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The Elimination of the Manipulative Strategies as a Part of Safe University Environment Formation

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Abstract

The main aim of the paper is identification of the ways of safe university environment formation by the views of university students in Slovakia and suggestion of the manipulative strategies elimination. Security is a very important part of society.

Its existence is needed in a variety of areas of societal life, especially in the university environment. The university environment is created by university students. The empirical part contains the results of empirical research. The research was realized by using quantitative methodology. Pre-prepared questionnaire was used for data collection. Data analysis was realized through univariate data analysis in the statistical software SPSS 20. The aim of empirical research was to analyze ways of supporting the creation of the safety environment. The respondents were Slovakian university students. The conclusions of the paper show using online space for the creation of a safe environment at universities. There is an importance of online lectures and seminars realized by qualified university teachers and experts as a tool of elimination the influence of the manipulative strategies at universities. It is the way to improve safety at universities.

Keyword: manipulative strategies, research, security, university environment, university students.

INTRODUCTION

Security is very important part of the life in the society. Eliminating security threats is mainly possible by creating a security environment. The security environment is therefore a concept of the many security strategies. For this reason, we need to define the security environment in general as the environment in which security strategies are developed. The security environment also implies the definition of basic security threats and the possibility of their elimination. It is a way of security enhancing. The security environment can be identified in several areas. The security environment is needed at universities. Security threats are a part of the university environment. For this reason, the academic community and its members reflects to the threats in the university environment. The members of the academic community are university students. University students participate in a wide range of activities connected to the university environment. If university students are to participate in activities in a university environment, they must consider the university environment as a safe.

For this reason, it is necessary to examine the opinions of university students in the selected aspects of the safe university environment formation. The university environment is very important part of every day's interaction in the life of university student. According to this, we should create security strategies in university environment. There are several possibilities of safe university creating. Subsequently, these possibilities can be sustained for a long time.

SECURITY

In the context of the focus of our investigation, it is necessary to define the security environment in general. Therefore, we can state that the environment in which the conditions of existence and development of reference objects, their activities, relations and interests are determined primarily by security, we called the security environment [1].

The environment referred to as security is associated with the characterization of the security aspect in connection with the definition of the basic existential characteristics of the given environment. In addition, we stress that "the security environment is characterized through the demarcation of a certain territory, geopolitically relatively coherent, which is usually also conditioned by other socio-economic, demographic, military-strategic and cultural-historical factors. The security environment is not an empty space, but a certain quality that not only limits the possibilities of social development, but additionally, by its critical

state, reflects and signals the critical state of society itself" [2]. The concretization of the security environment involves linking the aspect of security with a specific territory, which is characterized by specific characteristics conditioned by the action of other factors of a diverse nature. Thus, we perceive the security environment as an environment based on the promotion of security in diverse areas. We consider security as the result of actions and activities that are based on the protection of human existence. The opposite of security is danger. It results from existing threats in human life.

When we talk about promoting security in the environment, the need for security promotion stems from the existing threats in the environment. The types of threats can be identified as follows [3]:

- Direct (immediate threats): these are threats to which a state or a particular person is directly exposed,
- indirect threats: we are talking about threats that generally affect global or regional stability, linked to the allies of the state,
- urgent threats: threats that require an acute response,
- latent threats: these are threats that do not require an acute response, but may gradually become urgent threats,
- deliberate threats: most often these include military aggression, terrorist attacks, economic sanctions,
- unintentional threats: these include economic crises, epidemics, as well as pandemics and threats arising from natural agents.

We consider the above categories of threats to be clear and concise.

The formation of the security environment in general is one of the European Union's strategies. The European Union focuses on maintaining peace in society. Strengthening international security, the development of democracy and the rule of law, and, finally, the preservation of human rights and freedoms are equally important [4]. In our opinion, peace and stability of society contribute to the subjective perception of security among the population. It is also for this reason that the European Union's strategies generally focus on promoting social stability.

The global challenges and the main threats to the European Union can be summarised as follows [5]:

- Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction - existing strategies mainly emphasise preventive activities based on cooperation with the UN. The Non-Proliferation Treaty should also contribute to this, with an emphasis on strengthening the non-proliferation regime,
- terrorism and organised crime,
- cyber-security - Internet security is mainly the result of increasing attacks against private and state information systems in the Member States of the European Union,
- security of energy supply - in recent years, there has been growing concern about energy dependence due to production cuts in Europe, resulting in an increase in imports, particularly of oil and gas. The number of countries from which imports are sourced is very limited, particularly in the context of the stable political situation in these countries,
- climate change - climate change may also be involved, for example in disputes over trade routes or sea areas.

Mentioned global challenges and the main threats to the European Union can be prerequisite for the development of manipulative strategies. People are often listening about these challenges and their interpretation can be different. The reaction of European Union of the existing threats can be explained by different ways. Politics, media and human can spread their manipulative strategies about the threat of the European Union.

In the context of the existing threats, it is necessary to draw attention to the design of the European Union's foreign and security policy, which, according to the European Council, focuses on the following main priorities [6]:

- Strengthening the security of the European Union, resulting from analysing issues relating mainly to terrorism, cyber-attacks, energy security, defence, and also strategic communication;
- strengthening the resilience of the states in the Union's eastern and southern neighbourhood;
- strengthening an integrated approach to conflict and crisis management by rationalising and coordinating the political and military toolbox to address the implementation of crisis management, which should include policies and mechanisms for prevention, peacebuilding, stabilisation and conflict resolution;
- promoting continuous cooperation based on regional efforts by activating a constructive and visible role for the EU in different areas of the world;
- promoting global governance based on respect for international law.

We consider that one of the European Union's main priorities in security is to strengthen security in the face of the growing threat of terrorist attacks and the increasing number of cyber-attacks. The promotion of security in the European Union has become necessary mainly based on terrorist attacks, which, according to Trifunovic et al. have been visible in the European space at an increased rate since 2015 [7]. The growing threat of terrorist attacks can be the prerequisite for the manipulation strategies development

because people are worried about their security. The mentioned priorities are presented by politics and people who like attention.

SECURITY AT THE UNIVERSITIES

A wide range of threats is a part of different environments. For this reason, enhancing security is necessary. The academic environment in universities is one of the environments in which security is very important. "The mission of universities, which are part of the European Universities Education Area and the Common European Research Area, is to contribute to the development of education, knowledge, science and culture in accordance with the needs of society, to develop knowledge, skills, wisdom, creativity and the good of man, and thus to contribute to the development of a knowledge-based society. Fulfilling this mission with a student-centred focus is the main aim of the universities. According to the needs of society, the main role of universities is fulfilling their mission

in providing higher and university and creative scientific research or creative artistic activity" [8]. Security threats in the higher and university educational environment can be identified as direct, where the threat may directly affect university students or university faculty. In the higher and university educational environment, there may be urgent threats. In urgent threats, the most common threat is an acute threat to the academic environment, for example, by aggressive university students. It is also possible to identify latent threats. Latent threats arising from possible prolonged student dissatisfaction. Security in the academic environment is also affected by the possible threat of terrorist attacks, as well as by various crises caused by the emergence of pandemics or the action of natural factors.

University students are part of the university students' environment. University students are a large group of the population and university students are characterized by their specific attitudes and opinions [9]. We also add that a young person gradually forms his or her own personal identity during his or her participation at the university educational process [10].

According to the focus of our research we would like to connect the issue of security with the creation of safety universities. According to this, we briefly characterize the university educational process by its following organizational forms [11]:

- Lectures,
- Seminars,
- Praxis,
- Self-studies,
- Excursions,
- Workshop,
- Practical exercises.

In the current university educational process, we have several possibilities to educate university students about the security at the universities. We can use physical and online environment to educate university students. Physical environment of university educational process allows physical participation of university students on the learning activities. On the other hand, online environment of university educational process allows the participation of large number of university students on the learning activities without their physical participation at the place of their realisation.

We assume that university student feels comfortable if he or she is not threatened. University students can be threatened by the manipulation of

MANIPULATIVE STRATEGIES AND THREAT OF SECURITY

According to the aims of the presented paper, we would like to define manipulators and manipulative strategies. Firstly, we can state, that "manipulators frequently employ deceitful tactics to achieve their goal. This includes lying, omitting information, or twisting truth to create a distorted reality. They may present themselves as trustworthy and honest, but their actions reveal a pattern of manipulation that can lead to confusion and doubt in their targets [12]:

Manipulators can manipulate with the humans' opinions. The percipients of the manipulative tactics and strategies are called victims of the manipulators.

"Manipulation and its core are about exerting control over another person's thoughts feelings, or behaviour for one's own benefit. It is often subtle, insidious, and designed to bypass rational thinking. Recognising these tactics is the first line of defense." [13]: Mentioned definition of the manipulation is actual, and it characterizes its essence. Moreover, we need to define the most frequently manipulative tactics [14]:

- Gaslighting: it is probably the most insidious form of the manipulation. It involves denying someone's reality making them question their sanity. The most popular is denying that promises were made. The percipient doubt his or her perception and he or she becomes dependent on the manipulator's truth.
- Blame-shifting: manipulators excel at avoiding responsibility by shifting blame onto others. Manipulator says that percipient is responsible for manipulator's behaviour.

- Emotional blackmail: it involves using threats to control someone's behaviour. Manipulators are often using special emotional expressions. Their statements create a sense of obligation and guilt to manipulate victim into compliance. The victim is influenced by the expressions of the manipulator. Manipulators can use emotional expressions suitable for their satisfaction. Moreover, they can fill their expressions with the emotions.
 - Triangulation: manipulators can involve third party in a conflict situation. Third party in a conflict situation gain an advantage for the manipulator. It could involve gossiping, spread rumours, or using someone else as a messenger to avoid direct communication.
 - Playing the victim: exaggerating or fabricating hardships to evoke sympathy and gain attention.
 - Guilt tripping: Manipulators are using guilt to manipulate someone into doing something they don't want to do.
 - Passive aggression: manipulators are expressing negative feelings indirectly, through sarcasm, procrastination, or subtle sabotage. Indirect expression allows manipulator to express hostility without taking direct responsibility for his or her actions.
- Manipulative strategies are very dangerous because manipulators can influence the opinions of humans. Defined manipulative tactics can be applied to institutional sphere. Some of the institutional leader can use mentioned tactics. These tactics can be used to maintain leader's positions. We can state, that people who are in contact with the manipulator can have the feeling of non-security in their interaction. It is the reason for the elimination of the manipulative tactics. The elimination of manipulative tactics can be realised by following way [15]:
- Set clear boundaries: these boundaries define what manipulator's behaviour is accepted. Boundaries should be communicated with the manipulator.
 - Maintain emotional detachment: percipient of the manipulator's tactics and strategies should try to remain calm and objective interactions. He or she needs to manage his or her emotions in the interaction with manipulator.
 - Using "gray rock" technique: the percipient of the manipulator's tactics and strategies should be uninteresting and unresponsive to the manipulator. He or she should use neutral responses and he or she needs to avoid personal information.
 - Learn to say "no": percipient tactics and strategies can say that he or she is not able to do something without persecution.
 - Refuse to engage in arguments: percipient of the manipulator's tactics and strategies can effectively end the conversation if he or she would not discuss with the manipulator.
 - Focus on facts, not feelings: percipient of the manipulator's tactics and strategies should present his or her points clearly and concisely, focusing on objective evidence.
 - Document everything: it is important in a professional or legal context. Percipient of the manipulator's tactics and strategies should document all interactions with manipulator (emails, agreements, messages).
 - Seek support: percipient of the manipulator's tactics and strategies should talk with his or her family, friends, or therapist about manipulator's behaviour. He or she should share his or her feelings, emotions, experiences.
 - Consider limiting or ending contact with the manipulator: it is the best strategy in some cases. Sometimes, it may be difficult. Especially, if manipulator is a family member or a close friend.

AIMS AND METHODS

The main aim of the paper is identification of the ways of safe university environment formation by the views of university students in Slovakia and suggestion of the manipulative strategies elimination. We define the security, university environment and manipulative strategies. According to the theoretical background we define the main aim of our empirical research. The main aim of the empirical part of our study is to analyse the ways of supporting the creation of the safety environment at the universities. We define research questions as follows:

- 1) Do university students consider the university environment as a safe?
- 2) Do university students consider a safe university environment as a part of European Union strategies?
- 3) Do university students consider online lectures aimed at security strategies as an effective way of safe university environment formation?
- 4) Do university students consider workshop as an effective way of safe university environment formation?

According to the upper characterized aims of the research, we have used a quantitative approach to empirically investigate the stated issue. There are several ways to investigate the security at the universities by the opinions of the university students. We would like to investigate the larger number of the university students' opinions. The advantage of the quantitative methodology is the examination of a

larger number of respondents' answers. The quantitative approach is based on obtaining exact and verifiable data that are collected in numerical form. The aim of the quantitative method of investigation is most often to generalize and draw generally valid conclusions [16]. A larger number of answers makes it possible to draw general conclusions related to the issue under study. At the same time, general conclusions can verify the theoretical assumptions under investigation [17]. According to the main aim of our investigation we have chosen the quantitative approach. Quantitative research determined analysis of the larger number of university students' opinions.

A pre-planned questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire is one of the data collection methods most commonly used in quantitative research. We define a questionnaire as a method aimed at collecting and analyzing data in bulk and quickly [18]. The mentioned method allows for obtaining a larger number of responses to preplanned questions.

In our research, we used closed-ended questions in a questionnaire for university students. It was distributed through the online platform MS Forms. We considered the completion of the questionnaire via the online space a quick and efficient way to collect data.

The questionnaire contained identification questions aimed at gender and form of study at the university. The other questions related to the aims of our research. Questions in the pre-planned questionnaire were aimed to the obtaining respondent's answers in the issue of safe university environment formation.

The data collected using a pre-prepared standardized questionnaire were analysed using the statistical software SPSS 20. We were analysing obtained data through univariate data analysis. Univariate data analysis provides very good introduction to the answers of respondents. The results of data analysis are recorded in the frequency tables. Presented frequency tables provide a clear overview of the obtained data in our research. In the presented frequency tables, we recorded counts and percentages of obtained answers.

We researched opinions of 528 university students studying at universities in Slovakia. Our research is aimed only at Slovakian universities because the issue of security at universities is very extensive topic and according to the range of this study we need to select only one country for our research. In Slovakia, security situation at universities has been very unstable during 2024. Our research was realised in November 2024. Presented results are only partial results from the comprehensive research of Slovakian universities security situation.

RESULTS

Firstly, we would like to describe the selected characteristics of the research sample.

Characteristics of the research sample by the gender are described in the following table (Table I).

Table I The gender of research sample

gender	count	%
Female	367	70
Male	151	29
I do not want answer	10	1

Source: own research

Based on the data in the table above (Table I), we can state, that 70% of the respondents were women. 29% of respondents were men and 1% of respondents did not want to answer.

Moreover, we would like to characterize respondents by their form of study at university. The characteristics of the research sample by the form of study presents the following table (Table II).

Table II Respondents' form of study

Form of study	count	%
Daily	363	69
External	165	31

Source: own research

Based on the data in the table above (Table II), we categorize respondents into two groups. 69% of respondents are university students who are studying at the daily form. 31% of respondents are university students who are studying at the external form.

The next step is the analysis of the research questions in our research.

5) Do university students consider the university environment as a safe?

The first research question was finding out the opinions of researched university students about security in physical and online university environment. Received answers are received in the following table (Table III)

Table III Safe university environment – physical vs. online environment

	yes		no	
	count	%	count	%
Physical university environment	432	82	27	5
Online university environment	447	85	20	4

Source: own research

Based on the data in the table above (Table III), we can state, that 82% of respondents consider physical university environment as a safe. 85% of respondents consider online university environment as a safe. Researched university students consider university environment as a safe. Mentioned statement is connected to a security in the physical and online university environment. It can be verified by the excellent security conditions in the academic environment. According to the actual development of the society, we need to increase safe strategies at the universities.

6) Do university students consider a safe university environment as a part of European Union strategies? The next research question was finding out the opinions of researched university students in the area of their information about priorities of European Union. The results of respondents' answers are recorded in the following table (Table IV).

Table IV Safe university environment as a one of the European Union priorities

	count	%
Yes	264	50
No	47	9
I do not know	214	41

Source: own research

Based on the data in the table above (Table IV), we can state, that that 50% of respondents declare, that safe university environment is one of the European Union priorities. Only 9% of respondents declare, that safe university environment is one of the European Union priorities. 41% of respondents do not know to answer the question. In our opinion, university students should have correct information about the European Union priorities.

7) Do university students consider online lectures aimed at security strategies as an effective way of safe university environment formation?

The next research question was finding out the opinions of university students about online lectures aimed at security strategies as an effective way of safe university environment formation. The results of respondents' answers are recorded in the following table (Table V).

Table V Online lecture aimed at security strategies as an effective way of safe university environment formation

	count	%
Yes	287	55
No	120	23
I do not know	119	22

Source: own research

Based on the data in the table above (Table V), we can state, that 55% of researched university students consider online lecture as an effective way of safe university environment formation. 23% of respondents do not consider online lecture as an effective way of safe university environment formation and 22% respondents do not know the answer of the question.

We think that online space as one of the options of the university educational process realization. Therefore, university teachers can use online space for the security formation. Online space is very important for the young people. Sometimes,

8) Do university students consider workshop as an effective way of safe university environment formation?

The last research question was finding out the opinions of effectiveness of the workshop aimed at security

strategies. Respondents answered the questionnaire question if they would physically participate the workshop aimed at enhancing safe university environment. The results of respondents' answers are recorded in the following table (Table VI).

Table VI Physical participation in the workshop aimed at enhancing safe university environment.

	count	%
Yes	220	41,7
No	186	35,2
I do not know	122	23,1

Source: own research

Based on the data in the table above (Table VI), we can state, that almost 42% of researched university students would like to participate at the workshop aimed at safe university environment. On the other hand, 35% of respondents would not like to participate at the workshop aimed at safe university environment. Upper described data mean that participants in our research partially expressed their interest in learning about enhancing a safe college environment. University students should know that they can participate in the university environment creation. In our opinion, we need to educate university students in the issue of the security at universities. Security education of the university students can consist of learning how to behave appropriately in crisis situations that may arise in university environment.

According to the aims of our paper, we would like to compare using physical and online university environment in the safe university formation. The comparison provides the following table (Table VII).

Table VII The comparison of using physical and online university environment in the safe university formation

	yes		no	
	count	%	count	%
Physical participation in the workshop aimed at enhancing safe university environment	220	41,7	186	35,2
Online lecture about security strategies as an effective way of safe university environment formation	287	55	120	20

Source: own research

Based on the data in the table above (Table VII), we can state, that researched university students would like to learn information about security at universities. We can state, that we can use physical and online environment to educate university students. Using online environment I the university educational process is comfortable for the educated university students because they do not have to visit university. We need to educate university students. Education at the universities can be considered as a prerequisite for the prevention of the manipulative strategies using by manipulators. Only educated university students will be recognize the manipulative strategies and they will feel safer in university educational process and in their everyday lives. We can use online platforms for the education of the university students. We assume that university students will participate at the online lecture in university educational process because it is for them comfortable.

We can conclude that if university student would like to learn information about security at universities, he or she will participate in the enhancing of the security at universities. He or she will be educated how he or she should behave in the crisis situations at universities. For this reason, students need to have information about general security situation and security situation at the university from the qualifies university teachers or experts.

CONCLUSION

Security and the formation of the security environment in society can be considered as a very actual topic.

It is very discussed in various research, scientific papers, scientific conferences and in everyday life of the people.

For this reason, we have focused on the analysis of security in the university environment. In the theoretical part of the paper, we briefly characterize security in general. Security is very important part of humans' life, and it can be characterized as the status of the system. We defined the security environment in general as the environment in which security strategies are developed. The security environment also implies the definition of basic security threats and the possibility of their elimination, thus ensuring the promotion of security in the environment. According to this, we need to eliminate security threats in the security environment. We can consider manipulative strategies as a security threat. Manipulative strategies can influence the opinions of the people, especially they influence the opinions of the selected groups of the people, and we need to find the ways of their identification.

Consequently, we realised empirical research. We researched opinions of university students in Slovakia about security at universities and we identified the way of manipulative strategies elimination in the university environment. As the result of the empirical research, we suggest the possibilities of online space using for the education of university students in safe university environment. Educated university students can identify the security threats. We consider the manipulative strategies as a security threat and adequate educated university students will not be influenced by the manipulative strategies.

We consider the enhancing of security in the university environment as a very important and actual topic. For this reason, the detailed investigation of this area is necessary. University students are very important part of the university education. Their opinions are very important part of information source about security topic in the university environment. According to the focus of our investigation, we identified the university environment through the views of the university students as a safe. The university environment is considered as a safe in its both forms – physical and online university environment. Researched university students see the connection between strategies of the European Union and security support in the university environment. The researched university students declare that online lecture can be the effective way of safe university environment formation. In the same context, we can adequately utilize the online space to allow for the participation of a larger number of university students, while facilitating the physical mobility of lecturers across universities in Slovakia.

Finally, we can state, that the presents issue is very actual. We need to support the security at the universities. The support of security at the universities can be realised by several ways. For this reason, there is a space for the further investigation. Further investigation can be aimed on mapping of the existing security strategies effectiveness and safety treats at the universities by the view of university students. The research can be realized by using combination quantitative and qualitative research methods. According to the results of the further investigation we can expand the security strategies at the universities, and we can eliminate safety threats. University students will feel safer, and it will be contribution to their wellbeing at the universities.

Moreover, we suggest the improvement of the security education at the universities. The part of security education should be identification of communication means. Security education should be realised through an adequate communication, and it should contain the recommendations for the behaviour of university students in crisis at the universities.

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