

**(INTER)NATIONAL STUDENT TEAM
RESEARCH PROPOSALS ACROSS
SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINES AND CULTURES**

Nurturing Critical Minds

Book of Abstracts



**Vilnius
University**

arQus
European University Alliance



Conference organised by the Institute of Foreign Languages,
Faculty of Philology, Vilnius University

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**Faculty of
Philology**

Foreword by the Director of the Institute of Foreign Languages

Dear Participants,

Welcome to the *Nurturing Critical Minds: (Inter)national Student Team Research Proposals Across Scientific Disciplines and Cultures* – our international student conference dedicated to curiosity, collaboration, and the joy of research.

Organised by the Institute of Foreign Languages at the Faculty of Philology, Vilnius University, the conference brings together student teams from diverse disciplines and cultural backgrounds. Our Institute teaches English for Academic Purposes and Research across the University's faculties and engages actively in joint academic initiatives with partners in Lithuania and abroad. As a proud member of the Arqus European University Alliance, Vilnius University is firmly committed to strengthening international collaboration.

We are delighted to welcome participants not only from Vilnius University, but also from fellow Arqus institutions and our wider network of partner universities. This conference marks the culmination of the *English for Academic Purposes and Research* course, grounded in an action-oriented approach that develops academic literacy, fosters intercultural communication, encourages critical and analytical thinking, supports teamwork, and highlights the interdisciplinary and socially relevant nature of research today.

Thank you for joining us. I wish you an inspiring and engaging conference experience.

Warm regards,

On behalf of the Organising Team

Prof. Dr Roma Kriaučiūnienė,

Director, Institute of Foreign Languages,

Faculty of Philology,

Vilnius University, Lithuania

Keynote Speakers

Samantha Dockray: The Psychobiology of Adolescent Experience *University College Cork, Ireland*



Abstract

Adolescence is a distinct developmental phase that offers key opportunities for promoting lifelong health and well-being. Recent research has placed an equal emphasis on both the potential vulnerabilities and the opportunities for positive growth during adolescence. Developmental science provides several theoretical frameworks to understand adolescence as an integration of biological, psychosocial, and cultural processes, involving coordinated changes in the body, brain, and socioemotional development. This talk will consider pubertal development as a pivotal biological process that shapes adolescent wellbeing. It will present research findings on puberty and mental health, as well as the relationship between puberty and daily socio-emotional processes. The talk will also describe the persistent challenge of researching the biopsychosocial processes that underpin adolescent development, as well as some possibilities for addressing these challenges, including the use of community-engaged approaches.

Biography

Professor Samantha Dockray works at the School of Applied Psychology, University College Cork (Ireland). Her key interests relate to the application of psychobiological models of behaviour and emotions to understand adolescent health and development. Prof. Dockray has a particular interest in how puberty contributes to health, as well as the impact of stress and allostatic load on adolescents. Her research and other activities are described at beats-lab.com. Samantha Dockray holds a BSc in Psychology and a BSc (Hons) in Biomedical Science from Victoria University, Australia, before completing her PhD in Biobehavioral Health at The Pennsylvania State University.

Discover more about Professor Samantha Dockray and her research by visiting:

UCC Research Profiles: Samantha Dockray

Keynote Speaker

Caroline Allen: Why Language Learning Still Matters in the Age of AI *Leipzig University, Germany*



Abstract

In an era of AI and instant translation, is language learning still necessary?

This talk explores how language learning continues to shape professional success, personal growth, and intercultural understanding – and why technology should be seen as a tool that enhances, rather than replaces, language learning.

Biography

Caroline studied Secondary Education in England and moved to Germany in 2013.

After several years of teaching business English, she shifted her focus to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Her PhD examined how English courses can be designed to meet the specific needs of learners in medical contexts.

She now teaches at Leipzig University, where she develops and delivers ESP courses for students in the natural sciences. Her work centres on helping learners build confidence and become the English speakers they aspire to be.

Abstracts from Participants in the Telecollaboration Project

FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

Benefits, Challenges, and the Most Interesting Part of the Telecollaboration Project

Beatrise Lavrinoviča, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, 'English, European Languages, and Business Studies' study programme, 3rd-year student.*

Mikaela Markidou, *University of Ioannina, Greece/ University of Vilnius (ESN), Faculty of Philosophy, Psychology study programme, 3rd-year student.*

Estela Guerrero, *Austral University of Chile, Faculty of Humanities, 'Pedagogy in English' study programme, 1st-year student.*

Abstract

The telecollaboration project involved a team of three students from Chile, Latvia, and Cyprus (representing Lithuania). The aim was to explore each other's cultures through direct communication and collaborative discussion. During the project, the team addressed four key topics, shared facts about their respective countries, and gained insight into each other's cultural perspectives. The collaboration presented challenges, such as coordinating across distances and overcoming cultural misunderstandings, which the team addressed together. The project enabled participants to reflect on the benefits of intercultural exchange, including enhanced cultural awareness, improved problem-solving skills, and increased openness to new perspectives. Additionally, the discussions highlighted topics that were particularly engaging and informative for the team. Overall, the telecollaboration provided valuable insights into cross-cultural communication processes, both academically and personally, and fostered greater empathy and understanding among participants.

Keywords: *Telecollaboration project, international team, cultural exchange, country facts, communication process, challenges encountered, problem-solving, team collaboration, discoveries, lessons learned, fascinating topic, project benefits.*

Building Connections beyond Borders: International Telecollaboration Project

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Estere Kaķerāne, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'English, European Languages and Business Studies', 3rd-year student.*

Simran Sejwal, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'East–West Intercultural Studies', 2nd-year student.*

Abstract

The International Telecollaboration Project brought together students from diverse cultural backgrounds to explore intercultural communication and collaborative problem-solving across borders. Despite challenges such as time zone differences and coordination difficulties, participants successfully completed six selected topics and produced visual outcomes using collaborative tools, including *WhatsApp*, *Canva*, and *Edits*. Team members divided tasks according to their individual strengths, supported one another, and employed creative approaches to achieve the project's goals. Through this process, participants enhanced their communication skills, developed effective teamwork strategies, and gained a deeper understanding of different cultural perspectives. The project demonstrated that, with patience, respect, and structured collaboration, distance does not hinder meaningful intercultural engagement. Overall, the experience provided both academic and personal growth, highlighting the value of telecollaboration as a method for fostering cross-cultural understanding and international connections.

Keywords: *Telecollaboration project, challenges, teamwork strategies, personal engagement, value of a method.*

Comparative Analysis of Holiday Traditions in Latvia, Lithuania, and Chile: Students' Insights

Arturs Evarts, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'East-West Intercultural Studies', 2nd-year student.*

Hanna Konovchenko, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'East-West Intercultural Studies', 2nd-year student.*

Miroslava Rubahova, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'East-West Intercultural Studies', 2nd-year student.*

Abstract

Understanding cultural differences is essential for effective intercultural communication in a globalized world. This study examines holiday traditions in Latvia, Lithuania, and Chile through a student telecollaboration project, offering insights into how national identity and cultural heritage are expressed through festive practices. Using qualitative methods, the study analyzed data from joint online meetings, personal narratives, and descriptions of family rituals and culinary traditions. Findings indicate that, despite a shared largely Catholic framework, holidays such as Christmas serve as powerful markers of national identity alongside the Song Celebration, the Festival of Derun, and the Festival of la Tirana. Observed differences reflect local historical contexts, pre-Christian traditions, and geographical factors. Notably, cultural distinctions between Latvia and Chile, as well as those between Lithuania and Chile, are more pronounced than those between Latvia and Lithuania, suggesting that geographical proximity and shared history have a greater influence on cultural similarities. This research demonstrates how telecollaboration can facilitate intercultural understanding by combining personal experiences with comparative analysis, highlighting both shared practices and unique cultural expressions across countries.

Keywords: *holiday traditions, national identity, cultural heritage, intercultural understanding.*

Comparative Analysis of Latvian and Ukrainian Cultures

Paula Skadiņa, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, English Philology, 3rd-year student.*

Valeriia Kyslenko, *Vilnius University, Faculty of Philology, English Philology, 3rd-year student.*

Abstract

This research examines the key intercultural similarities and differences between Latvian and Ukrainian cultures, with a focus on how historical development, social values, and everyday practices influence national identity. The study examines history, traditions, folklore, national symbols, cuisine, and other cultural features, with a particular focus on the influence of folklore and symbolic expression. Comparative analysis highlights both shared Baltic-Slavic connections and unique traits rooted in each country's history and geography. Contemporary factors, including migration, language policies, and political change, are also considered for their impact on cultural perception. Overall, this study offers valuable insights into how Latvians and Ukrainians perceive themselves and each other, highlighting how enhanced cultural awareness can foster cooperation, integration, and mutual respect at both regional and international levels.

Keywords: *Latvian and Ukrainian cultures, unique traits, the country's history and geography, and contemporary factors.*

Cultural Differences Between Countries and The Way We Express Them

Rūta Veitmane, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'English, European Languages and Business Studies', 3rd-year student.*

Sviatlana Badrankova, *University of Vilnius, Faculty of Philology, subject 'Intercultural Communication + Telecollaboration', free listener.*

Abstract

Cultural differences shape how individuals think, behave, and communicate, influencing both everyday interactions and global cooperation. This study examines cultural variations across Belarus (from a Lithuanian perspective), Mexico/US, and Latvia, focusing on how language, social norms, values, traditions, and nonverbal communication reflect these differences. The project investigates how cultural identity is conveyed and perceived, as well as the challenges and opportunities these differences create in multicultural environments. By analyzing communication styles, attitudes toward hierarchy and individualism, and expressions of politeness and emotion, the study draws on literature, personal reflections, and examples from virtual intercultural collaboration. Findings highlight both similarities and contrasts across cultures, demonstrating how cultural awareness can enhance understanding, reduce misinterpretations, and foster respectful communication. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and provides insights for more effective intercultural interactions in educational and professional contexts.

Keywords: *cultural similarities and differences, values as a framework for assessment of cross-cultural collisions.*

Cultures Beyond the Screen

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Abstract

This study examines an international, digitally mediated collaboration conducted from September to December, involving participants from four countries. The project overview includes fundamental information about the participants and the processes employed throughout the collaboration. Challenges encountered during the project, along with the strategies implemented to address them, are analyzed, as are the tools used for task completion and the outcomes produced. The study highlights both the similarities and differences in cultural perspectives identified by the participants, as well as unexpected insights and noteworthy discoveries that emerged. Reflections on lessons learned during the process are provided, including recommendations for future telecollaborative projects and guidance for others engaging in similar intercultural work. The findings demonstrate how participation in digitally mediated, cross-cultural collaboration can influence personal perspectives, enhance cultural awareness, and foster skills in communication, problem-solving, and teamwork.

Keywords: *digitally mediated collaboration, challenges, strategies, tools, discoveries, lessons.*

Discovering Culture Through Conversation: Online Intercultural Exchange

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Tanja Bozovic, *National Louis University, Faculty of Arts and Education, study programme 'Early Childhood Studies', 4th-year student.*

Charlotte Soller, *Vilnius University, Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University (Erasmus+ student) / OTH Regensburg, Faculty of Natural and Cultural Sciences, 'Erasmus Programme', 3rd-year student.*

Abstract

This study examines cultural differences through an online intercultural exchange, where participants met via Microsoft Teams to discuss everyday aspects of life in their home countries. Discussions focused on topics such as traditional food, national celebrations, cultural practices, student life, and the surrounding environment. By sharing personal experiences and engaging in dialogue, participants were able to compare similarities and differences in how people from different countries live, celebrate, and interact with their surroundings. The findings indicate that informal discussions can reveal meaningful cultural perspectives and foster intercultural understanding. The study also highlights the role of online platforms in facilitating communication by providing a supportive environment for expressing ideas. Overall, the project demonstrates that open dialogue and curiosity can promote cultural awareness and meaningful connections, even outside formal educational settings.

Keywords: *intercultural exchange, discussion, personal experiences, similarities, differences, and cultural awareness.*

Intercultural Collaboration in Practice: A Student Perspective on the Telecollaboration Project-2025

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Aleksandra Beiere, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'English, Asian and Intercultural Studies: Middle Eastern Studies', 3rd-year student.*

Abstract

The Telecollaboration Project-2025 brought together students from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds to explore themes of culture, communication, and language. The project engaged participants in discussions, analytical tasks, and creative activities designed to foster academic collaboration and develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Throughout the project, students interacted across borders, negotiated meaning, and shared inquiry, thereby enhancing their intercultural awareness and deepening their understanding of communication in multicultural contexts. In addition to personal reflections, the team produced tangible outcomes, including posters, charts, and other project artefacts, demonstrating how different perspectives were synthesised to address the thematic questions. Overall, the project highlights the value of telecollaboration as both a pedagogical method and a meaningful intercultural experience that connects theoretical knowledge with practical application.

Keywords: *Intercultural Communication, cross-cultural collaboration, academic cooperation, critical thinking, cultural awareness.*

Intercultural Communication in Practice: A Telecollaborative Study Across Five Countries

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Anna Jansone, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'English, European languages and Business studies', 3rd-year student.*

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Benjamin Mauricio Durán Aburto, *Austral University of Chile, Faculty of Science, study programme of 'Pharmacy', 2nd-year student.*

Xycara Leshenka Juariza, *National Louis University, Undergraduate College, 'Social Work' study programme, 4th-year student.*

Abstract

This project investigates the development of Intercultural Communication within a multinational student team through a structured telecollaboration journal. Over the course of the project, students from universities in Latvia, Lithuania, Chile, and the United States participated in thematic online meetings focused on personal identities, higher education systems, cultural symbols, native languages, and local ways of life. By documenting these discussions, the study examined how students interpret cultural similarities and differences, negotiate meanings, and reflect on their assumptions.

The findings indicate that, despite diverse educational, social, and cultural backgrounds, students identified shared values, including the importance of family, the pursuit of quality education, and shared experiences of student life. At the same time, notable differences emerged in national education systems, perceptions of independence, and local cultural norms, prompting reflection and discussion. The telecollaboration process demonstrated that sustained dialogue can replace stereotypes with understanding, foster empathy through comparison of lived experiences, and shape identity and social interaction in

multilingual contexts. Informal topics such as food, traditions, and humor proved particularly effective in building trust and encouraging open discussion.

Overall, the project underscores the value of telecollaboration for enhancing intercultural awareness, critical thinking, and nuanced perspectives on global student life.

Keywords: *multinational student team, thematic meetings, similarities and differences, dialogue, empathy, identity.*

Intercultural Communication in Practice: A Telecollaborative Study across Five Countries

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Anna Minno, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'English, European Languages and Business Studies', 3rd-year student.*

Eliet Esperanza Navarrete Pérez, *Austral University of Chile, Faculty of Architecture and Visual Arts; 'Architecture' study programme, 3rd-year student.*

Ieva Adomavičiūtė, *Vilnius University, Faculty of Philology, study programme 'Scandinavian Studies', 4th-year student.*

Abstract

This telecollaboration project examined verbal and nonverbal communication in a multinational student environment. Four students from Latvia, Lithuania, and Chile participated in a series of meetings to exchange cultural knowledge and engage in discussions on topics such as educational systems, personality development, symbolism, festivities, and traditions. The study explored how students recognized cultural similarities and differences, interpreted meanings across cultures, and reflected on their experiences. Findings indicate that, despite diverse educational, social, and cultural backgrounds, participants identified commonalities in food traditions, celebrations, and cultural symbols. Significant differences emerged in educational systems, language use, and local cultural norms, prompting reflection and adaptation. The telecollaboration process demonstrated that multilingual and multicultural interactions foster openness, respect, and discovery. Moreover, discussing informal topics such as food, traditions, and language was particularly effective in building trust and creating a supportive environment for open dialogue. Overall, the project highlights the potential of telecollaboration to enhance intercultural understanding and develop practical communication skills in diverse settings.

Keywords: *cultural exchange, traditions, educational differences, effective topics.*

Monochronic Meets Polychronic: A Cross-Cultural Chronemic Analysis in Lithuanian–Chilean Interaction

Greta Pakalkaitė, *Vilnius University, Faculty of Philology, English Philology, 3rd-year student.*

Matilda Seguel, *Austral University of Chile, Faculty of Philology, English Language and Communication Education, 2nd-year student.*

Abstract

Chronemics is the study of time in communication, playing a central role in shaping interpersonal meaning, interactional flow, and cross-cultural understanding. This study examines chronemic patterns in the interaction of Lithuanian and Chilean students. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from nonverbal communication and the author's participation in an International Telecollaboration project between Vilnius University and the University of Austral de Chile. The guiding hypothesis proposes that Lithuanian students exhibit a more monochronic chronemic orientation, characterized by punctuality, brief pauses, and regulated turn-taking, whereas Chilean students demonstrate more polychronic tendencies, including flexible scheduling, longer or slower conversational pacing, and greater tolerance for variable timing. Using data from an online questionnaire-based survey, responses, and interactional analyses drawn from students' project journals. The research investigates punctuality norms, conversational pacing, the interpretation of silence, and interactional synchrony. The study reveals distinct cultural contrasts in chronemic expectations, sources of miscommunication, and the strategies students adopted to adjust their communicative rhythms over time. The findings contribute to intercultural communication research by illustrating how chronemic mismatches can influence relational impressions, teamwork efficiency, and interactional smoothness across cultures.

Keywords: *Intercultural Communication, chronemics, punctuality norms, conversational pacing, silence interpretation, and interactional synchrony cross-culturally.*

Student Experiences of Intercultural Learning Through Telecollaboration Across Latvia, Chile, USA, and Lithuania

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Nikita Mihuta, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, study programme 'European Languages and Business Studies', 3rd-year student.*

Abstract

This research examines how telecollaboration tasks were carried out among student groups from Latvia, Chile, the United States, and Lithuania, with a specific focus on comparing similarities and differences in task engagement across two telecollaboration teams. The study examines the experiences of two Latvian participants, each working in a distinct international group, to investigate their collaborative processes, challenges, and intercultural learning outcomes.

In the first group, all members ultimately participated responsibly, and tasks were completed in full. During the initial stages, however, the Latvian student had to take the lead in organizing and guiding the workflow due to limited engagement from others. Additional challenges arose when the Chilean student announced early on that they would not attend the conference, and later, the Lithuanian student was also unable to participate for academic reasons. Despite these setbacks, the group successfully completed the tasks, gaining valuable cultural insights through continued interaction.

The second group also demonstrated consistent participation, though the process was marked by early misunderstandings, irregular communication, and long response times. Over time, the group's productivity increased, and meetings became more regular until the final stage of the project, when several members became unresponsive for weeks. Task completion remained sufficient throughout, with the Lithuanian student contributing significantly more than required.

Overall, this study highlights the key challenges, collaborative dynamics, and cultural knowledge gained by the Latvian participants in two distinct telecollaboration environments. By comparing these experiences, the research provides insight into how student teams navigate responsibility, communication, and intercultural understanding in digitally mediated, multinational settings.

Keywords: *student engagement, project workflow, task completion, challenges, cultural knowledge.*

Telecollaboration Project and the Latvian Student Experience

Nora Dambe, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, ‘English, European Languages and Business Studies’ study programme, 3rd-year student.*

Inese Elīna Līce, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, ‘English, European Languages and Business Studies’ study programme, 3rd-year student.*

Abstract

This study explores the experiences of two Latvian students participating in an international telecollaboration project. Although they were in different groups, both students aimed to reflect on their individual experiences while highlighting similarities and differences between the groups. One primary challenge was scheduling meetings across different time zones and personal schedules; despite this, group participation remained consistent, and collaborative tasks, such as presentations and posters, were completed on time. Initial shyness occasionally affected video interactions during the first meetings, but engagement improved over time. The study examined both overlapping and unique discussion topics. Common topics included university life and food traditions, while topics such as languages, communication styles, and stereotypes varied between groups. These experiences illustrate the diversity of student perspectives and the ways in which telecollaboration fosters intercultural understanding, teamwork, and adaptability in a digitally mediated international context.

Keywords: *telecollaboration project, reflection on individual experiences, challenges, diversity of student perspectives.*

Telecollaboration Project with Lithuanian and American Students

Sofia Kivkule, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, English Studies, European Languages and Business Studies, 3rd-year student.*

Laura Lakovica, *University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, English Studies, European Languages and Business Studies, 3rd-year student.*

Abstract

This ongoing project investigates intercultural communication through a telecollaboration initiative involving students from Latvia, Lithuania, and Chile. Its primary aim is to examine how cultural backgrounds shape communication styles, perceptions, values, and social norms. Through weekly online meetings, collaborative tasks, and guided discussions, participants compare cultural practices related to education, community life, traditions, interpersonal communication, and identity. The project provides a space for students to reflect on their own cultural assumptions while gaining insight into those of their international peers.

The presentation provides an in-depth introduction to the telecollaboration project, outlining the structure of the exchange and sharing the participants' experiences. The virtual format facilitates meaningful interaction, enabling participants to engage in dialogue, negotiate understanding, and co-construct knowledge about cultural similarities and differences. Initial observations indicate that participants become more aware of implicit cultural norms and adopt more flexible communication strategies when engaging with peers from diverse backgrounds.

Overall, the project demonstrates the effectiveness of telecollaboration as a pedagogical tool for developing intercultural competence. By connecting students across continents, the initiative promotes empathy, global awareness, and effective communication in multicultural settings. The insights gained may inform future pedagogical approaches that incorporate virtual exchange into language, communication, and cultural studies curricula.

Keywords: *cultural background, collaborative tasks, guided discussions, project participants' experiences.*

Abstracts from Interdisciplinary Contributors

FACULTY OF CHEMISTRY AND GEOSCIENCES

Effect of Common Beverages on Tooth Enamel Erosion

Titas Krašauskas, Matas Pocevičius, *Vilnius University, Faculty of Chemistry and Geosciences, study programme 'Chemistry', 1st-year students.*

Abstract

Tooth enamel, the protective outer layer of teeth, is highly susceptible to erosion from dietary acids, a major contributor to dental health issues. Understanding the comparative erosive potential of commonly consumed beverages is therefore essential for promoting oral health and preventing irreversible tooth demineralization. This project investigated the effects of water, coffee, Red Bull, Coca-Cola, and orange juice on enamel integrity. Eggshells were used as an easily accessible and analogous substitute for tooth enamel. Samples were immersed in each beverage over a fixed period, and erosion was assessed through visual inspection, mass loss measurements, and physical changes such as altered hardness.

Results indicated that highly acidic drinks—Red Bull, Coca-Cola, and orange juice—caused significant erosion and visible surface damage. Coffee produced a moderate erosive effect, while plain water had negligible impact. These findings highlight the substantial risks posed by acidic beverages and emphasize the importance of informed consumption choices for long-term dental preservation.

Keywords: *tooth enamel erosion, dietary acids, acidic beverages, dental health, eggshell model.*

Invisible Ink: How Thermal Receipts Transfer Bisphenols to Skin — Exposure, Awareness, and Everyday Risk

Nojus Barzda, Simona Laurinėnaitė, *Vilnius University, Faculty of Chemistry and Geosciences, study programme 'Chemistry', 1st-year students.*

Abstract

Thermal paper receipts often contain bisphenol compounds such as BPA and BPS, which are recognized endocrine-disrupting chemicals capable of transferring to the skin during routine handling. Dermal exposure from receipts has been demonstrated in behavioral, occupational, and experimental studies; however, public awareness and protective habits remain limited. This project aimed to investigate how frequently people handle receipts, their knowledge of bisphenols, and which everyday behaviors may increase or reduce potential exposure.

A short literature review was combined with an anonymous online survey to gather data. Results showed that most respondents handle receipts regularly but rarely wash their hands afterwards, and none reported using hand sanitizer in this context. While many participants were aware that receipts can contain BPA or BPS, overall concern levels were low. Digital receipts and hand-washing were identified as the most effective preventive measures. These findings suggest that simple behavioral changes, alongside clearer public information, could help reduce unnecessary dermal exposure to bisphenols in both daily and occupational settings.

Keywords: *bisphenols (BPA, BPS), thermal paper receipts, dermal exposure, endocrine disruptors, preventive behaviors.*

Same Perfume, Different Aroma: The Science Behind Scent Perception

Miglė Buragaitė, Gytis Daukša, Kristalė Genytė, Vilnius University, Faculty of Chemistry and Geosciences, study programme ‘Chemistry’, 1st-year students.

Abstract

Fragrance is often viewed as a universal sensory experience, yet people are frequently surprised by how differently the same perfume smells from one person to another. This project investigates the phenomenon of differential scent perception, specifically exploring how a single fragrance can manifest distinct aromas on different individuals. Understanding this variability is essential for grasping the complex interplay between fragrance molecules and human physiology. Given individual biochemical differences, we aimed to determine whether factors such as skin type, age, and gender influence how a scent is perceived.

Our methodology combined a survey assessing public awareness of this phenomenon with an experiment evaluating its measurable effects. The results indicated that oilier skin generally enhances softer perfume notes, while drier skin tends to amplify sharper ones. However, other individual characteristics—such as pH levels, skin microbiome composition, and even diet, as highlighted in existing literature—can significantly alter the prominence or subtlety of specific scent components. Collectively, the findings confirm that personalized scent

experiences arise from a multifaceted interaction of physiological and environmental factors.

Keywords: *differential scent perception, fragrance variability, skin chemistry, perfume–skin interaction, olfactory physiology.*

Sleep Deprivation Effects on Humans

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Abstract

Sleep deprivation is a growing concern among students, who often reduce rest to meet academic and social demands. Insufficient sleep can impair mood, cognition, and productivity, making it important to understand how everyday sleep habits affect student functioning. This project explores that connection by addressing a gap in student-specific data, examining how sleep duration, schedule regularity, and caffeine use relate to daytime energy. An anonymous online survey collected self-reported information from first-year students regarding their sleeping patterns and daily alertness.

Results indicate that many students operate on less-than-optimal sleep, and that irregular routines combined with fatigue-related caffeine consumption are associated with lower restfulness and fluctuating energy levels throughout the day. These trends align with existing research on the effects of prolonged insufficient sleep. Although the sample is limited, the findings highlight the value of consistent sleep schedules and basic sleep-hygiene practices in supporting improved alertness and academic performance.

Keywords: *sleep deprivation, student well-being, sleep habits, caffeine consumption, daytime alertness.*

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Marketing in the Digital Age: Exploring Fan Loyalty Through Emotional Social Media Strategies

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Abstract

In today's digital landscape, social media has become one of the most influential tools shaping how artists communicate with their audiences. This research explores how social media has reshaped marketing, particularly in the music industry, by fostering closer and more personal connections between artists and their fans. A key aspect of this shift is the phenomenon of digital intimacy, which includes content that demonstrates authenticity, vulnerability, and personal moments—such as behind-the-scenes footage, live performances, brand collaborations, or direct fan interactions. These strategies are effective in building trust, loyalty, transparency, and emotional engagement, ultimately encouraging fans to support artists financially.

The study aims to identify which types of digital intimacy—such as personal storytelling, emotional disclosures, or unfiltered footage—most effectively drive fan loyalty and consumer action. Additionally, it examines how these strategies have influenced the careers of the world's top five music artists. Data will be collected from social media posts, fan interactions, and engagement metrics such as likes and comments. The research will employ qualitative content analysis to compare the impact of different intimacy strategies on fan engagement, contributing to our understanding of emotional marketing in the digital age.

Keywords: *digital intimacy, social media marketing, fan engagement, music industry, emotional marketing*

FACULTY OF LAW

Young Adults vs. AI

Gabija Genyte, Rasa Daniele, Kamile Dvilinskaite, Vilnius University, Faculty of Law, study programme 'Law', 1st-year students.

Abstract

This presentation explores the societal impacts of fake news and disinformation, emphasizing the increasingly significant role of artificial intelligence in shaping public perception and influencing information consumption. It presents the results of an online survey conducted among students to assess their ability to distinguish between real information and AI-generated content, as well as their susceptibility to misinformation propagated through AI tools. The study examines how exposure to such content affects critical thinking, media literacy, and informed decision-making. Findings highlight the urgent need for educational strategies and interventions that strengthen digital resilience, enhance fact-checking skills, and promote responsible engagement with online information.

Keywords: *fake news, disinformation, AI-generated content, media literacy, critical thinking.*

Understanding Fake News: Emotional Effects, Social Fragmentation and Generational Differences in Detection

Smilte Kozlovskyte, Greta Kvietkute, Paula Kotovaite, Benita Ledovskojute, *Vilnius University, Faculty of Law, study programme 'Law', 1st-year students.*

Abstract

Fake news spreads rapidly and harms society by increasing social division, reinforcing biases, and weakening trust in public institutions. This study hypothesized that younger adults would demonstrate higher levels of media literacy than older adults, due to their frequent exposure to digital platforms and online information. However, the results reveal that younger adults also struggle with evaluating sources, verifying facts, and recognizing manipulated or misleading content. These findings highlight the urgent need for mandatory media literacy education at both the school and university levels. Implementing such programs can equip students with practical skills to critically assess information, identify misinformation, and make informed decisions, ultimately fostering a more responsible and discerning digital society.

Keywords: *fake news, media literacy, misinformation, digital education, critical thinking.*

FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS

AI and Humanoid Robots in Healthcare

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Abstract

As intelligent technologies begin to share the clinical space with human caregivers, healthcare stands at a turning point where innovation meets emotion. This project investigates how humanoid robots, AI-driven systems, and machine learning models collectively reshape the experience of care. The study addresses an important gap: while technological efficiency is widely researched, the human response—trust, hesitation, and ethical concern—remains far less understood. Drawing on survey data comparing individuals with and without prior interaction with healthcare robots, quantitative analysis of public attitudes toward AI ethics, and a systematic review of recent machine learning applications, the research examines how people interpret and evaluate these emerging tools.

Findings suggest that familiarity with humanoid robots increases comfort and acceptance, yet ethical issues—such as bias, privacy, and accountability—continue to influence trust across age groups. At the same time, machine learning models demonstrate strong potential in diagnostics and early detection, though constrained by data quality and integration challenges. Together, these results highlight that the future of healthcare requires not only technical advancement but also ethical clarity and emotional sensitivity, ensuring that new technologies support medical practice while preserving the human spirit at its center.

Keywords: *healthcare AI, humanoid robots, machine learning, ethics in technology, human–technology interaction.*

Stress Coping Mechanisms in VU MIF Students

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Abstract

MIF students during the entire length of their studies experience different levels of stress due to academic, personal, or environmental pressures. This study aims to determine how different levels of stress correlate with the type of stress coping mechanism a MIF student may choose. Additionally, the goal is to find out whether a respected programme, students' age, or gender holds any significant value to the results. Data was collected through online forms and live questioning, yielding responses from over 50 participants. The findings show that no matter the year, programme, or gender, every MIF student faces some level of stress. The main stressors turned out to be deadlines and exams, with more than 70% of responders mentioning them alongside some other factors. Furthermore, the main coping strategies were listening to music and socializing, with around 80% of responders choosing them. Despite the limited sample size, the findings show that MIF students deal with significant amounts of stress and anxiety in their day-to-day lives. These findings highlight the importance of supporting students in developing effective and healthy coping strategies.

Keywords: *Student stress, Coping mechanisms, MIF students, Surveys, Healthy coping strategies.*

The Impact of Short-Form Video Content on Attention Span Amongst Different Age Groups

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Abstract

We are living in a technological age, where social media has become part of our everyday lives and may have a greater influence on us than we realize. For example, short-form social media video content, engineered to trigger dopamine bursts, might pose a threat to human attention span. Literature suggests that short-form videos harm attention span; however, the age-related differences remain unclear. Understanding how different age groups engage with this content can clarify whether certain generations are at a higher risk of impaired attention span. In our study, we expect constant exposure to short videos to have a greater impact on younger individuals' attention span compared to older people. The behavioral observation method was applied to identify which age groups exhibited the most vulnerability. Thirty participants, aged 5 to 70 years, were divided into three groups and instructed to watch 10 short videos on their phones while their screens were recorded. Afterwards, the attention score was evaluated by calculating the percentage of watch-time on each video. After analyzing the data, the results confirmed our hypothesis: younger participants exhibited noticeably lower attention scores than older individuals. These findings signify the importance of age-related factors when examining the impact of digital technologies on cognitive abilities. Furthermore, this study could create a basis for further research regarding strategies or guidelines directed at promoting healthier digital habits among the youth.

Keywords: *attention span, attention score, age group, short-form video, cognitive impact, screen time, behavioural observation, generational differences, adolescents*

FACULTY OF MEDICINE

Dominant Side Upper-Limb Use and Shoulder Pain Correlation in Volleyball

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Abstract

Shoulder pain is a common problem among volleyball players, often resulting from repetitive and asymmetrical movements such as spiking and serving. Although previous research has identified muscular imbalances and biomechanical changes in the dominant shoulder, much of the existing literature is outdated and lacks focus on pain prevention and treatment methods. Our study aimed to investigate whether repetitive use of the dominant upper limb contributes to shoulder pain in young volleyball players and to examine the role of physiotherapy in pain reduction and prevention. Data were collected from 60 young volleyball athletes in Lithuania through a Google Forms questionnaire assessing training habits, dominant-arm use, pain experience, and rehabilitation strategies.

Results showed that more than half of participants reported shoulder pain, with the dominant arm being the most affected. Consistent warm-ups were associated with reduced pain prevalence, and the majority of athletes who attended physiotherapy reported significant improvement. These findings highlight the importance of preventive measures—particularly warm-up routines—and the effectiveness of physiotherapy in managing shoulder discomfort. The study contributes to a better understanding of overuse-related shoulder issues among young volleyball players and emphasizes the need for training improvements and more accessible physiotherapy resources.

Keywords: *volleyball, overuse, asymmetry, shoulder pain, dominant arm, physiotherapy.*

Psychology and Sports – How Psychological Well-Being Influences the Effectiveness of Training

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‘Physiotherapy’, 1st-year students.

Abstract

Mental well-being is strongly linked to athletic success, yet many young athletes struggle with stress, motivation, and balancing psychological demands with training requirements. Existing research often emphasizes performance outcomes without adequately examining psychological factors as mediators or moderators of training effectiveness. This project investigates how specific components of psychological well-being—such as motivation, stress regulation, and emotional stability—affect training efficiency among competitive athletes. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative data (literature review, interviews, and observations) with quantitative data (surveys and performance indicators). Data were analyzed using Google Forms, AI-assisted tools, and manual interpretation by the research team.

Preliminary findings indicate that higher psychological well-being is associated with stronger motivation, better training adherence, improved focus, and superior performance outcomes. Conversely, poor mental health correlates with decreased consistency, increased burnout risk, and reduced training progress. These results highlight the critical role of psychological well-being in shaping training effectiveness. Integrating mental health-focused strategies—such as mindfulness, stress-management techniques, and motivation-enhancing interventions—may significantly improve athletes’ long-term performance and overall success.

Keywords: *psychological well-being, athletic performance, training effectiveness, motivation, stress regulation.*

What Positive Impact Does Karate Have On Your Body?

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Abstract

Karate is widely recognized as a popular martial art and sport, yet scientific literature rarely explores how its effects vary across different levels of mastery. This project investigates the positive impacts of karate on three groups: beginners, regular practitioners, and professional elite athletes. It also examines whether scientific findings align with athletes' real-life experiences and whether maintaining peak mastery is consistently possible. The study employed qualitative methods, analyzing eight scientific studies and conducting interviews with two elite athletes/coaches recognized both in Lithuania and internationally. The research focused on physical fitness, brain function, mental well-being, and common injuries.

Results indicate that karate training generally enhances strength, endurance, reaction time, focus, and emotional control, though real-life experiences vary individually. Athletes emphasized that even masters can experience declines in performance due to fatigue or injuries. Overall, the findings highlight that karate is a beneficial and health-promoting activity for individuals at all levels of mastery. The study also provides valuable insights for teachers, athletes, and researchers seeking to better understand how karate influences both the body and mind.

Keywords: *karate, martial arts, physical fitness, mental well-being, athletic performance.*

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

Critical Thinking Development in Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

Critical thinking skills are highlighted as key objectives throughout educational programmes, yet whether they are genuinely fostered in real classroom practice remains an open question. This research focuses on foreign language classes to investigate whether critical thinking skills positively affect students' academic performance. The study aims to examine the relationship between foreign language learning and critical thinking, highlighting why critical thinking is important and identifying the ways in which foreign language activities contribute to its development.

To achieve these objectives, qualitative research methods will be employed, using instruments such as semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, as well as classroom observations. This research can help improve foreign language education by demonstrating how critical thinking skills enhance student performance, leading to more effective teaching practices and better learning outcomes.

Keywords: *critical thinking, foreign language learning, academic performance, classroom observation, qualitative research.*

Early Cosmetics Use and Self-Perception Among Pre-Adolescent Girls: The Mediating Effects of Peer Pressure and Social Media

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Abstract

In recent years, early cosmetics use among pre-adolescent girls has increased significantly, becoming a cultural phenomenon among females as young as 9 to 12 years old (Pérez-Torres, 2024; Fahrurroh, 2025). This trend may be linked to an earlier onset of puberty, increased appearance-related anxiety and constant exposure to social media. Girls' self-perception might be heavily shaped by how they are viewed online and by peers, making social media use, social comparison and peer pressure essential factors in this process.

Although recent research has explored the links between cosmetics use, self-worth, body image, social comparison and peer pressure among adolescents, far less is known about how these constructs operate in younger girls. Therefore, the proposed study aims to investigate the relationships between early cosmetics use and self-perception among pre-adolescent girls as well as to examine whether peer pressure, active and passive social media engagement, and social comparison mediate these relationships. Approximately 120 girls aged 9-12 will be invited to participate using convenience sampling from five schools. Data will be collected through an online survey. Methods of data analysis will include descriptive statistics, correlation, and mediation analyses.

The results of the study could help provide clearer guidance for parents and educators on how early makeup use and social media influence children's self-worth. The findings might also suggest shifting the focus

toward media literacy and tackling harmful comparison, rather than relying solely on restricting social media use.

Keywords: *Early cosmetics use, self-perception, self-worth, body image, peer pressure, social comparison, social media use, pre-adolescent girls.*

Economic Progress Under Hu Jintao

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Abstract

This research project aims to explain the economic growth of China under Hu Jintao’s presidency (2003–2012(3)) and to explain why China has risen in the past decades to geopolitical prominence. One of the project’s objectives is to analyse national-level economic indicators, including Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expansion, income inequality, and distribution. It also aims to make sense of the current Chinese economic policy and development under the presidency of Xi Jinping, as well as to analyze the issues and make predictions for the future.

Methodologically, the project relies on quantitative statistical data. Supported by government reports and international institutional databases focusing on inequality, household income (Gini) and the urban-rural divide. This project identifies both achievements and structural vulnerabilities within contemporary China’s growth model, explaining its main strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, this project evaluates the Hu Jintao era legacy while highlighting data biases, accessibility challenges, research gaps and accessibility for future projects.

Keywords: *China economic growth, Hu Jintao, GDP, income inequality, development policy*

Empathy Development in Primary Education

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Abstract

Cultivating empathy in primary education plays a crucial role in shaping emotionally intelligent, socially aware learners who can contribute to a more collaborative and compassionate future. This research proposal examines the development of empathy in Lithuanian primary education and seeks to understand how current practices compare with those used in other countries. Recognizing empathy as a key component of children's social, emotional, and academic growth, the study aims to explore how teachers, students, and parents perceive and experience empathy-building within the school environment. Grounded in international theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies, the proposal highlights the importance of active learning, emotional understanding, group inclusion, historical empathy, and prosocial behaviour.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the planned research will gather data through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations across a range of Lithuanian cities and towns to capture diverse educational contexts. The project aims to identify whether empathy is meaningfully included in the current curriculum, how its development may differ between generations, and what improvements could support more effective social-emotional learning in primary schools. The expected outcomes will offer guidance for enhancing educational practice and may inform recommendations for curriculum development and teacher training in Lithuania.

Keywords: *empathy development, primary education, social-emotional learning, Lithuania, prosocial behaviour*

Exploring the Interface Between Self-Induced Suffering and Artistic Creativity in Female Poets: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Artistic creativity has long been associated with mental illness. The tortured-artist myth has been viewed as a culturally persistent belief that psychological suffering is a necessary ingredient for artistic genius, yet it may cause harm to artists. Extant studies provide evidence for the actual correlation between artistic genius and suffering, but many questions remain unanswered on the nature and direction of the relationship (Boumans, Oderwald, & Kroon, 2024; Liu et al., 2025).

The aim of the proposed study is to explore the interface between self-inflicted psychological suffering and artistic creativity in female poets. The study will utilize the method of thematic analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore how the participants (N = 12) perceive self-induced psychological suffering and emotional (in)stability and how those states, as they may think, influence their poetic work. The findings may provide an in-depth understanding of how psychological suffering relates to artistic creativity and potentially be used to develop support interventions for female artists to enhance their mental health and counter destructive stereotypes.

Keywords: *Artistic creativity, self-induced suffering, female poets, qualitative, thematic analysis.*

From Pixels to Power: Examining How the Proteus Effect Boosts Self-Confidence in Video Game Players

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Abstract

Nowadays, it is crucial to look for newer approaches to help teenagers boost their self-confidence and one of the ways might be to incorporate teenagers' free-time activities—video games—with the Proteus effect. The Proteus effect is the phenomenon where a person aligns their actions with those of the avatar they embody in the game. Previous research on this effect is limited and paints it in quite a negative light (Szolin et al., 2023; Gorisse et al., 2017). The same can be said about video games as researchers find more negatives than positives (Virgilio, 2024). However, it raises the question whether controlled conditions could eliminate the negatives and focus on the positives.

The proposed study aims to investigate the extent to which the Proteus effect might be associated with video game players' self-confidence. The study will use the experimental design and participants (N = 90) aged 16-18, who exhibit low self-confidence. They will be assigned to three groups. Two experimental groups will play character games but will be treated differently regarding the first-or third-person perspective, while the control group will engage in no-character games. At the end of the experiment, the participants will be asked to complete the Proteus Effect Questionnaire designed by the authors of the study. Data analysis will involve descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and ANOVA tests to examine the relationships between exposure, play perspective, and self-confidence outcomes. The study could yield significant insights into how these variables interact and add to the therapeutic potential of games for self-esteem and understanding of the Proteus effect.

Keywords: *Proteus effect, self-confidence, video games, first- or third-person perspective.*

How Religion and Politics Intwine in Modern South Korea

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Abstract

This study investigates how South Korean presidents have used religious and moral discourse to define national legitimacy and purpose from 1948 to 2025. A comparative textual analysis of ten speeches across three eras was conducted: the Theocratic Founding (Syngman Rhee), the Democratic Transition (Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung), and the Contemporary Era of Polarization (Moon Jae-in, Yoon Suk-yeol, Lee Jae-myung).

Our research identifies three main phases in the source of presidential authority. In the Rhee era, legitimacy was based on Divine Mandate, framing anti-Communism as a righteous struggle. This evolved during the democratic transition (KYS, KDJ) into Democratic Vocation, where leaders used their personal political suffering to justify painful national reforms (anti-corruption, IMF restructuring) and humanitarian foreign policy. In the contemporary period, moral language has become a tool for ideological delineation: Conservative President Yoon Suk-yeol emphasizes “Freedom” as the core ethical imperative to strengthen security alliances, while progressive leaders (Moon, Lee) prioritize “Peace-Based Security”, “Communal Care”, and “Economic Justice” as the nation's moral priorities.

The findings demonstrate that moral discourse remains the essential framework for political action in the ROK. Its primary function has shifted from building a unified national identity to serving as a powerful tool for mobilization and highlighting the sharp differences between opposing political groups in a modern democracy.

Keywords: *South Korea, presidential rhetoric, moral discourse, national legitimacy, political authority.*

The Effect of Perceived Opportunity to Media Multitask on Attention in High Media Multitaskers

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Abstract

Media multitasking is becoming increasingly prominent due to the ever-advancing technology, which is taking over so many parts of our lives. Numerous studies have explored how this phenomenon relates to attention problems; however, they yield inconsistent results (Ekrem, Bagci, & Karamoglu, 2024; Imren & Tekman, 2019). Furthermore, research on this topic does not provide insight into the effect of the urge to media multitask on the speed and performance of cognitive tasks.

With this proposed study, we aim to explore this topic experimentally by putting people in situations where their tendency to media multitask might interfere with the completion of such tasks. The study will use the controlled experiment method. Our participants will be university students aged 18-30 years who scored high on the MUQ (Media Use Questionnaire). Participants will be divided into two groups; each will be asked to complete the Modified AX-CPT task and the Transcription task. The control group will work on the two tasks with no interruptions, while the experimental group will receive incoming notifications. Attention will be measured through reaction time and the number of errors.

The expected results will shed light on how digital distractions affect the attention span of young people, and perhaps help schools reach decisions to limit gadget use. The results might also increase the awareness of teenagers about how various gadgets affect their task performance and encourage psychologists to pay attention to this emerging issue, as well as motivate them to find new strategies to tackle it.

Keywords: *Media multitasking, attention, modified AX-CPT task, transcription task.*

The Relationship Between Digital Hoarding and Mental Fatigue in University Students: The Mediating Role of Procrastination

Jonas Savickas, Kornelija Balčaitė, Marta Pūžytė, Vilnius University, Faculty of Philosophy, study programme 'Psychology', 1st-year students.

Abstract

Digital hoarding is a growing problem in today's society, especially prevalent among university students. Previous research indicates that cluttered digital interfaces lead to an increased cognitive load (or fatigue) and maladaptive perfectionism (Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2024). Hoarding in general may lead to procrastination and not knowing when to release the accumulated material (Abramova & Veronin, 2024; Zaremohzzabieh et. al, 2024; Ashworth & McCown, 2018). However, there is a significant gap in previous research, as no studies have linked digital hoarding, procrastination, and mental fatigue together. The proposed study sets out to fill this gap by suggesting that correlational links among these three constructs are explored, as well as whether the two different types of procrastination (active and passive) could act as mediators between digital hoarding and mental fatigue. Evidence linking digital hoarding, mental fatigue and procrastination together could spark an interest in various digital wellness interventions, different events to educate students on proper time management, as well as encouraging mental health professionals to assess their patients' digital habits.

Keywords: *Digital hoarding, mental fatigue, active and passive procrastination.*

The Toxic Narratives of Masculinity: How Adolescent Boys' Engagement with Red Pill Content Affects Their Perception of Women

Gabija Gendvilė, Ugnė Mažonaitė, Greta Radzevičiūtė, Vilnius

University, Faculty of Philosophy, Study Programme 'Psychology', 1st-year students.

Abstract

Red pill content consumption and its repercussions are an increasingly concerning problem amongst men, especially adolescent boys, who, at their age, are searching for inspiring role models. While previous studies have explored how Red Pill media affects people's beliefs on a smaller scale and on specific ideas, like rape (Persson, 2025) and leadership norms (Erbil et al., 2025), there is no research to date on the impact these ideas have on young and impressionable minds.

With this proposed study, we aim to examine how red pill content and peer group dynamics shape adolescent boys' views on gender norms as well as influence their desire to share them. The study will utilise a mixed-method design. First, a screening survey that involves the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) and the Red Pill Content Exposure, Engagement, and Internalization Questionnaire developed by the authors of the study will be conducted. Our participants, adolescent boys (N = 100) aged from 13 to 16 years, will be assigned to three groups based on the survey scores. The groups will be interviewed separately, and multiple focus-group interviews will be conducted. The data will be analysed using inductive and latent thematic analysis methods (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The results of the proposed study may bridge the gap in adolescent research on the interplay between engagement with red pill content, gender norms and toxic masculinity.

Keywords: *Toxic masculinity, red pill content, gender norms, thematic analysis, adolescent boys.*

Why Study Philosophy: Motivations, Value, and Career Implications

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Abstract

Drawing on data from two online surveys, this study examines how the expectations and realities of philosophy students regarding employment both diverge and align. The findings indicate that expectations are strongly shaped by pervasive negative societal stereotypes about philosophical education, including misconceptions about the skill sets acquired during the program and an ambiguous understanding of its academic content. The analysis of philosophy studies at Vilnius University compares contemporary curricular practices with previously dominant academic approaches in order to clarify the nature and relevance of philosophical training today. The study also identifies the main factors influencing students' decisions to pursue philosophy, showing that these motivations are predominantly epistemic, existential or personal, and skill-oriented. Although securing employment is not without challenges, the data demonstrate that philosophy graduates enter highly interdisciplinary career paths supported by professional networking, broad intellectual interests, and competencies directly connected to their academic training. By articulating the contrast between current students' expectations and the experiences of employed graduates, the study underscores an information gap rooted in limited knowledge about career outcomes and reinforced by persistent assumptions and stereotypes.

Keywords: *philosophy, philosophy studies, Vilnius University, career opportunities.*

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Are We Trading Privacy for Convenience in Our Homes?

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Abstract

Smart home devices have become increasingly popular in recent years and are on track to become a new staple in modern building services. However, many people remain unaware of the hidden costs related to privacy and the collection of personal data. We aim to shed light on these often-overlooked aspects as part of the *Digital Footprint, Privacy and Costs* project conducted for the *Academic & Technical Communication in English (Level C1)* course at Kaunas University of Technology. Our group, composed of students from Informatics and Civil Engineering, found the Smart Homes subtopic ideal for expanding our knowledge.

At the beginning of this project, we created a brief literature report focused on one of the core elements of Smart Homes—Home Automation Systems—comparing paid and free options, analyzing how they handle data, and examining the balance between privacy and convenience. The second phase involved creating an interactive virtual environment demonstrating the capabilities and risks of these new systems. This environment will allow visitors to walk through a house equipped with cutting-edge Smart Home devices, observe how these

systems interact, and learn about the potential security and privacy risks they pose. Visitors will also be able to test their knowledge about Smart Homes to see how well they understand these technologies.

Keywords: *smartphones, privacy, personal data, interactive virtual environment, smart home devices.*

The Price of Being Online: Cyberstalking Uncovered

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Abstract

Our project at Kaunas University of Technology, completed within the *Academic & Technical Communication in English (Level C1)* course, explored cyberstalking as a pervasive and escalating threat embedded in everyday online behaviour under the broader theme “Digital Footprint, Privacy and Costs.” We examined how ordinary digital traces—such as Instagram posts, text messages, and social media activity—can be weaponized through four interconnected stages: surveillance, direct harassment, deception and reputation sabotage, and enlisting others.

In the first stage of the project, our report, drawing on recent studies, showed that cyberstalking often begins with socially accepted “online checking,” yet can quickly escalate into psychological abuse, intimidation, and even physical threats, leaving victims with severe emotional and behavioral trauma. To further illustrate these dynamics, the second stage of the project involved creating multimedia material, including a team-produced video demonstrating how cyberstalking can unfold in everyday situations and offering practical recommendations for recognizing, avoiding, and protecting oneself from such threats. Our work emphasizes that privacy settings and digital awareness are not mere conveniences but essential lines of defence.

Keywords: *cyberstalking, digital footprint, online harassment, cyberstalking, digital behaviour, digital safety.*

Understanding and Preventing Phishing Attacks

Jamshedjon Akhunpochoev, Aleksandra Sokolovska, Mohamed Hashim Mohamed Mustafa, *Kaunas University of Technology, Faculty of Informatics, study programme 'Informatics', 2nd-year students.*

Abstract

Phishing is a type of social-engineering attack that has increased significantly over the past decade. These attacks are widespread, persistent, and affect many users on a weekly basis. As part of the course project *Digital Footprint, Privacy and Costs*, we examined this growing threat from its origins to its modern forms, providing detailed information about different types of phishing, current trends, and methods of detection and prevention.

We explored the approaches used by organizations to identify phishing attempts — including whitelisting and blacklisting systems, heuristic analysis, and machine-learning-based techniques that detect suspicious patterns. With the help of AI tools, we also created a short explanatory video and an interactive quiz to make the topic more accessible. Additionally, we offer practical advice that users can apply in everyday life to protect themselves. The presentation provides valuable insights into understanding and preventing phishing attacks.

Keywords: *phishing, social engineering, cybersecurity, threat detection, prevention methods.*

LIFE SCIENCES CENTRE

Bioprinting Human Organs: Ethical, Medical and Technological Perspectives (Ongoing Project)

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Vilnius University, Life Sciences Centre, study programme 'Molecular Biotechnology', 1st-year students.

Abstract

The global shortage of transplantable organs is a critical challenge in modern medicine, leading to thousands of patient deaths annually while they await donors. 3D bioprinting offers a promising solution through the layer-by-layer construction of biological structures using biomaterials, stem cells, and growth factors (Panja et al. 2022). Despite advancements in creating simpler tissues, the production of complex, vascularized solid organs remains difficult, presenting both scientific and clinical challenges (Jafarkhani et al. 2019). Additionally, 3D bioprinting introduces ethical and regulatory dilemmas regarding patient safety, regulatory pathways, and equitable access to potentially expensive treatments.

This study examines the technological, medical, and ethical barriers to the clinical translation of bioprinted organs, guided by two main questions: the key challenges affecting implementation and the perceptions of biomedical engineers and transplant surgeons regarding ethical issues such as equity, affordability, and consent. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study will involve semi-structured qualitative interviews with professionals in 3D bioprinting and organ transplantation, along with a quantitative survey targeting a diverse participant demographic. Expected outcomes include the identification

of significant barriers, such as vascularization and clinical safety, as well as ethical concerns about cost and access. By merging technical and ethical insights, this research aims to propose a framework for the responsible clinical adoption of 3D bioprinting, supporting ethical advancement in the field.

Keywords: *3D bioprinting, organ transplantation, healthcare.*

Food Biotechnology in Domestic Environments

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Abstract

Interest in homemade fermented foods has grown in recent years, yet domestic fermentation practices are rarely analyzed using quantitative, biotechnology-based methods. This gap limits understanding of how microbial activity can be monitored with simple household tools. This study investigates the applicability of basic biotechnological processes—alcoholic and lactic acid fermentation—in home food production using measurable physical and chemical parameters. The research combines a literature review with experimental preparation of kombucha, sauerkraut, kvass, and two types of bread. Temperature, pH, and fermentation duration were monitored to evaluate microbial activity and product quality. During kombucha fermentation, pH decreased from 5.2 to 3.1 over seven days at 24 ± 1 °C. Sauerkraut showed a drop from 6.4 to 3.5 within 72 hours at 21–23 °C, while kvass fermentation reduced pH from 5.8 to 4.2 in 48 hours with vigorous CO₂ formation.

In the bread experiment, dough with 11 g of dry yeast showed a 2.3-fold volume increase after 90 minutes at 27 °C, whereas yeast-free dough exhibited no significant rise, producing a denser loaf. A simple compression test revealed that yeast bread required about 20–25% less force to deform the crumb by 1 cm, indicating a softer texture. These results show that fermentation processes can be quantitatively assessed using household-level measurements and demonstrate how microbial metabolism influences acidity, texture, and overall product quality.

Keywords: *Fermentation; microbial metabolism; biotechnological processes.*

UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA

Side Hustles and Student Identity: Investigating Micro-Entrepreneurial Self-Perception Among University Students

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Abstract

This research investigates how students combine their identities as learners and future workers with the side-hustle construct. Given the growing context of rising living costs and platform economies, side hustles have emerged not as optional extra activities but as economic necessities for both students and the general population. This project aims to examine how activities such as freelancing, reselling, content creation, and other informal forms of work are labelled and whether they influence students' perceptions of independence, professionalism, and future career trajectories. Empirically, the project involves a combination of a semi-structured interview with a student who has a regular side hustle and an online questionnaire completed by university students (peers) with jobs or side hustles.

The data gathered from the interview will be analysed to identify recurrent patterns that illustrate the main concerns and motivations of students who engage in side hustles. Questionnaire responses will be examined in relation to students' self-chosen labels to explore how they connect these activities to their sense of economic autonomy. As such, the main aim of the project is to demonstrate that side hustles function as important sites of identity construction, reshaping the boundaries

between “being a student” and “being a worker,” and highlighting tensions between economic necessity, informal practices, and formal understandings of entrepreneurship within the context of higher education.

Keywords: *side hustles, student identity, economic necessity, informal work, entrepreneurship.*

Nurturing Critical Minds

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