

EBU

OPERATING EUROVISION AND EURORADIO

POSITION PAPER
**'FAKE NEWS' AND
THE INFORMATION
DISORDER**



JUNE 2018

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The European Broadcasting Union, representing 73 public service media organizations across 56 countries, warmly welcomes the European Commission's initiative on 'fake news' and online disinformation, and is keen to continue the exchange of views with all stakeholders in the debate.

The EBU believes that the Report of the High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation (HLEG) represents a step in the right direction and we look forward to pursuing the initiative within a multi-stakeholder Coalition working on a Code of Practice.¹

As the representative organization of Europe's public service media, the EBU wishes to provide the EU Institutions and key stakeholders with regular input, information and recommendations by identifying best practices, appropriate policy options and cross-industry initiatives to tackle the problem and build citizens' trust.

From the Baltic to the Mediterranean, as major news providers to a majority of the EU population, European public service media are repositioning themselves and developing techniques to face up to the challenges of the multi-platform age. EBU Members are in the front line when it comes to fighting the propagation of 'fake news' and disinformation. Quality journalism, media pluralism and unbiased reporting are not only part of the public service remit our Members abide to; these are values which are at the heart of our Members' corporate culture and their contribution to society and democracy.²

This document explains the unique role played by public service media in informing citizens and addressing 'fake news'. To fulfil this role, public service media needs political independence, a flexible remit and sustainable funding, supported by an appropriate regulatory framework across the wider sector. This paper also offers insights and recommendations on how to identify the scope of the problem and further actions to be taken by public authorities and platform operators in particular.

- **In part one, we examine the scope of the 'fake news' issue** and argue that disinformation is only the most visible element of a much broader and deep-lying problem: the 'information disorder'.
- **In part two, we explain the important and unique contribution of public service media.**
- **In part three, we propose measures addressing the role of online platforms** aiming to counter the spread of disinformation online.
- **In part four, we suggest future actions to be taken by public authorities**, in particular to improve access to reliable information and reduce the spread of disinformation online.

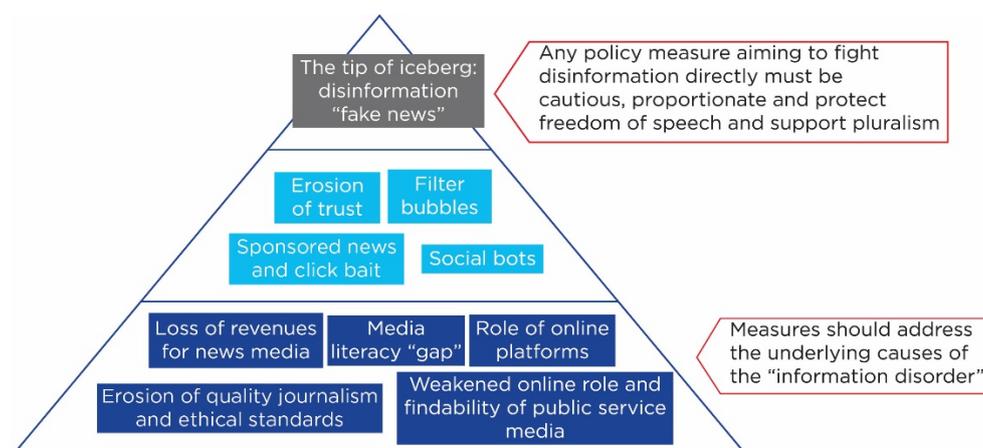
The annex provides additional information on initiatives taken by our Members to specifically tackle disinformation.

¹ See EBU Press Release ['EBU urges European policy makers to improve conditions for quality media to fight 'fake news' and disinformation'](#)

² The Members of the European Broadcasting Union share the Core Values of Public Service Media: Universality, Independence, Excellence, Diversity, Accountability and Innovation.

KEY POINTS

- 'Fake news' is the most visible element in a broader context of an online information disorder, where a small number of social media and other relevant platforms have huge influence on people's access to information. These platforms have unprecedented reach and economic power which are coupled with business models based on monetizing visibility and ranking the offer of information and content based on algorithms and "community standards". This development has disrupted the traditional media system.
- Intervention of public authorities is necessary to create the right framework conditions for digital intermediaries and for the media so that together they can ensure that all citizens continue to have access to trustworthy information in the online world, without being flooded by hate speech and 'fake news'.
- The EBU would therefore advocate a **holistic approach**, based on the one hand on a combination of incentive, support and regulatory measures to address malfunctions of the online information system and on the other hand creating a **favourable environment for responsible, independent, quality journalism**.
- Any policy measure aiming to fight disinformation must be cautious, proportionate and protect **freedom of speech and support pluralism**. Interventions by public authorities have to be proportionate to the threat posed by disinformation, thus minimizing the chilling effect which such measures can have on **freedom of expression**.
- **Independent public service media have a key role to play** to improve informed citizenship. Their offers should be easy to find and access, both online and offline. It is crucial that they continue developing strong online platforms and services under their own editorial control. It is also essential that public authorities sustain and where appropriate reinforce the role of public service media, as an important and well-established part of the holistic approach.
- **Media literacy** initiatives will play a key role in fighting the information disorder. Public service media are in a prime position to strengthen media literacy.
- **Social networks are in a position to better manage their own platforms** by better exposing users to pluralism, boosting the **transparency** of business practices and of algorithms for users and content providers,³ refusing sponsored links to harmful content and sanctioning abuses by non-human accounts.



³ See work undertaken by the Tow Centre for Journalism on algorithmic transparency: <https://towcenter.org/towards-a-standard-for-algorithmic-transparency-in-the-media/>

PART ONE – SCOPE

UNDERSTANDING THE 'INFORMATION DISORDER'

'When discussing fake news, the first problem is how to define it. Many journalists are sceptical about the very concept, pointing out that it has always been part of their profession to check facts before putting them on air. Even the notion of deliberately false stories brings a shrug: what's the difference between that and propaganda, which governments have spread since time immemorial?'

'What is different today is the sheer extent of the creation of fake news, and the dramatic speed with which it can be spread on a global scale. Completely false stories intended to target a party or individual, fabricated quotes from genuine sources and the manipulation of genuine information or pictures are commonplace on social media. Viral sharing means they can quickly become accepted wisdom among users of Facebook and Twitter, and when the results of national elections come into play, as recently happened in the United States and France, that presents a dilemma for responsible news providers: do you just ignore what you know to be a false story, or do you spend time and resources publicly debunking it?'⁴

IDENTIFYING THE CORE PROBLEM: SPEED, SCALE AND INTENTIONS

Given the remit of public service media in providing accurate and impartial news to support an informed democratic debate, the EBU and its Members would like to contribute their insights into the anatomy, the causes and the impact of 'fake news'.

We share the general view that the notion of 'fake news' itself misrepresents the societal problem we have to deal with at present. 'Fake news' has always existed – as propaganda, shock headlines, fearmongering, or smokescreens, to name but a few examples.

What has changed today is the speed and scale at which inaccurate, fabricated or deliberately misleading news stories reach citizens. The emergence of the internet and social technology have brought about fundamental changes to the way information is produced, communicated and distributed. At this stage, it may be difficult to fully recognize and assess the scope of this phenomenon.

The EBU considers that the notion of 'information disorder', as coined in a recent report commissioned by the Council of Europe⁵, better reflects the full extent of the current problem, where 'fake news' is only the tip of the iceberg. 'Fake news' is the most visible element in a broader context of an online information disorder, where a small number of social media and other relevant platforms have huge influence on people's access to information. These platforms have unprecedented reach and economic power which are coupled with business models based on monetizing visibility, structuring and ranking the offer of information and content, based on algorithms and unilateral 'community standards'. This development has disrupted the traditional media system. The use of algorithms and the business model of monetizing content through advertising have the side effect of distributing and amplifying 'fake news', although this may be against the platform operator's own interest. The sensational nature of 'fake news' pieces attracts

⁴ EBU Publication – 'A Perfect Storm: The multiple challenges facing public service media, and why tackling them is vital for democracy', October 2017

⁵ Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy: 'Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking', Claire Wardle, PhD and Hossein Derakhshan, with research support from Anne Burns and Nic Dias, October 2017

clicks and visibility, which boosts their appeal and virality. In turn, users' exposure to fake or unreliable news articles undermines trust in the media in general.

Moreover, the traditional legal framework to fight 'fake news', in particular libel and defamation law, which remains quite effective as far as the media are concerned – loses much of its effectiveness in the online world. Unlike for print and broadcast media, where there is a responsible editor who is responsible under media, civil and even criminal law for the content published, there is no one who has an equivalent responsibility for other online content distributed on social media. Online intermediaries and aggregators generally reject responsibility for the content that they curate, evoking the liability exemptions for hosting service providers, whereas the authors and creators or sponsors of online fake news are often impossible or difficult to pursue. This is because their identity may be hidden behind pseudonyms, or may not be disclosed by intermediaries, or because they are simply unreachable in foreign jurisdictions.

It should be noted that the term 'fake news' has been used and misused in the political debate, also to dismiss reports which politicians simply did not like. For the purpose of scoping the problem, we recommend to limit the notion of 'fake news' to the intentional creation and/or spreading of false or misleading news on social media and similar platforms, whether for political or other reasons. Generally, we prefer the term 'online disinformation', which is more precise and may serve to designate digital content which contains inaccurate information and which is presented, promoted or disseminated by one or more actors in the chain with the intention to cause harm or make a profit. The underlying motivation may be, for example, to manipulate public opinion or political processes, to damage the reputation of others or simply to make money (in the case of click baits). Actions and related tools should take into consideration the different formats used to vehicle disinformation. Disinformation represents a core problem, but at the same time, it is only one component of the broader information disorder.

PROTECTING DEMOCRACY AND VALUES

As stated previously, misleading news stories have always existed and impacted public opinion, generated emotional reactions and played a role in shaping the public sphere. However, it is difficult to find previous examples where disinformation has played such a prominent role in shaping electoral results in modern and well-established democracies, thus undermining the trust in the functioning of democratic systems.

A report by the London School of Economics entitled 'Fake News: Public Policy Responses'⁶ breaks down the different types of 'fake news' stories into six categories, arguing that each type of news warrants a different approach: alleged foreign interference in domestic elections through 'fake news'; ad-driven invention; parody and satire; bad journalism; news that is ideologically opposed; news that challenges orthodox authority.

Measures targeting disinformation should cover some of these cases (e.g. false propaganda, ad-driven invention) but not all of them. Parody and satire, for example, should not qualify as disinformation where they are (clearly) recognizable as such, and they should benefit from protection by freedom of expression and artistic freedom. News which challenges orthodox authority should also not be targeted by actions as long as it is based on a factual approach.

Nevertheless, repressive measures against disinformation can represent a dangerous option for public authorities because any decisive action may put human rights (freedom of expression, privacy) at stake. This danger can be reduced where measures are taken by independent bodies, in particular the courts. The EBU would therefore advocate a holistic approach, based on the one hand on a combination of incentive, support and regulatory

⁶ LSE Media Policy Brief 20: 'Fake News: Public Policy Responses', Damian Tambini, March 2017

measures to address malfunctions of the online information system (e.g. strengthen transparency and accountability of platforms, prevent advertising from fuelling 'fake news') and on the other hand creating a favourable environment for responsible, independent, quality journalism. The key is to tackle the underlying causes of the problem in a way that supports fundamental European values.

THE NEED TO BUILD TRUST IN PROFESSIONAL NEWS MEDIA

The impact of widespread disinformation has damaged the reputation and public acceptance of professional news media, which rely on thorough research and are driven by an impartial and fact-driven editorial approach. This loss of trust in professional news media goes hand-in-hand with a loss of trust in public institutions. In turn, this lack of trust undermines initiatives – fact-checking or labelling – undertaken by 'serious' media or public authorities to identify and inform audiences about 'fake news' stories.

At the same time, the world of professional news media must also bear its share of responsibility and transparency for the quality of journalistic standards. It is important to support and uphold quality standards in the media sector. Independent public service media have a key role to play in this area by providing a point of reference and striving to 'raise the bar' in the creation and dissemination of quality news in the media sector.

More generally, established news organizations continue to implement measures to reduce the risk of mistakes to the minimum when reporting news and should create transparent systems allowing for the investigation of claims relating to the appearance of false information on their network. An overall review of standards and ethical guidelines can be helpful to ensure that established media are ready for the ever-changing online environment. It is also important for them to have strong online platforms under their own editorial control.

PART TWO – PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA A KEY ASSET IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION

News and current affairs are core to public service media. Informing all audiences with independent news and helping them to better understand the world represents an essential contribution to informed citizenship. This underpins the values of democratic societies, offering a wide choice of quality content, impartial information and pluralistic views, promoting both social cohesion and cultural diversity. To fulfil this role, public service media needs political independence, a flexible remit and sustainable funding, including the freedom to develop new services.

Independent public service media organizations overall count amongst the most trusted media in Europe. They are fully aware that there is a pressing need to improve outreach to all audiences and develop new formats. They continue setting standards for quality journalism and driving innovation in how they gather, produce and distribute news.

Public service media organizations abide by their editorial standards to create news content for their websites. These editorial guidelines ensure that all news content provided on public service media organizations' websites is reliable, accurate, thoroughly-researched, fair and impartial, accountable, up-to-date and topical. News offered by public service media organizations sustains informed citizenship and contributes to the public debate.

The fight against disinformation is at the heart of the strategic reflections of public service media. They are developing or implementing voluntary measures to identify and address the problem, with fact-checking and media literacy initiatives in particular. As the European umbrella organization for public service media, the EBU is also undertaking several initiatives to support its Members' strategies.

BROADCAST MEDIA REMAIN THE MOST TRUSTED NEWS SOURCE IN EUROPE

Despite the damage caused by disinformation to trust in professional news media and public institutions, the EBU Report on Trust in Media 2018⁷, based on data published in the 88th Eurobarometer survey, shows that broadcast media remain the most trusted media throughout Europe. Radio is the most trusted medium, trusted by 59% of EU citizens, closely followed by TV at 51%. In the last five years, trust in both has continued to grow across Europe. Trust in the written press has also increased over the last five years though it is generally less trusted than broadcast media in European countries.

Meanwhile, potentially fueled by the debate around 'fake news', trust in the internet and social networks continues to fall and trust in social networks is at its lowest ever level. Only 34% of EU citizens tend to trust the internet and a mere 20% of EU citizens say they trust social networks.

There are some significant regional differences in the findings. For example, those which show the least trust in the written press are from south-east Europe and the UK, while western European citizens show the least trust in social networks. Trust in radio and TV is the highest in the Nordic regions. In Sweden, for example, 84% of people tend to trust radio and 74% trust TV.

⁷ https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/MIS/login_only/market_insights/EBU-MIS%20-Trust%20in%20Media%202018.pdf

STRENGTHENING THE KEY ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA, BOTH ONLINE AND OFFLINE

Public service media are a vital asset to deliver impartial, accurate and thoroughly-researched news stories to citizens. This is all the more important in the online environment and their role here must be clearly recognized by regulators. Ensuring the online presence of public service media guarantees citizens' access to valuable, impartial and thoroughly-researched information and is in this regard indispensable.

In order to fulfill this important mission, their independence from both political and commercial pressure must be carefully nurtured. Public service media organizations in Europe need an adequate governance framework, sustainable funding and a remit which explicitly recognizes the importance of their role online. Crucially, in today's digital environment, they need the freedom to develop their own online platforms in order to reduce their dependency on third-party online platforms and social networks.

Part of the solution to tackle 'fake news' is to ensure that quality and trusted news are available in the online space. Public service media take a two-pronged approach to our long-standing role providing all audiences with impartial and accurate news services and content on online platforms, complemented by specific initiatives to address 'fake news' and support media literacy.

ACTION BY PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA TO SUPPORT INFORMED CITIZENSHIP AND FIGHT DISINFORMATION

As major news providers to a majority of the EU population, European public service media are repositioning themselves and developing techniques to face up to the challenges of the multi-platform age. EBU Members are in the front line when it comes to fighting the spread of 'fake news' and disinformation. Quality journalism, media pluralism and unbiased reporting are not only part of the public service remit our Members abide by; these are values which are at the heart of our Members' corporate culture and their contribution to society and democracy.

Providing trustworthy news programmes as well as documentaries and current affairs programmes with a powerful outreach on their linear channels, non-linear services and websites and apps, as well as via third party platforms, is the most important contribution public service media organizations make to an informed citizenship, and countering the spread of disinformation.

Beyond the traditional news programming they offer across platforms, public service media organizations have developed a number of initiatives aiming to sustain informed citizenship and limit the impact of disinformation. Examples include:

- Fact-checking of statements made by officials on their outlets notably during debates,
- Interactive weekly Facebook Live with a journalist showing people on the streets and Facebook audience fake reports trending on social media, catching their reactions and explaining,
- Crowd sourced story verification,
- Special fact-checking investigative reports in TV news bulletins and on a dedicated blog,
- Creation of in-house wire news agency using own journalists to reinforce fact-checking,
- Posts on own websites, blogs, online articles, social media,
- Blog reports,
- Dedicated Twitter feed,
- Debunking logo on fact-checked hoaxes,
- Fact-checking modules on dedicated YouTube channel,
- Radio and podcast fact-checking segments,
- Collaboration with public authorities to develop awareness campaigns and joint initiatives.

A non-exhaustive list of fact-checking initiatives which have been developed or are supported by European public service media organizations is annexed to this document.

THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN BROADCASTING UNION

The EBU has undertaken several relevant activities to address the topic of 'fake news'. It was a central theme at our annual 'News Exchange'⁸ event and of our research report on Trust in the Media⁹. Early last year we carried out a survey¹⁰ with Member organizations on how they tackle 'fake news'. We also organized an event in Brussels in March 2017¹¹ to showcase existing initiatives aiming to tackle the problem.

EBU's Public Service Journalism initiative:

This initiative helps Members re-define and re-position their newsrooms' offer to audiences. The Public Service Journalism initiative was launched in June 2017 with the publication of a report '**Perfect Storm**'¹² on the multiple challenges facing public service news. A new report is planned for autumn 2018 and will examine why public service media news is an important mechanism for democratic and plural societies.

We are in the process of launching a new EBU Investigative Journalism Network.

In addition to strategic initiatives, networking and research, the EBU regularly delivers services in the area of news.

News Exchange:

- Our News Exchange provides Members with round-the-clock access to live and edited news stories.
- 120 news and sports items every day, 45,000 items every year.
- 9 hours of live coverage every day.

News wire:

- UGC verification network, with 570 people from 37 Members: discovering, verifying and clearing eyewitness media in real time, which Members can then use on broadcast, online players and social media platforms.
- 50 UGC items cleared every day.

⁸ <https://www.ebu.ch/publications/opening-remarks-at-news-xchange-2017>

⁹ https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/MIS/login_only/market_insights/EBU-MIS%20-Trust%20in%20Media%202018.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.ebu.ch/digital-media/fake-news>

¹¹ <https://www.ebu.ch/events/2017/03/ebu-media-lunchtime-talk-how-is-europes--media-fighting-fake-news-and-disinformation>

¹² <https://www.ebu.ch/publications/perfect-storm>

Eurovision Youth News Exchange (YNE):

This is a daily multi-lateral exchange of items for children's news programmes and magazine shows. These daily or weekly programmes cover current affairs from a child's perspective, in a language that children can understand, explaining the context and background of world events, providing children with tools to understand the news that they are exposed to through the media.

Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI):

EBU supports this self-regulatory media initiative designed to combat disinformation online. Initiated by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), it was launched on 3 April¹³

The JTI is designed to promote journalism by adherence to an agreed set of trust and transparency standards to be developed and implemented. This will happen by means of the so-called Workshop Agreement of the European Centre of Standardization (CEN).

The resulting standards are expected to reflect transparency of media ownership and sources of revenues, as well as journalistic methods and the compliance with ethical norms and independence. They are intended to become a voluntary, leading benchmark of media self-regulation and good practices for all those who produce journalistic content, ranging from individual bloggers to international media groups.

¹³ <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2018/04/ebu-partners-with-rsf-on-journalism-trust-initiative-to-combat-disinformation>

PART THREE – THE ROLE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS

'One week after the election [US elections], Eli Pariser, author of The Filter Bubble, created a public Google document and asked people to contribute solutions to solve the mis-information problem. Within a few weeks, the document was more than 150 pages long and included comments from over 50 people. The document includes many ideas and can be seen as a comprehensive blueprint of what solutions are possible.'

'One point we'd like to stress, however, is that much of the debate about solutions presupposes communication as information transmission. But this cannot explain or solve the problem of information disorder. As Carey suggests, "under a ritual view [of communication] news is not information but drama" and "a portrayal of the contending forces in the world." Our conversations about solutions will need to evolve in order to recognise this role information plays beyond simply transmitting messages.'

'Over the past twelve months, potential solutions have been discussed endlessly at conferences and in workshops, but we've seen little concrete changes from the platforms. While there is certainly more foundation money than there was, and a myriad of small projects are underway, the grand ideas are yet to be implemented. These include Apple CEO Tim Cook's call for a Public Service Announcement about dis-information, new labels to identify different types of content on social platforms, systematic programs for taking down bot accounts, the integration of critical media literacy programs in schools and best practices for making fact-checks and debunks shareable.'¹⁴

The correlation between the rise of 'fake news' and the widespread development of social networks and online platforms is too important to ignore. A discussion on the role of industry is inevitably dominated by how these players can act to fight the dissemination of disinformation. The EBU believes that beyond the fact-checking and labelling initiatives, which are necessary and useful when well-designed but also insufficient on their own, several options could be considered more seriously by platform operators and social networks and would deliver long term benefits in terms of reputation and trust.

RECOGNIZE THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL INTERMEDIARIES AND AGGREGATORS ON PUBLIC OPINION

Digital intermediaries such as social networks and online video platforms are undeniably impacting public opinion today by sorting and selecting news and information. Their behaviour and the impact of proprietary algorithms on users' choices is well described in a recent TED talk by techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci.¹⁵

The power of internet intermediaries is not mitigated by specific regulation, thus leaving it to the intermediaries themselves and the so-called community standards set by them to determine how they exercise their role as information intermediaries. Political institutions have recently put pressure on internet intermediaries to assume more responsibility for what circulates on their platforms and to act more decisively against all types of illegal content and 'fake news'. However, without a clear regulatory framework, this can lead to the concentration of more powers in the

¹⁴ Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy: 'Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking', Claire Wardle, PhD and Hossein Derakhshan, with research support from Anne Burns and Nic Dias, October 2017

¹⁵ Zeynep Tufekci – 'We're building a dystopia just to make people click on ads', September 2017, TEDGlobo > NYC - https://www.ted.com/talks/zeynep_tufekci_we_re_building_a_dystopia_just_to_make_people_click_on_ads

hands of a few dominant platforms, to the detriment of users' freedom of expression and information.

It appears of primary importance that digital intermediaries and aggregators act in a responsible way that is commensurate with the impact of their activities on the exercise of citizens' human rights and on public opinion forming.

Their activities as information intermediaries should be more transparent and they should accept a basic level of public accountability. Self-regulatory systems should be transparent and inclusive, i.e. based on concertation with all relevant stakeholders, and provide for effective enforcement. External monitoring and supervision is important regarding process and the effective achievement of the objectives.

Providing basic information on the source of content provided by digital intermediaries and on the source of any sponsorship would help end-users make better informed choices. In this light, we would suggest the following:

- **Transparency of sources:** clear branding and attribution is essential to enable users to identify reliable content on a platform. Intermediaries could also include a link to the information provider's impressum, which could consist of basic information on the information provider, i.e. its name, place of establishment, contact details and where applicable, the name of the competent supervisory or complaints bodies;
- **Transparency of sponsorship:** information intermediaries could include cover identification of the natural or legal person that has made a (financial or other) contribution to ensure distribution on a platform or to improve the ranking or visibility of particular information or content.

It should also be noted that the current EU regulatory framework does not take into account this powerful function of internet intermediaries and aggregators and is thus lagging behind technological and market developments. Digital intermediaries and aggregators are legally categorized as providers of 'information society services' and thus fall within the scope of the E-commerce Directive. However, this Directive has not been updated since 2000, and merely singles out intermediaries providing technical services of 'mere conduit', 'caching' or 'hosting' and does not address the much more powerful functions exercised by information intermediaries in today's digital world. Nowadays, platforms play a decisive role in structuring citizens' access to information, and this function of social media and other information platforms needs a clear regulatory framework. This is important not only in cases where platforms acquire, curate or edit content but also when they use algorithms to determine ranking and visibility.

DO NOT LET DIGITAL ADVERTISING FUEL 'FAKE NEWS'

The story of the town of Veles in Macedonia,¹⁶ where a large number of residents cashed in on creating false and politically biased stories targeting the 2016 US Presidential election campaign, is the most telling example of how 'fake news' are a source of revenue for both their creators and their disseminators. Social networks should clearly reflect on their role as key intermediaries which enable those writing sensationalist disinformation and 'fake news' on websites to reach large audiences. Social networks should refuse to provide 'sponsored' links to such websites, which will in turn prevent the monetization of 'fake news' generated by visits to those websites. Social networks should also offer full transparency on who is sponsoring content.

¹⁶ The city getting rich from fake news – BBC News, 6 December 2016 - <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38168281>

BOOST ALGORITHMIC TRANSPARENCY

Users should be given the chance to consciously change the algorithms that populate their social feeds and search results. For example, they should be able to choose to see diverse political content or a greater amount of international content in their social feeds. Platforms should aim to ensure that algorithms used for ranking content expose users to a diverse and pluralistic offer of news. In addition, algorithmic tweaks or the introduction of machine-learning techniques can lead to unintended consequences, whereby certain types of content are de-ranked or removed. There needs to be transparency around these changes so the impact can be independently measured and assessed.

Some EBU Members have noted that a simple tweak in the algorithms used by social networks can lead to a drop in user engagement of 40 to 50%. This can in particular undermine access to professional news media sources. Without transparency, there will be claims of bias and censorship from different content producers. There needs to be transparency and predictability around these changes and the impact should be independently measured and assessed.

In this regard, the EBU would encourage close consideration of the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec (2018)2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries of 7 March 2018¹⁷ which requests clear and transparent policies around the use of algorithms by digital intermediaries and carrying out regular due diligence assessments of their compliance with the responsibility to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We would also draw attention to the work undertaken by the Tow Centre for Digital Journalism on algorithmic transparency,¹⁸ which can be summarized by the following points:

- **Human Component:** availability of a high level explanation of the goal, purpose and intent of the algorithm including the editorial goals and the human editorial process that defines it, as well as a better understanding of who is accountable and who controls algorithms within an organization.
- **Transparency around data:** availability of information regarding accuracy, usage, completeness and level of uncertainty of the data that drives algorithms, how data is processed and knowledge about which personal data is used to drive algorithms.
- **Algorithm models:** a better understanding of the features and variables used in the algorithm, including how datasets are used to 'train' algorithms, how the accuracy of algorithms is benchmarked and their level of uncertainty when predicting behaviour.

CAREFULLY EXAMINE THE ROLE OF BOTS

The role of 'bots' in spreading disinformation has been frequently highlighted during the past couple of years. Tools to identify 'human' users are widespread today and used on a multitude of websites and interfaces; tools used to monitor the dissemination of a piece of content are also widespread. It would be necessary to further examine the role played by bots in spreading disinformation and encourage social networks to act forensically when a non-human account is clearly and recurrently spreading disinformation and to take measures against such abuses.

¹⁷ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries \(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 March 2018 at the 1309th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies\)](#)

¹⁸ <https://towcenter.org/towards-a-standard-for-algorithmic-transparency-in-the-media/>

WORK WITH ACADEMIA TO MONITOR DISSEMINATION AND ACT FORENSICALLY

Academic institutions have developed a myriad of monitoring tools to identify the source and relays of disinformation spread via social networks, and there is scope for further innovation. These new techniques, such as the one developed by Belgian start-up *Saper Vedere* which helped identify the source and relays of a disinformation campaign during the 2017 French Presidential elections,¹⁹ would help social networks and journalists to map out the source and spread of stories in real time and accordingly in a forensic way. We believe that such tools can be useful for monitoring the spread of disinformation and potentially be used to act forensically when dealing with evident attempts to spread disinformation.

HELP CITIZENS STEP OUT OF THE 'FILTER BUBBLE'

Like 'fake news', 'filter bubbles' are nothing new, but the development of tailored news offerings for individuals arguably does little to expand the perspectives at the disposal of audiences and tends to comfort their pre-established viewpoints rather than challenge them.

Social networks are in a prime position to offer audiences tools that will help them expand their news sources and diversify their newsfeed, for example by placing side-by-side stories representing different viewpoints. There is a case to urge social network operators to design algorithms in a diversity-friendly way so as to ensure exposure to a wide range of information and opinions (so-called 'exposure diversity'). An additional possibility is to highlight contextual details and build visual indicators.

However such measures do raise questions regarding the editorial role of social networks and platforms. In this regard, it would seem necessary that platforms and social networks work in close collaboration with established news media such as public service media.

¹⁹ <http://www.saper-vedere.eu/who-did-propagate-rumours-during-the-french-campaign/>

PART FOUR – THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

As already indicated, the EBU is in favour of a holistic and comprehensive approach by public authorities, which addresses the online 'information disorder' and strengthens the media system, and which does not solely focus on the fight against 'fake news' or disinformation, i.e. the 'tip of the iceberg'.

This should include an appropriate legal framework for online information platforms which ensures accountability and transparency; measures to prevent unfair or discriminatory treatment of media service providers; a fair sharing of revenue and data; transparency of ranking systems; prominence of general interest content including public service media; and protection of content integrity.

Intervention of public authorities is in many regards necessary to create the right framework conditions for digital intermediaries and for the media so that together they can ensure that all citizens continue to have access to trustworthy information in the online world, without being flooded by hate speech and 'fake news'. This should include measures to facilitate the creation, distribution and findability of quality content as well as measures in order to create a more level playing field between media service providers and platform operators. It is also essential that public authorities sustain, and where appropriate reinforce, the role of public service media as an important and well-established part of the solution.

We would however advocate great caution when it comes to targeted measures by public authorities aimed at dereferencing, blocking or removing 'fake news', to avoid unintended and disproportionate consequences for freedom of expression.

Any adequate response to fight disinformation must also build on the close collaboration between the various actors who are in the front row in fighting 'fake news', bringing together their actions. The exercise of 'soft power' by public authorities should include incentives and encouragement of such collaboration as well as measures aiming to boost media literacy in the digital age. In this light, it is important to support fact-checking and debunking websites aiming to counter disinformation, which have developed rapidly over the past couple of years alongside coordination and collaboration between these initiatives at the international level.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN EU LEGISLATION MUST BE PURSUED

To improve the right framework conditions, we welcome and strongly support the first steps which have been taken or envisaged to regulate platforms, and which can help to reduce the 'information disorder'.

This concerns in particular new provisions in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, such as the new rules for video sharing platforms put forward by the European Commission and which the European Parliament and Council have proposed to extend; these rules can help to fight hate speech and re-balance the regulatory asymmetry. We also strongly support proposed clarifications in the Directive which recognize the possibility for Member States to introduce so-called 'prominence' measures, which can make reliable news and information easier for viewers to find and access. We equally support the proposal from the European Parliament to protect the integrity of media content when it is distributed over different platforms. All these measures help to improve citizens' access to trustworthy information and their trust in the media.

While we generally believe that legislative initiatives should give priority to a sector-specific approach, we also welcome horizontal initiatives which address harmful platform-to-business practices, which apart from harming competitors can also negatively affect freedom of expression and media pluralism. Such practices may include unilateral decisions by platform operators

reducing the media's access to audiences, lack of transparency and foreseeability, preferential treatment of own (or partners') services and retention of audience data by platforms.

We also wish to highlight the importance of EU net neutrality rules and related BEREC guidelines in order to ensure that internet service providers offer non-discriminatory access to content and services for users, irrespective of their origin, type or location on the internet. Effective net neutrality is key to ensuring media pluralism and cultural diversity in the European digital landscape.

ANY POLICY INTERVENTION MUST BE PROPORTIONATE AND PROTECT FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Above all, legislators and regulators should set the right framework conditions to protect freedom of expression and information. Protecting the rights of users and third parties vis-à-vis information intermediaries and supporting media freedom and pluralism will allow ethical and trustworthy media to remain viable and to flourish.

In this light, any intervention by public authorities to counter the spread of fake news must be proportionate to actual threats, which may vary from country to country and may arise during certain sensitive periods (e.g. elections).

MAKE RELIABLE AND IMPARTIAL NEWS EASY TO FIND AND ACCESS

The EBU has argued on numerous occasions in favour of ensuring that general interest content including news is easily found on the interfaces and platforms used to access media content. In this regard, the EBU welcomes the clarifications proposed by the European Parliament in the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive which give EU Member States the possibility of introducing so-called 'prominence' measures.

PROTECT NEWS MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS' INDEPENDENCE

Regulatory frameworks in Europe should enable public authorities to step in to protect the independence of news media organizations. Public authorities should ensure the protection of the integrity and security of journalists. In this regard, the EBU recommends close consideration of the Draft UN International Convention on the Safety and Independence of Journalists and Other Media Professionals,²⁰ as proposed by the International Federation of Journalists.

PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF MEDIA SERVICE PROVIDERS' CONTENT

It is of particular importance to protect the integrity of content that is provided under the editorial control and responsibility of media service providers. Radio and television continue to be the most trusted media in Europe and the legal framework should ensure that citizens, who increasingly access audiovisual media services via new platforms, receive these services exactly as they have been edited, without any interference or manipulation by third parties, including commercial overlays.

²⁰ http://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/documents/Draft_Convention_Journalists_E.pdf

Protecting content integrity therefore safeguards viewers' trust in specifically regulated audiovisual media. Viewers must be able to rely on the integrity and authenticity of media service providers' programmes and services, including when they are distributed over online platforms.

Such protection is all the more necessary as a counterweight to the spread of disinformation and it will allow media service providers to continue playing an important democracy-enhancing role in public opinion formation.

The current revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive presents an ideal opportunity to enshrine content integrity in EU law. The EBU therefore welcomes the European Parliament's support for such a measure, which includes a provision addressing this issue.

GIVE QUALITY JOURNALISM THE MEANS TO FLOURISH

The profound changes and loss of advertising revenues have created an unprecedented strain on the professional news media sector. In turn, this harms the sector's capacity to maintain the highest standards in reporting, fact-checking and editing and to train future professional journalists. Media organizations invest in interdisciplinary fact-checking groups and verification teams that are specialized in identifying fake news and train journalists in a way that they can verify information in this changing (technological) landscape.

More generally, financial support mechanisms and public investment in training, at both national and EU levels, is key to helping the industry keep afloat and maintain high standards. In the specific case of public service media, the key role it plays providing public information must be adequately recognized by national governments who determine the governance, levels of funding and organization. Public service media can also play a leading role when it comes to supporting quality journalism and by regularly updating ethical standards.

REVAMP MEDIA LITERACY INITIATIVES

Boosting media literacy is essential when it comes to fighting the phenomenon of 'fake news'. Media literacy can create the conditions to slow down and limit the spreading of 'fake news'.

Renewed emphasis should be placed on teaching how social algorithms produce filter bubbles and on increasing awareness amongst the general population about the role of emotions when receiving news stories ('emotional scepticism'). People should be taught how to critically assess statistical and quantitative statements. Media literacy initiatives should target and cater for the needs of both younger audiences and adults.

Public service media organizations have championed media literacy initiatives over the years and continue to be a leading source of actions aiming to help the public better understand the way news are reported and presented. The availability of online media literacy tools provided by public service media is a key asset and public authorities must continue providing appropriate support.

In a similar vein, children's programming by public service media can play a key role in boosting media literacy. Children's news bulletins, both online and offline, can help minors develop the necessary understanding and skills to navigate information.

The EBU is also keen to take part in a larger discussion on how a renewed approach to news and media literacy should be implemented. Member States also play an important role by including media literacy in school curricula. Initiatives and campaigns can be used to explain the editorial standards to which established media abide and teach users how to assess the different sources of information that they can find online.

EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP ON THE WORK OF THE EU HIGH LEVEL EXPERT GROUP ON FAKE NEWS AND ONLINE DISINFORMATION

The EBU has signed the final report of the independent High level Group²¹ in the expectation that the European Commission will facilitate the work of a multi-stakeholder Coalition proposed by the Group. The Coalition will be set up to elaborate a meaningful Code of Practice without delay and achieve concrete objectives within a defined timeframe.

We welcome the elaboration of 10 key principles by the High Level Group which have been identified as a basis for the Code of Practice. The Group's report also recognizes that self-regulatory measures in this area have never been tested and that the Commission should consider, if necessary, appropriate (co-)regulatory responses.

In this light we want to further highlight the need to focus on the following aspects:

- Ranking systems used by platforms,
- Basic levels of transparency by platforms towards media organisations (e.g. communication of information about how algorithms will be adapted before any changes are implemented),
- Transparency of sponsored content and hyperlinks
- The possibility of introducing basic rules addressing the relationship between content providers and platforms to level out the playing field

²¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>

Annex

Examples of fact-checking initiatives developed or supported by European public service media

Specific examples – Fact-checking sites by European public service media

Austria – ORF / 'Faktencheck'

Quasi real time fact-checking ('Faktencheck') of claims and statements made by politicians on live TV shows, it serves to immediately rebut untruthful or incomplete statements, thus preventing them from lingering unchallenged in the debate forum.

This has proved its value especially in the run-up to general elections and was first carried out by ORF TV News programmes before the 2013 general elections, and more recently in the weeks before the elections of the National Assembly in autumn 2017. Immediately after the live TV-debates, a journalist provided an on-air assessment on the validity of the facts and arguments that were brought forward by the leading candidates during the debates. A team of 3 journalists would review doubtful statements. Special attention was paid to make transparent the sources that were used to either verify or refute the statements in question. The sources used during the verification process included experts, scientific institutions, statistical databases as well as reports from the National Audit Office or election manifestos of the political parties. The instant debunking of wrong or inaccurate statements has had a lasting effect: politicians now seem more cautious when offering figures and statements to substantiate their position.

Denmark – Detektor

<https://www.dr.dk/tv/se/detektor-tv>

Weekly political fact-checking videos from the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, which is funded through a public licence fee. Based on Detektor's reporting, politicians are asked on camera to rate their own statements on a true to false scale.

France

Public broadcaster France Télévisions offers its audiences a range of programmes and initiatives which aim to support media literacy and counter the spread of disinformation, including:

- A dedicated online media literacy portal: <https://education.francetv.fr/matiere/education-aux-medias>
- To help younger audiences better understand the news environment and the world around them, France Télévisions has developed several programmes targeting different age groups: *1 jour, 1 question*²² for 6-12 year olds; *Decod'actu*²³ for 13-17 year olds and *Première Campagne*²⁴, which gives secondary school students the possibility to interview

²² <https://education.francetv.fr/matiere/actualite/ce1/marque/1-jour-1-question>

²³ <https://education.francetv.fr/matiere/actualite/premiere/serie/decod-actu>

²⁴ <https://education.francetv.fr/matiere/education-civique/cinquieme/serie/premiere-campagne>

French politicians. *#DanslaToile*²⁵ meanwhile aims to help 6-10 year olds develop critical thinking and online literacy skills.

- The award-winning *Les clés des médias*²⁶, co-produced with Radio France, the *Ligue de l'Enseignement* and the French Ministry of Education, aims to help develop critical thinking and media literacy.
- Collaboration with Facebook and Google to tackle 'fake news' articles

Germany – Faktenfinder

<http://faktenfinder.tagesschau.de/>

Regional members of the German public broadcasting consortium ARD contribute to multimedia fact checks and investigate widespread claims and rumours from across the country and around the world. The project is an initiative of tagesschau24, the digital TV news channel produced for ARD by one of its regional partners, Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) in Hamburg.

Germany – Truly.Media

www.truly.media

Truly.Media, co-developed by Germany's international broadcaster Deutsche Welle and the Greek company Athens Technology Center, is a web-based collaborative platform for the analysis and algorithm-supported collaborative verification of digital media, primarily from social networks.

The major features of Truly.Media include, among others, monitoring social media content, creating common workspaces, collaborating in real-time, managing items to be verified in a structural way, and keeping track of all the findings. It offers a variety of third party as well as internally-developed tools for the verification of photos, videos, texts, as well as social media accounts. This tailor-made verification platform meets especially the requirements of journalists and human rights investigators in their daily work.

Truly.Media builds on research projects supported by the European Commission and Google's Digital News Initiative.

Italy

- 'Decalogo BastaBufole'²⁷ is a guide for students on how to deal with today's information disorder and detect fake news. The project is the result of a cross-sectorial collaboration between Rai, the Italian Ministry of Education and Research (MIUR), the Federation of Publishers (Fieg), Confindustria, Facebook and Google. Guidelines were successfully developed and have been promoted in secondary schools, reaching over 4 m. students in Italy.
- Rai is an active participant of the Agcom's Technical expert group aimed at guaranteeing pluralism and correct information on digital platforms²⁸. This group aims to promote platforms' self-regulation and the exchange of best practices for the identification of online disinformation phenomena (incl. fake news).

²⁵ <https://education.francetv.fr/matiere/education-au-numerique/ce1/programme/danslatoile>

²⁶ <https://education.francetv.fr/programme/les-cles-des-medias>

²⁷ http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/BastaBufale-ecco-il-decalogo-per-non-cadere-nella-trappola-delle-fake-news-iniziativa-MIUR-Camera-deputati-8e7ac842-c93a-4c98-b062-44045de40dac.html?refresh_ce

²⁸ <https://www.agcom.it/documentazione/documento>

- Digital World programme²⁹ is Rai's online programme to better understand new technologies and the way we interact with them. Fake news has featured several times as a key topic in this programme.
- 'Le bufale del web smentite dalla scienza'³⁰ is a special web series dedicated to scientific hoaxes and fake news. The astrophysicist Luca Perri helps young viewers to understand online fake news; he proves that stories are wrong scientifically and explains how they have been created and spread.

Latvia – Melu Detektors (Truth Teller)

<http://www.lsm.lv/lv/temas/melu-detektors/>

Hosted by LSM.lv, the digital news portal for Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji (Latvian Public Media), the project operates on its own with a combination of government funding and advertising. It began as a partnership with Re:Baltica, a non-profit investigative news outlet supported by the Open Society Institute in Latvia and was launched with support from the US-Baltic Foundation and the US State Department. It uses five ratings, which range from Patiesība ('Truth') to Panikas celšana ('Panic-mongering').

Norway

[Faktisk - http://faktisk.no/](http://faktisk.no/)

Faktisk is an independent, non-profit reporting project launched by four Norwegian news organizations: rival newspapers Dagbladet and Verdens Gang (VG), public broadcaster NRK and commercial broadcaster TV 2. Its journalists focus on claims made in political debate, in the press and on social media, and their work is freely distributed to its news partners and other Norwegian media. In addition to contributions from the four media partners, financial support comes from Fritt Ord, a foundation whose name means "Freedom of Expression"; Stiftelsen Tinius, a trust that is the largest shareholder of VG's parent company; and a Dagbladet-affiliated foundation. A color-coded, five-point scale is used, from green for absolutely true ('helt sant') to red for completely wrong ('helt feil').

Sweden

The public service corporations SVT (Sveriges Television) and SR (Sveriges Radio) together with the newspapers Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet are planning to launch an initiative to increase awareness of the importance of media literacy and critical news consumption. The initiative is a fact-checking partnership to be conducted during the forthcoming Swedish elections. Additional media providers are expected to join.

The exact scope of the partnership is under discussion. The intention is to launch a shared fact-checking website and run editorial training and development courses in a partnership. Each participating news provider will produce its own journalism on statements and claims distributed via social media – journalism produced independently but to common principles with the aim of collecting links to fact-checking articles on the shared website.

²⁹ <https://www.raiplay.it/programmi/digitalworld/>

³⁰ <http://www.raiscuola.rai.it/speciale/le-bufale-del-web-smentite-dalla-scienza/1959/-1/default.aspx>

Switzerland – Fact Checks

<http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/in-depth/fact-checks-by-swissinfo-ch>

Reports by SWI (swissinfo.ch), the international service of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR), a public media non-profit organisation funded by the licence fee. Reports are posted in multiple languages and appear most frequently during the country's frequent voting periods under Switzerland's form of semi-direct democracy.

Ukraine

Ukrainian public broadcaster UA:PBC broadcast the documentary "Nothing but lies: War on fake news" on 11 January 2018, which addressed fake news, what it is and how to distinguish it from the truth, whether there is a difference between fake news in Ukraine and the United States and if it is a global problem.

UK – BBC Reality Check

<http://bbc.co.uk/realitycheck>

The UK's licence fee-funded public service broadcaster BBC has a new news literacy project which will offer mentoring to up to 1,000 schools - in class, online, or at events - from some of the most respected and well-known BBC journalists. All schools will have access to free online materials including an interactive game developed by Aardman studios where the player is a BBC journalist. A 'Reality Check Roadshow' will tour. The BBC launched Reality Check in 2010 for the UK election campaign coverage. It now has an expanded, permanent team dedicated to creating content that examines the facts and claims behind a story. The feature runs across TV, radio and online including on social media.

The Stop Fake News Initiative

Ukraine

<https://www.stopfake.org/en/news/>

Stopfake.org, which is not supported financially or otherwise by any official Ukrainian organization or government agency, is an example from Ukraine of a civil society initiative.

According to its website, its primary goal is to verify information, raise media literacy in Ukraine and establish a clear red line between journalism and propaganda. It was launched by lecturers, graduates and students from Kyiv Mohyla Journalism School, along with the KMA Digital Future of Journalism³¹ project.

Initially the goal of the project was to verify and refute disinformation and propaganda about events in Ukraine being circulated in the media (it was launched in March 2014). In time the project grew into an information hub and they also try to investigate how propaganda impacts other countries and regions. Today the project team fact-checks, de-bunks, edits, translates, researches and disseminates information in 11 languages.

They strive to achieve their goal not only by refuting fakes but also by creating a propaganda archive and database, analyzing and verifying information, training various media stakeholders to identify fakes and participating in conferences and seminars on journalistic integrity and fact-checking.

³¹ <http://j-school.kiev.ua/about/history/>

The First Draft Initiative

<https://firstdraftnews.com/>

First Draft provides practical and ethical guidance on how to find, verify and publish content sourced from the social web. Core partners are journalism, human rights and technology organizations that have an international remit and work at the intersection of information distribution and social media.

First Draft was formed as a non-profit coalition in June 2015 and funded by Google News Lab:

- to improve skills and standards in the reporting and sharing of information that emerges online,
- to provide practical and ethical guidance on how to find, verify and publish content sourced from the social web,

Its founding partners are Eyewitness Media Hub, Bellingcat, Google News Lab, Storyful, Dig Deeper, Meedan, Verification Junkie, Reportedly, Emergent Info.

One of its main aims is to facilitate conversations between people working to solve the problems associated with trust and truth in a digital age.

The First Draft Partner Network, launched in September 2016, includes the following EBU Members: ARD, BBC, DW, Euronews, France Télévisions, France 24, ZDF, and the EBU service, the Eurovision News Exchange.

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