al., 2021:5). By teaching individuals to critically and effectively engage with the content online, MIL aims to increase individuals' critical thinking to encourage individuals to evaluate information (Dame Adjintettey, 2022; Hameleers, 2022; Schmitt et al., 2018). It is about teaching individuals how their interpretations, creations and engagement with digital information and media affect the digital information landscape (Hobbs, 2016:137-140). However, while research suggests that individuals with strong critical thinking skills developed through learning about MIL are better equipped to resist misinformation (Bronstein et al., 2019; Puig et al., 2021; Lutzke et al., 2019), the most effective methods for teaching this knowledge remain uncertain (Nygren, 2019:113). To examine this further in relation to MII, this study chose to focus on one aspect within the broad MIL framework: source criticism.

Source criticism is a methodological tool applied to analyse and evaluate information by examining its source (Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:8-9). Rather than solely aiming to expose falsehoods, the method considers the degree of certainty or reliability that may be ascribed to the information (ibid). The approach prompts us to ask: to what extent is this claim and

information credible upon closer examination? It originated as a methodology by historians in Scandinavian countries to critically assess previous information and sources (Torstendahl, 2005:209-210). A key assumption in historical research is that historians seek knowledge about unchangeable past events that cannot be repeated for analysis (Jarrick, 2005:203-205). As a result, historians rely heavily on texts as their primary sources, which provide insights into what occurred without the historian's direct observation. However, these texts may contain lies or false claims, and to address the issue, source criticism was developed (ibid). By examining the reliability of the text, historians could reject questionable sources and narrow down the number of texts to better understand the historical events (Torstendahl, 2005:209).

Since its development, source criticism has undergone multiple revisions. Despite its evolution, the core principles of source criticism remain grounded in four key criteria: authenticity, dependency, tendency, and temporal proximity (Bertilsson, 2021:2; Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:8). *Authenticity* assesses the credibility and origin of the source, ensuring that it can be trusted. *Dependency* examines how sources are interrelated, such as when information is repeated or derived from another source. *Tendency* explores the potential biases within the source, analysing whether it reflects specific viewpoints or interests. Finally, the *temporal proximity* suggests that sources produced closer in time to the actual event may offer a more accurate portrayal (Bertilsson, 2021:2). These criteria create a framework for critically assessing sources, highlighting the importance of careful evaluation and promoting critical thinking. By applying source criticism, individuals may become more discerning when evaluating the information they encounter. This framework encourages people to ask critical questions about the intent behind the information and its source. Consequently, source criticism promotes careful consideration before accepting or sharing new content, fostering a more thoughtful approach to online information consumption.

3.2. Education in Source Criticism as a Countermeasure to MII

Having established the theoretical basis of source criticism as a methodological tool for fostering critical thinking, this section examines its application as a countermeasure to MII. Just as Scandinavian historians relied on historical texts to understand events beyond their immediate experience, citizens today depend on news and media to comprehend global events. The overwhelming amount of information available may lead to confusion and misinformation. This is referred to as an epistemic crisis, emphasising the difficulties of verifying information

in the digital age (Steensen, 2019:1). To respond to the growing amount of information, fields like journalism, library and information science have increasingly adopted source criticism as a methodology for evaluating source credibility (Steensen, 2019; Tallerås & Sköld, 2020). However, the epistemic crisis affects not only professionals but also civilians. As previously noted, MII often aligns with individuals' pre-existing beliefs, making it difficult to detect false information. Expecting civilians to identify such manipulation is unrealistic, especially when experienced journalists and librarians struggle to navigate today's information landscape. This raises the question of whether focusing on the credibility of sources could make this task more manageable. By doing so, individuals are encouraged to critically evaluate the motives behind the information, considering who wrote it and where the information originated from.

As previously discussed, source criticism encourages individuals to evaluate the trustworthiness of information through four key criteria: authenticity, tendency, dependency, and temporal proximity. This study excludes temporal proximity, as it may confuse individuals when analysing contemporary news. For historians, temporal proximity can enhance accuracy by aligning sources closely with events. In the analysis of news articles, this focus may be less helpful, especially as initial reports may shift with new evidence. For example, in the case of the Nord Stream sabotage, early suspicions by Sweden and Denmark led to Russia's exclusion from the investigation, which some interpreted as indirect blame (Reuters, 2022b). Later findings pointed to Ukraine as the responsible party (Reuters, 2023). This example shows how temporal proximity, when applied to news sources, may hinder critical assessment by favouring initial, potentially incomplete information.

Educating individuals to use source criticism by applying the three remaining criteria enhances critical thinking by prompting individuals to reflect on the source. This process shifts the focus from merely accepting content to actively questioning the sources' credibility, bias and origin. It helps individuals to discern and analyse the current unreliable information, hence enhancing their critical thinking skills as "all source criticism is based on critical thinking, but not all critical thinking is about source criticism" (Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:7). By encouraging critical assessment of new information, sources lacking compelling reasons to be trusted will be rejected, helping individuals identify and disregard uncertain information (Bertilsson, 2021:2; Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:7). In turn, the detection of MII sources help individuals develop mistrust toward the information, as its credibility, objectivity, and trustworthiness remain uncertain (Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:8). The improved critical thinking prompts

individuals to question information, reducing the likelihood of spreading harmful misinformation online (Orhan, 2023:3).

This highlights the interrelationship between the two concepts. Critical thinking serves as the core of the theory, as it is essential for source criticism to function as an effective countermeasure. It shapes decisions about what to believe (Ennis, 1985:2) and prompts individuals to question and analyse information reflectively, ensuring their judgments remain free from emotions, biases, or personal preferences (Orhan, 2023:2-3). The enhanced engagement in analytic reasoning and critical thinking helps individuals detect fake news and stand against it (Bronstein et al., 2019; Puig et al., 2021; Lutzke et al., 2019). On the other hand, source criticism serves as the methodological approach that applies critical thinking to assess the origin, reliability, and bias of information. Thus, educating individuals to use source criticism may enable them to evaluate new information critically to identify MII independently.

Prior research highlights the challenges that education in source criticism faces as a countermeasure to MII, particularly due to variations in individuals' prior knowledge. While education in source criticism has the potential to counteract MII, the level of general prior knowledge required for it to be effective remains uncertain. Nygren (2019:113-114) discusses the relationship between critical thinking, education, and subjective knowledge, suggesting that individuals find it easier to critically assess, question, and process information in areas with which they are already familiar. Additionally, the same scholar (Nygren, 2018:63) notes that the ability to handle information critically is not innate but must be developed through learned habits and subject-specific knowledge. This implies that education in source criticism could face challenges, as not all individuals may possess the foundational knowledge or critical thinking skills necessary to assess a source's authenticity, dependency, and tendency. However, in Sweden, source criticism is already actively taught in schools and by government agencies (Krisinformation, 2024; Psychological Defence Agency, 2024; The National Agency for Education, 2024). Consequently, the ability to handle information critically is not a new habit among Swedish citizens.

Furthermore, in the context of challenges of source criticism, one subjective knowledge limitation could be that individuals need to have familiarity with which sources are generally trustworthy and which are not. By encouraging individuals to question all unknown sources, there is a risk that this could inadvertently limit access to diverse viewpoints, potentially

impacting freedom of speech. However, source criticism is not about creating a simplistic dichotomy of true or false; rather, it emphasises critical thinking by evaluating the information. Instead of restricting information or guiding individuals toward specific beliefs, it encourages them to support their conclusions with credible sources. By critically questioning the origin and motive behind the new information, individuals are encouraged to indirectly evaluate the content (Psychological Defence Agency, 2024). In other words, while source criticism primarily targets the source of information, analysing its origin, including any potential bias and the motivations behind its creation, also leads to a critical evaluation of the content itself. In the context of MII, individuals could assess the reliability of the information by considering who wrote the news, where it originated from, and the underlying motivations behind its publication without threatening the freedom of speech or other democratic staples.

3.3. Cultivating Resilience Through Education in Source Criticism

Building on the importance of critical thinking and source criticism in countering MII, this section explores how education in source criticism can enhance resilience, both on an individual and societal level. Resilience is a growing term within security and crisis studies. It is described as the ability to "bounce back" from unanticipated dangers or crises (Williams et al. 2017:740-741) and is associated with notions like 'robustness,' 'flexibility,' and 'adaptability' (Alfredsson et al., 2013). However, the definition of resilience varies across disciplines, creating challenges for a precise meaning. To clarify what resilience means in the security field, Coaffee and Chandler (2016:4) define it as the "capacity to prepare for, respond to, or bounce back from problems or disturbances that cannot necessarily be predicted or foreseen". This definition emphasises the connection between resilience and contingency, highlighting its relevance to a state's ability to prepare for threats in advance.

Scholars have explored the connection between individual critical thinking and MII. Nygren and Ecker (2024) argue that critical thinking, MIL, and education contribute to a state's ability to resist disinformation. They suggest that education fosters resilience by promoting healthy news consumption habits and critical thinking skills. Similarly, McDougall (2019) emphasises the role of media literacy education in enabling young people to engage with media more critically and effectively.

Building on this, education in source criticism has the potential to develop citizens' and states resilience. A source-critical populace could enhance the state's resilience in three ways: preparation, response, and recovery. By teaching citizens source criticism, the state can prepare for MII by encouraging individuals to question the credibility, bias, and origins of sources (Bertilsson, 2021:2; Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:7). Enhanced critical thinking enables citizens to detect, mistrust, and stop sharing MII, thereby supporting the state's response to adversarial threats. Finally, minimising reactions to MII supports the state's ability to recover from such disruptions. In other words, fostering a source-critical populace makes them more resilient, which strengthens the state's overall defence against MII.

Furthermore, using source criticism as a countermeasure could help states avoid the unintended consequences of other countermeasures. For instance, measures like blocking, ignoring, naturalising, or confronting MII risk undermining democracy or even strengthening antagonistic narratives. Enhancing individual critical thinking through source criticism instead allows governments to foster desirable behaviours without imposing restrictive laws that might undermine freedom of expression (Bertilsson, 2021:4). Educating citizens in source criticism makes them self-sufficient and actively involved in defending against MII. This approach empowers individuals to make informed decisions based on critical thinking skills rather than relying on state-imposed measures (ibid.).

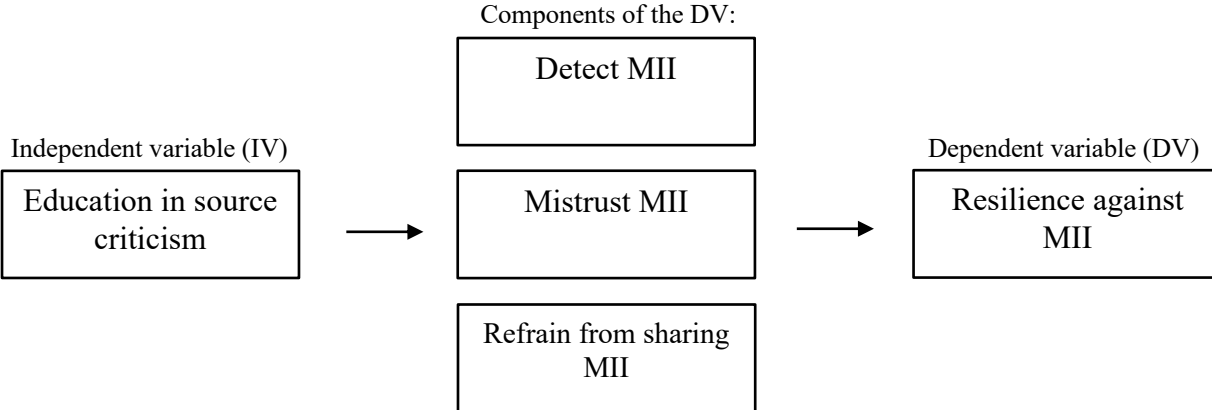
3.4. Summary of the Theory

In summary, critical thinking serves as the core of the theory. It is an underlying skill of source criticism needed to analyse the origin, bias and credibility of information. These two concepts intersect in how education in source criticism can function as a countermeasure to MII, where critical thinking is the cognitive skill and source criticism is the methodological tool. Source criticism enhances critical thinking by teaching essential criteria such as authenticity, dependency, and tendency. These criteria equip individuals with the tools to critically analyse information before accepting it, encouraging thoughtful evaluation. As such, source criticism is a method within the broader critical thinking process, focusing specifically on assessing the reliability, potential bias, and origin of sources. Education in source criticism encourages individuals to question the extent to which they can affirm a claim as valid. Compared to other kinds of content analysis, it offers a more practical approach to evaluating information.

Educating individuals to apply source criticism when interpreting new information may strengthen individuals' resilience against MII, thus making it a suitable countermeasure. The education in source criticism intends to 1.) help individuals detect MII by applying the three criteria of source criticism. This process encourages critical assessment of new information, where sources lacking compelling reasons to be trusted are rejected, helping individuals identify and disregard MII (Bertilsson, 2021:2; Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:7). 2.) By detecting MII sources, individuals develop mistrust toward the information, as its credibility, objectivity, and trustworthiness remain uncertain (Rosenqvist & Ekecrantz, 2022:8). 3.) Education in source criticism enhances critical thinking and causes individuals to mistrust information, thus preventing them from sharing the MII online (Orhan, 2023:3). Additionally, the enhanced critical thinking has the potential to help states resilience against MII as it may help states to prepare for, respond to, or bounce back from antagonistic states illegitimate information.

The detection, mistrusting, and refraining from sharing unreliable information are the components of this study's dependent variable: resilience against MII. This relationship between education in source criticism and resilience against MII is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theoretical model (author's illustration)



4. Hypotheses

This thesis explores the causal relationship between education in source criticism and resilience against MII among Swedish citizens, particularly concerning Russian MII. According to the above-mentioned theory, education in source criticism is expected to enhance individuals' critical thinking skills, which helps them to detect, mistrust, and refrain from sharing MII. This enhanced critical awareness may ultimately strengthen state resilience against MII, providing a feasible countermeasure for policymakers to consider.

The following hypotheses are derived from this reasoning:

H1: Education in source criticism will have a positive effect on Swedish citizens' ability to detect malign information influence in news articles from Russian sources, as indicated by lower trust ratings for these sources.

H2: Education in source criticism will have a positive effect on Swedish citizens' ability to detect news articles from Swedish sources, as indicated by higher trust ratings for these sources.

H3: Education in source criticism will have a negative effect on Swedish citizens' trust in news articles containing Russian malign information influence, as indicated by lower trust ratings for these articles.

H4: Education in source criticism will have a positive effect on trust in news articles from Swedish sources, as indicated by higher trust ratings for these articles.

H5: Education in source criticism will have a negative effect on Swedish citizens' willingness to share Russian news articles containing malign information influence with other individuals.

H6: Education in source criticism will have a positive effect on Swedish citizens' willingness to share news articles from Swedish sources with other individuals.

5. Methodology

5.1. Choice of method

This study uses an experimental design, which is aligned with previous studies aiming to measure the effect of countermeasures on fake news (Clayton et al., 2020; Freeze et al., 2021). Experimental designs are valuable for studies aiming to draw conclusions about causality. They allow researchers to isolate and manipulate the independent variable to measure the impact of the treatment on a dependent variable (Druckman, 2022:81; Esaiasson et al., 2024:238-239).

The purpose of an experiment is not to replicate real-world conditions. Rather, it focuses on defining the theoretical construct and ensuring that the treatments used to manipulate the independent variable are properly executed (Druckman, 2022:13). The focus is on creating a psychologically engaging environment for participants, which is crucial for the validity of the conclusions. If participants do not take the treatments seriously, the results become meaningless, regardless of how realistic the setting appears (ibid:81-82). It is, therefore, essential to design an experiment that conceals its purpose from respondents, as awareness could bias their answers (Esaiasson, 2024:255). By isolating and manipulating the independent variable, the researcher can control for external “noise” from the real world and may thereby isolate the causal relationship. Consequently, the results may be generalised to broader theoretical contexts rather than specific real-world populations. To put it differently, the findings are not generalisable to the entire Swedish population. Instead, they provide valuable insights into the causal relationship between education in source criticism and Swedish citizens’ resilience against MII. The hypotheses are the main focus of the study (ibid.:245).

In this study, the manipulated independent variable is education in source criticism. The effect of the education was tested on both Swedish news and Russian state-funded media. The purpose of the study is to examine if education in source criticism enhances Swedish citizens’ ability to detect, mistrust and refrain from sharing Russian media without affecting the credibility of Swedish news. By receiving education in source criticism, respondents are expected to enhance their ability to critically assess the source of a news article, evaluate any biases, and examine the credibility of the content’s origin. The goal is for the treatment group to distinguish between Swedish and Russian news articles by analysing the source’s authenticity, dependency, and tendency. Consequently, it is anticipated that the treatment group views Russian news sources with increased scepticism, leading them to distrust and reject information from these sources.

To examine the causal relationship between education in source criticism and resilience against MII, I conducted a survey experiment and randomised respondents into two groups: a control group and a treatment group. Both groups read four titles and introductions from Russian or Swedish news articles. However, only the treatment group received education in source criticism. This allowed me to observe how Swedish citizens assess the credibility of Swedish and Russian news articles after receiving the treatment. Aside from the education on source criticism for the treatment groups, all other aspects were equal between the groups. This ensured a fair comparison of the effects of education in source criticism on Swedish citizens.

5.2. Research design

The experiment used a post-test-only design. The advantage of this design is that data is collected only once from respondents, after the test, which simplifies the process. It also minimises participants' suspicion of the study's purpose. However, the design's shortcoming is that it becomes difficult to verify whether the manipulation of the independent variable had the intended effect on the dependent variable (Esaiasson et al., 2024:250; Teorell & Svensson 2007:75). An alternative would have been to use a pre-post design, where the dependent variable is measured both before and after the experiment. The benefit of this method is that it allows for analysing whether individuals' opinions have changed post-treatment. However, there is a risk that the repeated questions may reveal the purpose of the experiment to participants. Answering the same question multiple times could lead the participants to focus on certain types of information or questions, which may result in them responding based on what they think they should answer rather than what they believe. This is a key concern for the study's validity, as participants must take the experiment seriously (ibid).

Given the pros and cons of both approaches, the study carefully weighed these factors and ultimately opted for a post-test-only design to reduce the likelihood of respondents being influenced in any direction. While it will be more challenging to determine whether the treatment directly caused the differences between the control and treatment groups, the randomisation of respondents helps with this issue. The randomisation makes it unlikely that all participants in the group will have the same prior knowledge of Russian MII (Esaiasson et al. 2024:248-249).

The study is conducted as a survey experiment, meaning respondents answered a questionnaire. The questionnaire was an online survey created with Qualtrics as the survey tool. To simplify the distribution of the surveys, the survey tool has made a QR code and a link to the survey. This made it possible for me to hand out the survey through both social media and in person. The questionnaire was designed to be straightforward and quick to complete to limit respondents' dropouts.

To provide a brief overview of the method: Firstly, respondents were given brief information about the study, including assurances of anonymity and their right to withdraw at any time. Qualtrics is programmed to delete an unfinished answer after 48 hours to ensure that respondents who withdraw from the study will not be included in the data. They were also asked for their consent to participate in the study and whether they were above 18 years old. Secondly, the treatment group received education in source criticism. Thirdly, both the treatment and control groups read four headlines and introductions from news articles, two from Russian state-funded media and two from Swedish media outlets. After reading the articles, all the respondents were asked to answer a series of questions about the news articles. These questions serve to measure the study's dependent variable, resilience against MII and are measured by the respondent's ability to detect, mistrust and refrain from sharing the news articles. Additionally, two manipulation check questions were asked. Next, three control questions were asked (age, sex, education level and citizenship). After finishing the questionnaire, respondents were provided with more detailed information about the real purpose of the study. The answers of the study were analysed through STATA in several OLS regression analyses.

5.3. Selection of case

The selected cases used to study how education in source criticism may work as a countermeasure to MII are Sweden and Russia. Specifically, Swedish and Russian media were examined to understand the effect of education on source criticism of Swedish citizens. Sweden was chosen as I am Swedish, making Swedish media more accessible. Additionally, Sweden has a strong tradition of source criticism. While this might seem like a contradictory case to study, research suggests that different states benefit from tailored countermeasures (Pamment, 2022). Sweden's existing use of source criticism as one of its countermeasures (Psychological Defence Agency, 2024) and the recognition that critical analysis skills are learned, not innate

(Nygren, 2018:63) make it a suitable case. Hence, Swedish citizens are an appropriate choice, as its citizens are not unfamiliar with source criticism and critical thinking.

Russia, on the other hand, was chosen as the antagonist due to its documented use of MII against Sweden (Wagnsson & Barzanje, 2021). This threat is also highlighted in Sweden's national security strategy (Wagnsson, 2020:401) and reinforced by the EU's blocking of Russian state-funded media following the Ukraine-Russia war. Furthermore, looking at the Ukraine-Russia war, Russia uses MII to manipulate perceptions about the invasion's motivations (Oleinik, 2024). Given Russia's aggressive stance in the global sphere and the substantial evidence of its targeted use of MII against Sweden, it provides a relevant case to study.

Finally, I have chosen to focus on news media rather than other platforms, such as social media. While antagonistic states use various channels to project their MII, news media was selected because it has historically been a primary means for distributing information. Additionally, Russian state-funded media plays a key role in projecting the state's narratives (Wagnsson & Barzanje, 2021:240).

5.4. Selection of Respondents and Distribution of the Surveys

The target respondents for this study are Swedish citizens aged 18 and above, chosen to explore how education in source criticism affects their resilience to Russian MII. Ideally, a random sample of Swedish citizens would be used to enhance external validity, as random selection strengthens the ability to generalise findings to the broader population (Essiasson et al., 2024:252-253). However, since this is an experimental study, the primary focus is examining the causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables rather than its generalisability. Consequently, a random sample is not necessary. Instead, I used a convenience sample, i.e. all individuals I could access (ibid). The respondents were randomly assigned to the two groups, which preserves internal validity and allows the observation of causal effects. While the sample may not mirror the population perfectly, a non-representative experiment can still provide valuable insights into hypotheses and theories (ibid). Although the results will not be generalisable to all Swedish citizens, I will be able to analyse how the participating citizens respond. This allows me to draw conclusions about the causal relationship between my dependent and independent variables.

Another key factor in evaluating causal effects is the study's power (Essiasson et al., 2024: 253–254), meaning the number of respondents who completed the survey. A higher power improves the ability to distinguish systematic effects from random variation. While adding treatment groups can provide more detailed insights, it also risks weakening the power by spreading participants too thinly across groups (ibid). To address this, I carefully structured the surveys to balance detail and power by creating one study that tested both Russian and Swedish media. The alternative would have been conducting separate studies for each, which would have required four different surveys and might have compromised the study's power. Low power increases the risk of non-significant results, leaving uncertainty as to whether the treatment was ineffective or if the sample size was simply too small. A larger sample size, therefore, helps distinguish treatment effects from random noise by isolating the variables and minimising external noise from real-world influences.

To achieve the selected sample of respondents and aim for the study to have high power, a link and QR code were created. This allowed me to distribute the survey online, via social media, and in person in Stockholm and Gothenburg. I used Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn for online distribution. Although the survey was initially shared within my personal networks, it was open for others to share, potentially expanding its reach beyond my immediate circle. This approach helps me to reach a broader audience across different parts of Sweden rather than limiting the sample to the two largest cities. However, relying on social media might lead to an overrepresentation of younger, like-minded individuals, as the sample could skew towards my acquaintances. Using LinkedIn to share my survey may also alter the representation, as the platform is commonly utilised by academics. To address this, I also distributed the survey in person at cafes, libraries, and train and bus stations, reaching individuals who are less active online, which potentially increases the diversity of the sample. I also placed the QR code in universities and libraries in Stockholm and Gothenburg.

Using both approaches helps ensure a larger and more varied pool of respondents with enough variability to test my hypotheses. However, as mentioned earlier, a perfectly representative sample is not necessary for this experiment, as the theory and hypotheses are the focus. The slightly tweaked representation will not harm the study's results. Rather, it is vital to collect a large sample size to achieve high power to analyse the effect of education in source criticism. The random assignment of participants to the different groups is the key to preserving internal validity and drawing meaningful conclusions.

Furthermore, to ensure that respondents are Swedish citizens over 18 years old, I asked if they were above 18 years old during the consent process and asked about their citizenship as well as their actual age at the end of the study. These questions allow me to exclude any respondents who indicate that they are not Swedish citizens or not adults. If respondents were under 18, they were directed to the end of the survey and unable to participate further. Each respondent is permitted to participate only once, preventing excluded participants from re-entering the study by providing false information. Additionally, the survey, articles, and treatment were conducted in Swedish, which increases the likelihood that respondents are Swedish citizens, as Swedish is primarily spoken in Sweden.

5.5. Dependent Variable

The study's dependent variable is resilience against MII, operationalised through the theoretical framework, which posits that education in source criticism enhances individuals' ability to detect, mistrust, and refrain from sharing MII. Thus, detecting, mistrusting and refraining from sharing are the components of this study's dependent variable.

The dependent variable is measured through specific questions in the questionnaire. After reading one of the news articles, respondents were immediately asked to rate claims about that article on a scale from 1 to 10, where "1" meant "do not agree at all" and "10" meant "completely agree". This process was repeated for each of the four articles. The scale used in the study is ordinal, meaning it ranks responses without indicating how much one response differs from another. While the scale appears to be evenly spaced, the intervals between values may not be equal, as respondents could interpret the scale differently. Therefore, although the scale ranges from 1 to 10, it functions as an ordinal scale (Esaiasson et al., 2024:157-158). The advantage of using an ordinal scale is that the values are consistent across all questions, allowing for ranking. A scale of 1 to 10 was chosen to ensure no neutral value, causing them to lean toward one side of the scale. Since all the components of the dependent variable are measured using the same ordinal scale, there is no need for re-coding in STATA for the analysis. Instead, I analysed the mean of responses across treatment groups in a linear OLS regression model, which allows for examining the effect of the treatment on average levels of trust, detection, and sharing.

Detection is operationalised by asking respondents whether they believe “*the news article is written by a trustworthy source*”. They were asked to rate the trustworthiness of each news article’s source on a scale from 1 to 10. This question shows whether Russian media sources are perceived as less reliable than Swedish media sources. While it primarily addresses trust in sources, it also serves as a proxy for detection, allowing respondents to indicate which sources they perceive as trustworthy or untrustworthy. A low score on the trustworthiness scale for Russian news articles will indirectly reflect their ability to detect MII. Directly asking if an article is Russian MII would be too obvious and could bias the results, compromising the study’s ability to establish causal relationships. This operationalisation enabled respondents to differentiate between Swedish and Russian sources without requiring them to voice their opinions directly.

Mistrust is operationalised by asking respondents how they perceive the statement “*the news article is trustworthy*”. This operationalisation is similar to how *detection* is measured; however, while *detection* focuses on the trustworthiness of the source, *mistrust* focuses on general trust in the content of the article itself. Respondents were asked to rate the trustworthiness of each article’s content on a scale of 1 to 10. This question helps assess whether Swedish citizens perceive Russian news articles as more or less trustworthy than Swedish news articles. This approach aims to measure general mistrust toward the articles without making the study's intent too obvious.

Refrain from sharing MII was measured using two questions. First, respondents were asked to rate the statement, “*The article is interesting enough for me to share it on social media*”, on a scale of 1 to 10. Second, they were asked to answer, “*Do you usually share news on social media?*” with a yes or no response, which was coded as a dummy variable (0 = No, 1 = Yes). Using both questions allows me to assess the likelihood of the articles being shared specifically by individuals who typically share news on social media. This approach lets me exclude responses from individuals who usually do not share news content online, focusing on those who do. Including both sharers and non-sharers could negatively impact the measurement of sharing behaviour and potentially skew the results.

Lastly, I have included two manipulation check questions to assess whether the treatment was successful. The first question asks, “*On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you in your answers?*” it aims to determine whether respondents in the treatment group feel more confident

in their responses after receiving education in source criticism. The second question asks, “*On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to think about the credibility and reliability of information when it comes from an unfamiliar source?*”. This question subtly assesses whether participants are inclined to evaluate sources critically, which could indicate the effect of education on source criticism without directly mentioning it. Including this question provides a basis for analysis even if the main hypotheses show a null result (Esaiasson et al., 2024:249-250). While this question may not address all aspects of the hypotheses directly, it offers insight into whether the treatment was effective in fostering critical thinking skills in evaluating the online information sphere.

The remaining questions in the questionnaire are designed to conceal the study's actual purpose from respondents. As mentioned earlier, awareness of the study's aim could bias their answers and, consequently, affect the validity of the study (Esaiasson, 2024:255). The focus of this study is to test the hypotheses, and the remaining questions do not contribute to that testing. However, while these questions do not directly contribute to the hypotheses, they may still offer valuable descriptive insights into how Swedish citizens consume news and may serve as a part of an exploratory analysis in the case of a successful randomisation.

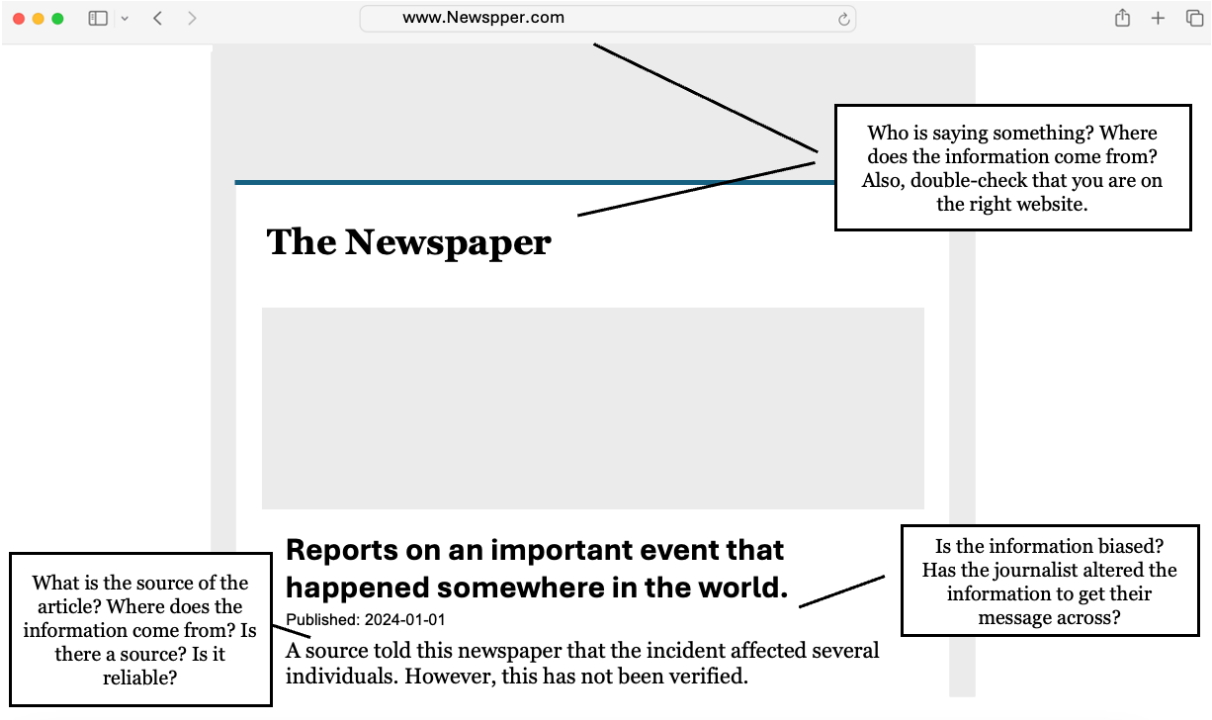
Additionally, the survey questions were tested on peers, friends, and family before distribution. This was done to ensure that the questions were easy to understand. To avoid any bias, the test participants were not allowed to participate in the final survey after reviewing the questions.

5.6. Treatment

The treatment of the study is education in source criticism and functions as the study's independent variable. The design of this education is inspired by the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency's approach to “recognising deceptive identities” (Psychological Defence Agency, 2023:17). While the “recognising deceptive identities” material emphasises media and information literacy to identify deceptive identities online, my study adapted this design to the study's theoretical framework focusing on authenticity, dependency, and tendency to educate respondents specifically in source criticism. In other words, the independent variable is operationalised by three of the four criteria of source criticism (Bertilsson, 2021:2). Further, the treatment was conducted in Swedish and can be found in the appendix (Appendix B: Treatment in Swedish).

Authenticity is taught by emphasising who is saying something, where the information comes from, and whether it is trustworthy. It is taught by asking the respondent who is behind the article and where the information is derived from. *Dependency* enhances the ability to assess which sources the news article uses and if it is a credible source. It is taught by encouraging the respondent to look at the content’s source, whether it exists, and whether it is trustworthy. *The tendency* is taught by emphasising the critical assessment of why the source is saying something and whether it is biased.

Figure 2. The education in source criticism in English



Comment: The treatment was conducted in Swedish in the survey and can be found in the appendix.

The independent variable was coded as a dummy variable where 0 = did not receive education in source criticism and 1 = did receive education in source criticism. This allows me to examine the differences between the answers depending on whether the respondent was randomised into the treatment group and received education in source criticism or into the control group and did not receive any education.

5.7. Selection of Articles

As previously stated, I have chosen four titles and introductions from Swedish and Russian news articles. These were selected to keep the questionnaire straightforward and quick to complete. Additionally, the introduction of a news article serves as a concise summary, giving respondents an understanding of the topic without being too long-winded. While using four full articles could have enhanced respondents' understanding, it would have also lengthened the time required to complete the questionnaire, increasing the risk of respondent dropouts. Such dropouts could reduce the study's power and weaken the ability to draw conclusions about cause and effect, ultimately affecting the study's validity.

The news articles used in the survey were translated into Swedish to prevent respondents from easily identifying foreign sources based solely on language. Conducting the study in Swedish also aligns with its focus on the perceptions of Swedish respondents. The translation was adapted to follow Swedish grammar conventions rather than as a direct word-for-word rendition. This approach minimises the risk that respondents might recognise Russian media due to translation inconsistencies, encouraging a critical evaluation of the source instead. Importantly, while I adjusted the grammar, I preserved the original content and message of the articles. Maintaining the same content is essential, as one of the treatment's key criteria, tendency, assesses potential bias in the source. Altering the content would compromise respondents' ability to distinguish between Swedish and Russian news articles. Additionally, all articles were reformatted with the same font and design to ensure consistency. These adaptations in both language and design help isolate the variable, supporting a clearer analysis of the causal relationship. The Swedish versions of the news articles are included in the appendix (Appendix C: News Articles in Swedish).

The articles were carefully selected to obscure their national origins. As noted earlier, the central focus of this experiment is to test whether education in source criticism, specifically authenticity, dependency, and tendency, can help individuals resist Russian MII. Therefore, the articles were selected in a way that allows respondents to apply these source criticism skills.

These are the selected articles:

Figure 3. News article from Sputnik (2018):

Swedish 'Thought Police' Brings Elderly Ladies to Justice for 'Hate Speech'

Published by Sputnik, 2nd March 2018

A group, regarding itself as a protector of free speech and which admits to prioritizing the protection of journalists and politicians, was surprised at how many seniors are engaged in "inciting hate."

Figure 4. News Article from Svenska Dagbladet (2019):

Chinese media warns about Sweden

Published by Svd, 23rd December 2019

State-controlled media in China warns about Sweden. This weekend, the state-run organization CCTV reported that the Chinese embassy in Stockholm has warned that Chinese tourists in Sweden are being robbed at knife and gunpoint, Swedish Radio Ekot reports.

Comment: The author's translation.

Figure 5. News article from Omni (2023):

Russia is Going to Give Free Grain to African Countries

Published by Omni, 27th July 2023

Russian President Vladimir Putin promised free grain to six African countries in the coming months at the opening of the Russian-African summit in St. Petersburg, Reuters reports. According to the president, Russia is heading for a record harvest and can take Ukraine's place as a grain supplier to Africa.

Comment: The author's translation.

Figure 6. News article from Tass (2024):

Sweden has 'Neither the Right nor will' to Disagree with US over Nord Stream — Diplomat

Published by Tass, 13th July 2024

Let me remind you that the crime was committed in Sweden's special economic zone. And the reason for such legal apathy is that the chief beneficiary of the terrorist attack is the administration of [US President Joe] Biden, who did not even keep secret the relevant plans

The first article, "Swedish 'Thought Police' Brings Elderly Ladies to Justice for 'Hate Speech'" (Sputnik, 2018), is written by the Russian-state-funded media house Sputnik. Researchers often identify Sputnik, alongside RT, as two of Russia's MII sources (Hellman, 2024; Wagnsson,

2023). The chosen article covers the group 'Näthatsgranskaren', a Swedish organisation of lawyers, law students, former police officers, and system developers who created software to monitor hate speech on social media (Svenska Dagbladet, 2018). However, Sputnik frames this group as part of the police and implies they are against Swedish freedom of speech. They even call the group the "thought police," a term borrowed from George Orwell's dystopia *1984*, where the thought police were tasked to control people's beliefs and opinions. This promotes an image of the Swedish police and agencies as against liberal democratic values. Furthermore, this portrayal is misleading and does not match Svenska Dagbladet's (SvD) reporting on the same topic (Svenska Dagbladet, 2018), which Sputnik references as the source. According to SvD, only about 1% of the posts that 'Näthatsgranskaren' examines lead to formal notification, while other posts may be offensive or racist, they are not illegal. Additionally, SvD's article makes no mention of elderly individuals, like 65-year-old women, being prosecuted (ibid).

Like the first news article, the fourth, "*Sweden Has 'Neither the Right nor Will' to Disagree with US over Nord Stream — Diplomat*" (Tass, 2024), is also published by Russian state-owned media, Tass. While Tass is not as widely considered a propaganda outlet, its credibility has been questioned. In March 2022, it was removed from Reuters Connect for biased coverage of the Ukraine war (Reuters, 2022a), and in September 2023, it was suspended from the European Alliance of News Agencies (European Alliance of News Agencies, 2023). These actions raise questions about Tass's reliability, especially given its state ownership. Stier's (2015) research underscores how regimes influence media freedom, citing Russia under Putin as an example where state interests can lead to media censorship and control (Stier, 2015:1275).

The news article describes how Sweden is allegedly unable to investigate US involvement in the attack on Nord Stream on September 26, 2022. It refers to diplomat Maria Zakharova, who appears to suggest to the paper that Sweden is protecting the US by not recognising US participation in the terrorist attack. Furthermore, it indicates that the US was open with its plan to attack the pipeline. It suggests that the U.S. was behind the Nord Stream attack and portrays Sweden as merely following the U.S.'s lead, unable or unwilling to question its role in the attack. However, the Russian diplomat does not refer to any sources behind the statement, and the statement goes against the investigations carried out by European actors. Reuters (2022b) reports that the investigation points to a group of Ukrainians being behind the act and not the US.

The two Russian news articles were chosen for the study due to how they distort the events. While the Sputnik news article twists SvD's reporting on 'Näthatsgranskaren' and portrays Sweden in a way that contradicts the country's values of freedom of speech, the Tass news article instead describes how Sweden is allegedly unable to investigate US involvement in the attack on Nord Stream. Both news articles also lack a clear source in their introduction, referring only to "the group" or "the diplomat" without clarifying who is behind the statements. In short, the article is biased, from a Russian media source, and lacks clear sourcing. It conflicts with source criticism's three criteria: authenticity, dependency, and tendency, making them a fitting example for this study.

Ideally, I would have used an article from RT, as many sources indicate that RT is frequently used for MII purposes (Hellman, 2024; Wagnsson, 2023). However, since the EU blocked RT after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, I am unable to access its articles. It would feel ethically questionable to use current EU-banned material. As a result, I selected Tass instead.

The second article, "*Chinese Media Warns About Sweden*" (Svenska Dagbladet, 2019), was published by the Swedish outlet SvD. This article was chosen because it objectively reports on how Chinese media and government agencies caution their citizens about travelling to Sweden. SvD covers this topic without bias and is transparent about its sources, specifically citing Sveriges Radio Ekot, a Swedish public broadcaster widely regarded as trustworthy by the public for its objective reporting, according to the Som-institute's research (Andersson, 2024).

The third article, "*Russia is Going to Give Free Grain to African Countries*" (Omni, 2023), was chosen due to its more positive way of reporting on Russia. It reports how Russian president Vladimir Putin promises free grain to African countries as Russia is heading for a record harvest. The news article is objective and covers the topic without being biased. Furthermore, it uses Reuters as a source. Reuters describes itself as a 'stateless' media source that prioritises accuracy, independence, integrity and freedom of bias (Reuters, 2024). It scored 45.17 on Ad Fontes Media's (2024) reliability score, where reliability scores above 40 are generally good, and scores below 24 are generally problematic. Its bias score is -1.22 on a scale that ranges from -42 to +42, where zero equals minimal bias (ibid). Hence, Reuters is generally considered a credible source.

The Swedish news articles were selected to provide a clear contrast to the Russian ones. Unlike the Russian articles, which display bias, lack transparency, and originate from Russian sources, the Swedish articles are objective, transparent about their sources, and authored by Swedish outlets. This selection of news articles allows respondents to critically assess each article using the key source criticism criteria of authenticity, dependency, and tendency.

Lastly, the translation of the articles was tested on peers, friends, and family before distribution. This ensured that the language was grammatically correct, easily understandable, and consistent with the original content. As mentioned earlier, the test participants were excluded from the final survey to prevent any potential bias.

5.8. Randomisation

As previously mentioned, randomly assigning respondents to the two surveys is crucial for the study's internal validity, i.e., the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Esaiasson et al., 2024:252). By creating sufficiently large, randomly composed groups, you can expect them to be similar at an aggregate level. As a result, the groups will be nearly identical, even though they consist of different individuals. Consequently, the treatment is the only factor that can explain any difference in the dependent variable between the two groups (Teorell & Svensson, 2007:75).

To ensure random assignment, I used the randomiser function in Qualtrics to direct each respondent to one of the two groups through a single link or QR code. Each respondent can only use the link to answer the survey once, preventing them from switching groups or returning to change their responses. This random assignment process was thoroughly tested multiple times before survey distribution to ensure internal validity.

The three control questions at the end of the survey regarding the respondent's demographics ensured that the random assignment was successful. The questions asked the respondent's sex, age group, and educational level. Due to how the questions are not affected by the treatment they could provide me with the opportunity to examine whether the randomisation had been successful. If the randomisation is successful, the demographic questions may function as an exploratory analysis, as the demographic groups may show differences in their answers (Esaiasson, 2024:249).

5.9. Ethical Considerations

The purpose of an experimental design is to manipulate the independent variable to investigate whether it affects the respondents in any direction. This is not justifiable in all contexts; certain ethical considerations must be made (Teorell & Svensson, 2007,19-20). Two important ethical guidelines are the consent and the information requirements (Esaiasson et al., 2024:257). The respondents must consent to participate in the study and have the option to discontinue the survey at any point, and this is referred to as the consent requirement. The information requirement concerns how the respondents must be informed and aware of the purpose of the study. Initially, this study is presented as "a survey that examines how people react to various news articles". After answering the questionnaire, the participants are provided with more detailed information: "This survey aimed to investigate whether Swedish citizens become more resistant to Russian propaganda after undergoing education in source criticism".

In this study, there are more ethical considerations to consider. Namely, the usage of real Russian MII. Therefore, it was included in the consent form that the respondent must be above 18 years old. At the end of the study, I informed the respondents that some of the news articles in the questionnaire were from Russian news sources, as well as which parts of the Russian news were biased or skewed. There were also links to other sources reporting on the same event. Additionally, I informed the respondents of how antagonistic states may use information to harm states. There were also links to the Swedish Psychological Defense Agency's webpage on source criticism and information management, as well as a handbook for private individuals to provide the respondents with more information about the subject. This is seen in the appendix (Appendix E: Debriefing in Swedish).

Since my study includes actual Russian media, I have deliberately avoided using content related to ongoing conflicts, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Russia-Ukraine war, or Russian bombings in Syria. This decision was made as I could not predict who would respond to the survey or whether they might have personal connections to these conflicts. Using current events in the survey raises ethical concerns as it engages with sensitive topics that may potentially cause psychological distress or anxiety among respondents, particularly if they have personal connections to the events being discussed. Instead, I selected articles focusing on issues like Swedish freedom of expression and an accusation that the U.S. is behind the Nord Stream attack.

Lastly, the use of an online survey tool also raises ethical considerations regarding the collection of respondents' personal information, such as IP addresses and location data. I opted for Qualtrics because it offers the option to disable personal data collection. While I did not actively collect any personal information, it is important to acknowledge that Qualtrics may still gather data for its own policy and protection purposes. To ensure transparency, I informed respondents of this both before entering the survey and on the initial page of the questionnaire. Furthermore, a link to Qualtrics' data protection policy was referred to for further information.

6. Control and Re-coding of Data

The survey was published on November 4, 2024, and remained open to respondents until December 5, 2024. During this period, 195 people participated, 1 of whom was under 18, and 2 who were not Swedish citizens and were excluded. Thus, 192 respondents remained, with 98 respondents assigned to the control group and 94 respondents assigned to the treatment group. Additionally, one respondent reported being 832 years old. This answer was removed, as the individual's age cannot be verified, but the rest of their responses have been retained in the data.

6.1. Control of Randomisation

Table 1 presents the mean values of the control questions for the control- and the treatment group, along with the p-values for each comparison. The p-values were derived from t-tests conducted for each question to assess the success of the randomisation.

Table 1. Means and P-value of control questions

	Sex	Education	Age
Control Group	1.5	4.102041	38.10309
Treatment Group	1.606383	3.808511	37.75532
P-value	0.1643	0.0859	0.8727
N	192	192	191

Comment: Age has a smaller number of observations due to one respondent reported being 832 years old. This answer has been removed, as the individual's age cannot be verified.

At first glance, there are some differences between the groups; however, the variation is relatively small. The mean gender value in the control group is 1.5, which indicates a slightly higher representation of men, while the treatment group has a mean of 1.606383, indicating a slightly higher proportion of women, non-binary individuals, or people who chose 'I don't want to specify'. For education, the control group has a mean of 4.102041, while the treatment group has a mean of 3.808511, indicating that the treatment group, on average, has slightly lower levels of education. Lastly, the mean age in the control group is 38.10309, while the treatment group's mean is 37.75532, showing a small difference in age between the two groups. Although these differences are noticeable, they are relatively small (ranging from 0.1 to 0.5), which suggests that the groups are generally homogeneous.

When analysing the p-values for each category, all are above 0.05, meaning that we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This indicates there is no statistically significant difference between the control and treatment groups on these characteristics. Therefore, the groups can be considered homogeneous, and the randomisation process appears to have been successful.

For further context about the dataset, Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. It highlights details such as the higher number of women compared to men who responded, the fact that nearly half of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree and the relatively even distribution across age groups. As previously mentioned, the collected data do not need to be representative of the Swedish population. Rather, the focus is on the success of the randomisation process. Therefore, Table 2 serves solely to provide additional context and illustrate the demographics of the respondents, offering a better understanding of the dataset used in this study.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondent

Category	Subcategory	Total (n, %)
Sex (1-4)	Men (=1)	88 (45.83%)
	Women (=2)	103 (53.65%)
	Nonbinary (=3)	0 (0%)
	Do not want to specify (=4)	1 (0.52%)
Education (1-8)	Elementary school (=1)	2 (1.04%)
	Secondary school (=2)	25 (13.02%)
	Less than a bachelor (=3)	24 (12.50%)
	Bachelor (=4)	88 (45.83%)
	Master's (=5)	41 (21.35%)
	PhD (=6)	6 (3.12%)
	Other (=7)	5 (2.6%)
	Do not want to specify (=8)	1 (0.52%)
Age (1-100)	19-25	54 (28.27%)
	26-35	50 (26.17%)
	36-45	24 (12.56%)
	46-55	26 (13.61%)
	56+	37 (19.37%)

Comment: The percentage of each subcategory and variable coding is presented in parentheses.

6.2. Limitations of data

During the data collection process, two primary limitations emerged. First, the sample size was smaller than ideal. While many individuals clicked on the survey link and were randomised into a survey condition, fewer respondents completed the entire study. This was likely due to the survey's length, the number of questions and the articles included. According to Qualtrics' sample size calculator, 385 respondents were needed to achieve high statistical power. Unfortunately, the collected data included only about half of this number, potentially affecting the strength of the results.

Second, two respondents reported difficulties selecting the answer option '1' due to a technical issue. To address this, the data were recoded to mitigate the impact of this problem. Specifically, response options were re-coded into a 1-5 ordinal scale: options 1 and 2 were recoded as 1, 3 and 4 as 2, 5 and 6 as 3, 7 and 8 as 4, and 9 and 10 as 5. This adjustment ensures that respondents who intended to select '1' but clicked '2' due to technical issues remain categorised in the lowest response group. As a result, all variables are now analysed on a 1-5 scale instead of the original 1-10 scale. This adjustment may result in some loss of detail in the data. However, the focus of the analysis is not on whether respondents selected a '1' or a '2' but rather on understanding the overall levels of detect, trust, and share that respondents report and how these levels change after the treatment. The re-coding to a 1-5 scale ensures that the data more accurately reflects respondents' intended answers, which ultimately enhances the validity of the study without compromising the aim of the analysis.

To demonstrate how the re-coding of the variable affects its interpretation, two histograms are presented. Both histograms show the distribution of the 'detect' variable for Sputnik between the control and treatment groups. The histogram on the top displays the distribution when the variable was coded on a 1-10 scale, while the histogram on the bottom shows the distribution after the variable was re-coded to a 1-5 scale.

Figure 7. Detect Sputnik, when coded as 1-10

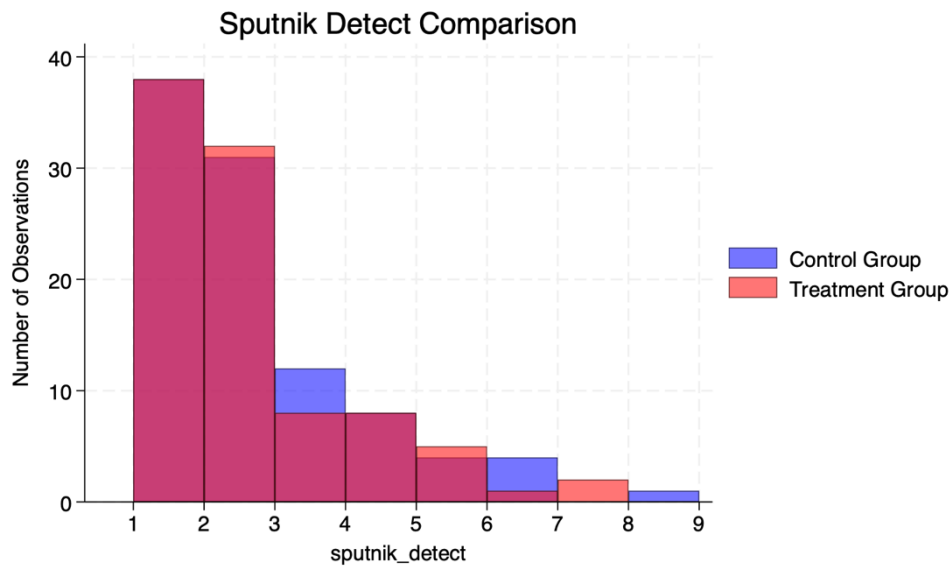
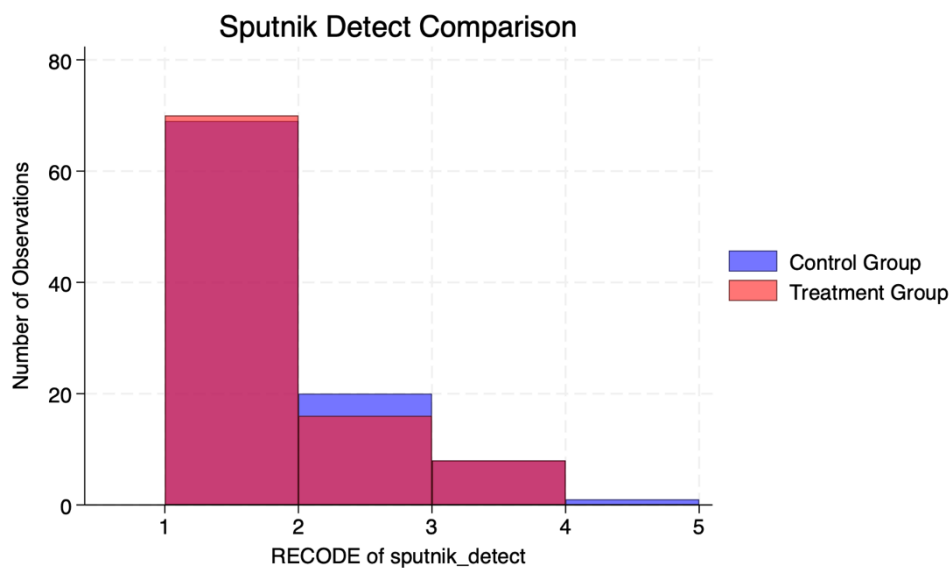


Figure 8. Detect Sputnik, when coded as 1-5



As illustrated, the re-coding resulted in a loss of nuance, as the 1-10 scale allowed for more detailed distinctions between respondents' answers. However, despite the re-coding, the overall pattern of responses remains consistent: most respondents selected lower values, with fewer respondents choosing higher scores. This consistency indicates that the core trait measured by the variable, how the respondents perceive trust within Sputnik as a source, remains unchanged, even though the scale was simplified. Consequently, these histograms effectively show that while the re-coding process reduced the nuance of the scale, the underlying distribution and trends in the data remained consistent.

6.3. Index

To simplify the analysis and effectively address the research question: *What effect does education in source criticism have on Swedish citizens' resilience against malignant information influence?* Four indices have been created. These indices combine the three components of the dependent variable: detect, mistrust, and refrain from sharing, which together create resilience against MII. Each of these components is scored on a 1-5 scale. When combined, the highest possible score for each index is 15, and the lowest is 3. This scoring system allows us to measure the level of resilience Swedish citizens exhibit toward the news articles and to see if this resilience changes after receiving education in source criticism. Ideally, the Russian articles should have low scores, indicating a lack of trust in the source, content, and the desire to share. Conversely, the Swedish articles should have higher scores, reflecting greater trust and willingness to share.

To avoid skewing the data, the sharing index will only include the 21 respondents who indicated that they "usually share articles on the internet." This decision ensures that the remaining 171 respondents, who do not typically share content online, do not negatively impact the analysis of sharing behaviour. Meanwhile, the detect and trust indices will continue to include all 192 responses, providing a broader view of the participants' overall resilience.

Table 2. *Index for each article with Cronbach's Alpha*

News Article	Components	Cronbach's Alpha
Sputnik	Detect, trust and share	0.8632
SvD	Detect, trust and share	0.5112
Omni	Detect, trust and share	0.7716
Tass	Detect, trust and share	0.8732

The indices are evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, a widely used measure of internal consistency, which indicates how well the variables within an index correlate with each other. Cronbach's Alpha ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating better internal consistency. Generally, a value above 0.7 is considered acceptable for suggesting that the items on the scale are sufficiently correlated (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011:54).

Based on the results presented in Table 2, the index for the SvD news article does not meet the requirement for internal consistency, as its Cronbach's Alpha is below 0.7. However, the other indices meet the conventional threshold for covariation. Despite the lower internal consistency of the SvD index, all four indices will be used in the analysis. However, to ensure the reliability of the study, the components of the dependent variable, detect, mistrust, and stop share, will be analysed independently as well.

7. Results

7.1. Test of Hypotheses

7.1.1. Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2

H1 and H2 suggest that education in source criticism will positively affect Swedish civilians' ability to detect MII, as measured by their trust ratings for the sources. Specifically, Swedish media is expected to show a higher trust level, while Russian media is expected to show a lower level. Four OLS regression analyses were conducted to test these hypotheses, and the results are presented below.

OLS Regression Table 1. *Detect*

	(1) Sputnik	(2) SvD	(3) Omni	(4) Tass
Treatment (0/1)	-0.0540 (-0.53)	-0.0410 (-0.25)	0.222 (1.26)	0.155 (1.28)
Intercept	1.408*** (19.10)	4.031*** (37.31)	3.163*** (26.50)	1.439*** (21.11)
<i>N</i>	194	194	194	194
<i>R</i> ²	0.001	0.000	0.008	0.009

*Comment: t statistics in parenthesis. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Table 1, the regression analysis of detect, shows how education in source criticism affects respondents' trust in the different sources. The results indicate, when looking at the B-coefficient (β), a negative effect on trust in Sputnik and SvD and a positive effect on trust in Omni and Tass. Consequently, the effects of education in source criticism on trust in Sputnik and Omni align with the hypotheses.

When analysing Sputnik, the control group had an average trust level of 1,408 on a 1-5 scale (as indicated by the intercept). After receiving education in source criticism, this trust level decreased by on average by -0.0540. The R^2 value is 0.001, suggesting that education in source criticism explains only 0.1% of the variance between the dependent and independent variables explained by the regression model. However, a low R^2 is typical in survey-based data as the responses may be random due to how the respondents may not carefully consider their answers. However, when analysing Omni, the intercept shows that the control group's average trust level was 3.163 on a 1-5 scale. After receiving education in source criticism, trust in Omni increased

by an average of 0.222, which illustrates how the respondent’s trust in Omni as a source increased after the treatment. The R² is 0.008, explaining 0.8% of the variance between the variables.

Although the effects on Sputnik and Omni align with the hypotheses, it is important to note that neither result is statistically significant. As a result, we cannot rule out chance as a potential explanation. In other words, while these results support the hypotheses, they cannot be used to confirm them. Furthermore, the regression analysis for SvD and Tass shows that trust in these sources moved in the opposite direction from the hypotheses. SvD had an intercept at 4.031 and decreased by -0.0410 after the treatment, while Tass had an intercept at 1.439 and increased by 0.155 after the education. However, since neither of the results are statistically significant, the results cannot be used to disprove the hypotheses. As a result, neither of the tables in regression table 1 can confirm or disprove the H1 or H2.

7.1.2. Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4

H3 and H4 suggest that education in source criticism will positively affect Swedish civilians' trust in credible media content and the MII content negatively, as measured by their trust ratings. These hypotheses differ from the ideas presented in H1 and H2, shifting the focus from trust in sources to trust within the content of the articles. It is expected that Swedish media will show a higher trust level while Russian media will show a lower level of trust. Four OLS regression analyses were conducted and presented below to test these hypotheses.

OLS Regression Table 2. *Mistrust*

	(5) Sputnik	(6) SvD	(7) Omni	(8) Tass
Treatment (0/1)	0.00890 (0.07)	0.131 (0.77)	0.0454 (0.24)	0.0145 (0.11)
Intercept	1.459*** (17.09)	3.582*** (30.02)	3.316*** (25.58)	1.592*** (17.50)
<i>N</i>	192	192	192	192
<i>R</i> ²	0.000	0.003	0.000	0.000

*Comment: t statistics in parenthesis. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.*

Examining regression table 2, all β are positive, indicating that trust in Swedish and Russian articles increased after education in source criticism, contrary to H3 and support H4.

Consequently, all articles experienced an increase in trust after receiving education in source criticism.

The intercepts for SvD and Omni show that the control group rated SvD's trust level as 3.582 and Omni's as 3.316 (on a 1-5 scale). After receiving education in source criticism, the level of trust in these articles increased, on average, by 1.131 for SvD and 0.0454 for Omni. The R^2 for SvD is 0.003, explaining 0.3% of the variation between the variables, while the R^2 for Omni is 0.000.

Looking at Russian articles, Sputnik had a trust level of 1.459 among the control group, and Tass had a trust level of 1.592. After receiving education in source criticism, the level of trust in these articles increased (Sputnik by 0.00890, and Tass by 0.0145), contrary to the expected effect. Both the Russian articles had an R^2 at 0.000. However, none of the β in Table 2 are statistically significant. Thus, neither of the tables in the regression analysis can confirm or disprove hypotheses 3 or 4.

7.1.3. Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6

H5 and H6 suggest that education in source criticism will have a positive effect on Swedish citizens' willingness to share credible content online and a negative effect on MII. It is measured by looking at the respondents who normally share content online and whether they would share any of the four articles. The Swedish media is expected to have higher levels of wanting to share, while Russian media is expected to have a lower level. Four OLS regression analyses were conducted to test these hypotheses, and the results are presented below.

OLS Regression Table 3. *Refrain from Sharing*

	(9) Sputnik	(10) SvD	(11) Omni	(12) Tass
Treatment (0/1)	-0.556 (-0.95)	-1.361* (-2.17)	-0.250 (-0.42)	-0.0278 (-0.06)
Intercept	1.889*** (4.26)	2.778*** (5.86)	2*** (4.47)	1.444*** (4.32)
<i>N</i>	21	21	21	21
R^2	0.045	0.198	0.009	0.000

*Comment: t statistics in parenthesis. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Analysing Regression Table 3, all of the β is negative, meaning that the education in source criticism had a negative effect on the Swedish citizen's willingness to share all of the content online. Consequently, the willingness to share Russian media sources is in line with H5, while the effect on the Swedish articles was the opposite of what H6 expected.

Looking at the Russian articles, the willingness to share Sputnik decreased by -0.556 from the intercept, which was 1.889, and Tass decreased by -0.0278 from the intercept at 1.444 (on a scale of 1–5). In other words, in the control group, participants' average willingness to share Sputnik was 1.889, and Tass was 1.444, both declining after receiving education in source criticism. The R^2 for Sputnik is 0.045, explaining 4.5% of the variation, while the R^2 for Tass is 0.000. However, neither result is statistically significant. Therefore, the findings cannot confirm or disprove the hypotheses.

For Swedish sources, education also reduced willingness to share. SvD decreased by -1.361 from an intercept of 2.778, while Omni decreased by -0.250 from the intercept of 2. In the control group, the average willingness to share SvD was 2.778, and Omni was 2, both decreasing after the education. The R^2 for SvD is 0.198, explaining 19.8% of the variation, while the R^2 for Omni is 0.009, explaining 0.9% of the variance. Omni is not statistically significant, while SvD is statistically significant with a p-value below 0.05. However, the small sample size of 21 respondents limits the ability to disconfirm the hypothesis. As Esaiasson (2024:253) notes, at least 30–40 respondents per group are required for meaningful statistical tests to detect differences between control and treatment groups. The small sample size limits statistical power, making it harder to confidently detect differences between groups. Thus, despite the statistical significance in the regression table for SvD, the small sample size prevents reliable conclusions about cause and effect.

7.2. Index: Resilience Against MII

Due to the difficulty in analysing how the previously presented regression tables affect Swedish citizens' resilience against MII, I will also analyse the indices. This will help to analyse the effect of education in source criticism on resilience against MII to address the study's research question.

OLS Regression Table 4. *Index*

	(13) Resilience Sputnik	(14) Resilience SvD	(15) Resilience Omni	(16) Resilience Tass
Treatment (0/1)	-0.0408 (-0.16)	0.0369 (0.11)	0.326 (0.91)	0.220 (0.85)
Intercept	3.041*** (17.03)	7.867*** (33.62)	6.663*** (26.64)	3.163*** (17.40)
<i>N</i>	192	192	192	192
<i>R</i> ²	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.004

*Comment: t statistics in parenthesis. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

By analysing the β for the OLS regression in Table 4, we observe that resilience for Sputnik, SvD, and Omni aligns with the combined hypotheses, i.e., education in source criticism increases resilience to MII. Sputnik's intercept is 3.041, representing the average level of detect, trust and stop share in the control group. After education in source criticism, the level decreases by -0.0408. For SvD, the intercept is 7.867, and it increases by 0.0369 after education, while Omni's intercept is 6.6663 and also increases by 0.326 after treatment. This suggests that Swedish citizens become better at detecting, mistrusting, and refraining from sharing unreliable information after receiving education on source criticism. Specifically, it highlights the effectiveness of education in source criticism in building resilience to MII when the components of the dependent variable are analysed together. The scores on the indices (ranging from 1 to 15, with higher values representing greater resilience to MII) increased for Swedish news outlets following the education. In contrast, the scores decreased for the Russian outlet, indicating reduced trust and engagement with its content. These findings suggest alignment with the hypotheses when combined. Furthermore, the R^2 for Sputnik and SvD is 0.000, while the R^2 for Omni is 0.004, explaining 0.4% of the variance between the variables. However, none of these results are statistically significant, meaning we cannot rule out chance as an explanation, and the findings cannot confirm or disprove the research question.

Tass, on the other hand, shows a positive effect on resilience after education in source criticism, and it does not support the hypotheses. The intercept is 3.163, which increases by 0.220 after education. In other words, this result contradicts the hypotheses. The R^2 is 0.004, explaining 0.4% of the variance. Unfortunately, this result is also not statistically significant.

7.3. Manipulation Check

Given the insignificance of the results and their inability to support the hypotheses, the manipulation check questions will also be analysed. These questions were designed to evaluate whether education in source criticism increased respondents' assertiveness in their answers and if they normally reflect on sources when reading news online. This analysis provides insight into whether the treatment was effective in influencing respondents' approach to evaluating news articles.

OLS Regression Table 5. *Manipulation Check*

	(17)	(18)
	Assertiveness of answer	Reflection of Sources
Treatment (0/1)	-0.0365 (-0.27)	-0.0651 (-0.60)
Intercept	3.643*** (38.24)	4.469*** (58.95)
<i>N</i>	192	192
<i>R</i> ²	0.000	0.002

*Comment: t statistics in parenthesis. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

By analysing the manipulation check question, we observe that the treatment did not have the expected effect. i.e. the treatment did not effectively influence the respondents as intended. Education in source criticism had a negative effect on respondents' assertiveness. The intercept indicates that the control group had an average response of 3.643 (on a scale of 1–5), which decreased by -0.0365 following the education. Similarly, whether respondents typically reflect on the sources of online media also showed a negative effect from the education. In the control group, the average response was 4.469, which decreased by -0.0651 after the treatment. The R^2 value for assertiveness is 0.000, while the R^2 for reflection on sources is 0.002, and indicates that regression analysis explains 0.2% of the variance between the variables. However, as neither variable is statistically significant, we cannot confirm or disprove whether the manipulation had the intended effect.

Despite the negative direction, the results provide interesting insights into the analysis. Firstly, the intercept for reflection of sources shows an average score of 4.469 for the control group. This indicates that Swedish citizens already possess a strong baseline knowledge of source criticism and have a habit of reflecting on sources when reading news online. Secondly, the

negative effect on assertiveness indicates an increased concern and insecurity among the respondents after receiving education in source criticism.

Previous studies suggest that teaching can potentially have side effects, such as excessive scepticism or overconfidence (Nygren & Ecker, 2024:17). In this case, the findings suggest that respondents became more self-critical. Additionally, these findings do not align with prior research on countermeasures, indicating that individuals became more sceptical and lost trust in all media (Clayton et al., 2020; Freeze et al., 2021). Instead, they suggest an increase in awareness and insecurity. This increased awareness and insecurity may explain why respondents reflected less on sources than the control group did. As they became more aware of the importance of sources, their insecurity may have led them to believe they were not reflecting enough on sources. In other words, they did not become more sceptical but rather more concerned and aware of the significance of source criticism. Furthermore, the findings indicate that Swedish citizens already possess a high level of knowledge about the importance of sources. However, it is important to note that the responses are not statistically significant, and no definitive conclusions can be drawn from the results.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causal relationship between education in critical source evaluation and resilience to MII. It did so with the research question: *what effect does education in source criticism have on Swedish citizens' resilience against malign information influence?* To study this, a survey experiment with 192 respondents was conducted. The study yielded mixed results, but certain patterns were identified; for example, education in source criticism appears to have had a positive effect and improved resilience against Swedish media and a negative effect and decreased it against Sputnik. This could support the theory that education in source criticism enhances critical thinking skills, thereby creating a more resilient population. However, looking at all of the regression tables, the control group (the intercepts) consistently rated Swedish articles higher than Russian ones. This can be interpreted as a sign that Swedish schools and authorities are already effective in educating citizens on source criticism. Thus, the respondents already had foundational knowledge of source criticism. Additionally, none of the answers were statistically significant, which means that the hypotheses cannot be confirmed or disproved. In other words, while education in source criticism shows promising results, the effect of the treatment remains uncertain. The observed positive effect may be attributed to the fact that Swedish citizens already had some prior knowledge of source criticism.

Moreover, the results of the manipulation check indicate an increased awareness and self-critique after the treatment. Interestingly, this does not align with previous studies on how countermeasures such as general warnings and education in critical thinking increase general scepticism towards media overall (Clayton et al., 2020; Freeze et al., 2021; Nygren & Ecker, 2024). Instead, this study's result indicates that education in source criticism may be a better-suited option as a countermeasure. The indices for Sputnik, Omni, and SvD suggest that education in source criticism may strengthen resilience to MII. Hence, although the respondents became more self-critical and insecure after the treatment, the indices moved in the right direction of the combined hypotheses. This indicates that the respondents became more aware of the importance of sources and that education in source criticism increased the Swedish citizens' resilience against Russian MII. However, further research is necessary to get statistically significant results to rule out chance as an explanatory factor.

There are several reasons why the results were statistically insignificant, with the primary factor being the methodological challenges faced by the study. The main limitation is the number of respondents who completed the survey. As previously mentioned, the results have approximately half the number of respondents (power) required to draw conclusions. This likely led to the results not being statistically significant. Consequently, I am unable to determine whether there is a causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables. This is a major limitation, as it remains unclear whether the statistically insignificant findings are due to insufficient power, limitations in the questionnaire, failure to properly manipulate the treatment group or other methodological challenges. However, all of these factors likely played a role.

The limitations of the questionnaire are noticeable when looking at the manipulation check regression analysis. The results indicate that it is likely that I failed to manipulate the treatment group. The results indicate that I did not succeed in generating the knowledge I had aimed for, as the assertiveness β declined after the treatment. Drawing on Wagnsson et al. (2024:17-18), the treatment was used to empower individuals to build resilience. However, the results indicate the opposite; the respondents became self-critical. This does not have to be negative, as it also seemed to have increased the respondent's awareness of the importance of being critical of sources. Looking at the indices, the results went in the right direction of the hypotheses.

Another limitation of the questionnaire is that the cover story and questions may not effectively have concealed the study's purpose, which likely caused bias in the responses. This may have occurred because the survey was perceived as too obvious, prompting respondents to answer in ways they thought I wanted rather than based on their true beliefs. In other words, more careful consideration could have gone into designing the survey to prevent this. Additionally, I noticed that more people clicked on the survey link than completed it, likely because they were either uninterested in the content or found it too complex or lengthy. This issue might have been mitigated by focusing exclusively on Russian media. By narrowing the focus, I could have concentrated all efforts on examining how education in source criticism functions as a countermeasure against MII. A more focused survey would likely have been shorter and could have attracted more respondents, leading to statistically significant results. However, the downside of this approach is that it would have limited our understanding of how education in source criticism affects people's ability to evaluate credible news, which was a key aspect of the research gap.

One additional challenge with the questionnaire was the content of the articles. I selected articles that were borderline cases, meaning their origins were not immediately obvious, to encourage respondents to apply source criticism and engage in critical thinking. However, this may have negatively impacted the results, as individuals might have reacted and answered based on the content of the articles. This could have particularly influenced the results in 'regression table 3' on refraining from sharing. The results show a negative effect on all articles, which could be due to respondents disagreeing with the content. To address this, I could have chosen Swedish state-owned sources to balance the two Russian state-funded media sources better. This could have helped participants, as Swedish state media are considered trustworthy in Sweden and might have been easier for them to recognise than Omni and SvD. Additionally, the importance of recognising the media source could explain why Tass was the only article that showed an unexpected result in 'regression table 4: index'. This is likely because Swedish citizens are more familiar with Sputnik than Tass. This aligns with previous research on the level of general prior knowledge needed for educating critical thinking (Nygren, 2019:113–114). However, Swedish citizens should be able to apply source criticism to any source, regardless of their familiarity with it, for education in source evaluation to function as a countermeasure in practice

The final methodological challenge concerns the study's representation. Although the study did not need a representative sample to examine the causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables, I believe that my sample has shortcomings that could have influenced the results. For example, most respondents had a higher level of education, and Nygren (2018:63) shows that education influences critical thinking, with educated individuals being more adept at critical thinking. Statistics from Sweden's statistical agency (SCB, 2022) from 2021 show that 45% of Swedish citizens have pursued post-secondary education. Although the study is four years old, it indicates that my study overrepresents individuals with post-secondary education since 70.3% of respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher education. Engaging more people with lower education levels might have helped the study achieve better results. However, I found it challenging to reach individuals with lower education levels as they generally were less interested in participating in the study. Future research would benefit from finding ways to engage broader segments of Sweden's population and encourage their participation.

For future research, several potential improvements can be considered. Increasing the sample size would provide better statistical conditions and reduce uncertainty in the results. Additionally, more subtle manipulation strategies and improved survey questions could reduce the risk of response bias. Focusing on fewer and clearer examples, such as exclusively Russian media, could make the survey shorter and more manageable for participants, reducing dropout rates. However, this would affect whether we can determine if critical source evaluation influences credible news. At the same time, methods for engaging broader demographic groups, particularly individuals with lower education levels, and increasing sample representativeness should be explored, as research shows that prior education may influence individuals' critical thinking.

In conclusion, although the study was unable to establish any causal relationship between education in source criticism and resilience to MII, it provides insights into the challenges and potential of this research area. The observed patterns suggest that Swedish schools and authorities already promote critical thinking and source criticism, as the respondents already possessed prior knowledge on the subject. Furthermore, the results also indicate that education in source criticism has the potential to act as a countermeasure against Russian MII in Sweden. The results indicate that it did not foster general scepticism against the articles. Instead, it cultivated an awareness that could benefit the countermeasure. With improvements in methodology and sampling, future research can build on these findings to deepen our understanding of how education in source criticism can strengthen resilience against MII.

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10. Appendix

10.1. Appendix A: Consent to Survey in Swedish

*Enkätundersökning för masterarbete vid Försvvarshögskolan

Detta är en enkätundersökning som syftar till att studera hur individer reagerar på olika nyhetsartiklar. Undersökningen innebär att du kommer att få läsa fyra sammanfattade artiklar. Efter att ha läst artiklarna ombeds du svara på frågor om dem, följt av några avslutande demografiska frågor.

Undersökningen tar endast några minuter att genomföra. Du kan även välja att avbryta undersökningen när som helst. Ett ofärdigt enkätsvar kommer inte att tas med i analysen utan kommer att raderas. Resultaten kommer att presenteras som siffror i en tabell och ingå i en masteruppsats vid Försvvarshögskolan.

Jag som står bakom enkäten kommer inte att ha tillgång till några personliga uppgifter, men jag kan inte garantera att Qualtrics inte samlar in data för säkerhets- och förbättringssyften. För mer information, vänligen se Qualtrics [Data Protection & Policy](#).

10.2. Appendix B: Treatment in Swedish

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL www.TidningensNavn.se. The article content is partially obscured by a grey overlay. The visible text includes the title "Tidningens namn", a sub-headline "Rapporterar om en viktig händelse som hänt någonstans i världen.", a date "Publicerad: 2024-01-01", and the first sentence of the article: "En källa uppger till denna tidning att händelsen påverkat flertal individer. Det har dock inte kunnat verifierats." Three callout boxes with lines pointing to specific parts of the page contain survey questions:

- Box 1 (top right): "Vem är det som säger något? Var härstammar informationen ifrån? Dubbelkolla även så att du är på rätt hemsida." (Points to the URL bar)
- Box 2 (bottom left): "Vilken är artikelns källa? Var ifrån kommer informationen? Existerar det någon källa? Är den pålitlig?" (Points to the sub-headline)
- Box 3 (bottom right): "Är informationen partisk? Har journalisten vinklat texten för att få fram sitt budskap?" (Points to the first sentence of the article)

10.3. Appendix C: News Articles in Swedish

Sveriges "tankepolis" ställer äldre damer inför rätta för "hatpropaganda"

Publicerad av Sputnik, 2 mars 2018

Gruppen, som betraktar sig som en beskyddare av yttrandefriheten och medger att de prioriterar skyddet av journalister och politiker, blev förvånade över hur många äldre som engagerar sig i att "uppvigla till hat".

Kinesiska medier varnar för Sverige

Publicerad av Svd, 23 december 2019

Statligt kontrollerade medier i Kina varnar för Sverige. I helgen rapporterade den statliga organisationen CCTV att den kinesiska ambassaden i Stockholm har varnat för att kinesiska turister i Sverige rånas under kniv- och pistolhot, rapporterar Sveriges Radio Ekot.

Ryssland ska ge gratis spannmål till länder i Afrika

Publicerad av Omni, 27 juli 2023

Rysslands president Vladimir Putin lovar gratis spannmål till sex afrikanska länder de närmaste månaderna, säger han på öppnandet av rysk-afrikanska toppmötet i S:t Petersburg, rapporterar Reuters. Enligt presidenten går Ryssland mot en rekordskörd och kan ta Ukrainas plats som spannmålsleverantör till Afrika.

Sverige har "varken rätten eller viljan" att motsätta sig USA angående Nord Stream, säger diplomaten

Publicerad av Tass, 13 juli 2024

Det bör noteras att brottet begicks i Sveriges särskilda ekonomiska zon. Anledningen till den rättsliga apatin är att Bidens administration är den som har tjänat mest på terroristattacken, och administrationen hemlighöll inte ens planerna.

10.4. Appendix D: Questionnaire in Swedish

10.4.1. Questions measuring the dependent variable

Hur pass väl stämmer påstående in på en skala 1-10 gällande ovan nyhetsartikel?

1=Inte alls 10=fullständigt

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Artikeln använder ett lättläst språk

1

10

Artikeln är skriven av en trovärdig källa

1

10

Artikeln beskriver en intressant händelse

1

10

Artikeln beskriver händelsen på ett objektvt sätt

1

10

Artikeln är intressant nog för att jag skulle dela den på sociala medier

1

10

Artikeln är trovärdig

1

10

10.4.2. Manipulation Check Questions

***Hur pass säker är du på dina svar på en skala 1-10?**

1=Inte alls säker 10=fullständigt säker

Säker på svar

1

10

***Hur pass sannolikt är det på en skala 1-10 att du reflekterar över hur trovärdig och tillförlitlig information är om den kommer från en obekant källa.**

1=Inte alls sannolikt 10=fullständigt sannolikt

Ja

1



10

10.4.3. Demographical questions

***Är du svensk medborgare?**

Ja

Nej

***Kön?**

Man

Kvinna

Ickebinär

Vill inte ange

***Hur gammal är du?**

***Vilken är din högst avslutade utbildning?**

- Grundskola
- Gymnasieskola
- Mindre än kandidatexamen
- Kandidatexamen
- Masterexamen
- Doktorsexamen
- Annan
- Vill inte ange

10.5. Appendix E: Debriefing in Swedish

Tack för att du deltagit i undersökningen!

Syftet med denna studie var att undersöka om svenska medborgare blir mer motståndskraftiga mot rysk propaganda efter att ha genomgått utbildning i källkritik. Du fick läsa rubriker och ingresser från fyra artiklar. Två av artiklarna var från svenska medier (SvD och Omni) och de andra två från ryska medier (Sputnik och Tass).

Artikeln om Sveriges "tankepolis" är en rysk artikel från det statligt finansierade mediahuset Sputnik. Den handlar om gruppen Nätthatsgranskaren, som består av jurister, juridikstudenter, före detta poliser och systemutvecklare. De har skapat en programvara som söker igenom sociala medier på jakt efter näthatare. I Sputnik-artikeln framställs gruppen som en del av polisen och att de motverkar svensk yttrandefrihet. Detta stämmer dock inte överens med uppgifterna från [SvD](#) som artikeln hänvisar till som källa. [SvD](#) rapporterar att omkring 1 % av de inlägg gruppen granskar går vidare till anmälan. De övriga inläggen kan vara hotfulla och rasistiska, men överträder inte gränsen till att vara brottsliga. Det framkommer heller ingenstans i [SvDs](#) artikel att 65-åriga kvinnor skulle ha ställts inför rätta.

Även artikeln om Sverige, USA och Nord Stream är från rysk media. Den kommer från det statligt finansierade mediahuset Tass och beskriver hur Sverige påstås vara oförmöget att granska USA inblandning i attacken mot Nord Stream den 26 september 2022. Artikeln hänvisar till diplomaten Maria Zakharova, som tycks antyda för tidningen att Sverige skyddar USA genom att inte erkänna USAs delaktighet i terrorattentatet. Den ryska diplomaten hänvisar dock inte till några källor bakom sitt uttalande. Diplomaten uttalanden går även emot de utredningar som genomförts av europeiska aktörer. [SVT](#) och [Reuters](#) rapporterar att utredningen pekar på att en grupp ukrainare ligger bakom dådet.

Främmande makter använder sig ibland av desinformation, vilseledning och propaganda för att påverka och skada Sverige på olika sätt. Det kan därför vara bra att vara källkritisk för att inte bli lurad av snedvriden eller falsk information. För mer information om hur du kan förbättra din källkritik kan du exempelvis besöka följande sidor hos Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar:

[Källkritik Handbok för privatpersoner](#)

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