

BACKGROUND NOTE ON FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION ONLINE

Introduction

The HLG's tasks shall be to advise the Commission on all issues arising in the context of fake information spread across traditional and social media and how to cope with its social and political consequences. More specifically the HLG shall:

1. Analyse in-depth the current situation and legal framework, as well as the potential political and social risks associated with the spread of disinformation;
2. Define the scope of the problem and canvass legislative or non-legislative interventions to limit the dissemination of fake content; in doing so, a distinction should be drawn between false information amounting to illegal content under EU or national laws e.g. incitement to hatred, violence or terrorism, defamation, etc., and false information falling outside the scope of such laws, and therefore not illegal;
3. Define roles and responsibilities of all relevant stakeholders with attention to the functioning of social networks and other online platforms, and the vulnerabilities of professional news media;
4. Assess the effectiveness of the voluntary measures put in place so far by online platforms and news media organisations to counter fake news;
5. Assess possible improvements to such existing voluntary measures
6. Sketch out the direction for developing quality journalism (data journalism, investigative journalism, etc.) and improving media literacy as complementary actions to promote trust in media and users' awareness;
7. Identify guiding principles for possible self-regulation based on shared good practices and coordination of relevant policies and activities at EU and national levels;

This background note paper is intended as a scene-setter for the discussions. It provides an overview of the following topics:

- why fake news has become an important issue;
- the relevance of fake news for public policy at the European, national and regional level;
- a working definition of fake news;
- actions undertaken so far by the actors concerned to address fake news; and
- the potential need for further action at the EU, national or regional levels

The final section of the paper sets forth some questions that the three panels leading our discussion may wish to take up.

1. Disinformation online in a changing news media landscape

The spread of disinformation online has become a global story due to claims that the viral spread of fake news online had a significant effect on the outcome of the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US presidential elections. This phenomenon may also be seen as an indicator of much wider forces that have been described as "the commercialisation and private control of the public sphere by social media"ⁱ and the parallel weakening of the traditional news media industry.

Academic research points in particular to four trends re-shaping our news environment:

- First, the **rapid evolution of news consumption patterns in the EU**, with online media (including social media) representing, on average, the *main* source of news (above 50%) for the under-35s, and with third-party platforms (social media, search engines, news aggregators and mobile alerts) reaching a 68% share of new online distribution, against 32% held by online news publishers' websites accessed directly without intermediation.ⁱⁱ
- Second, **a concentration of resources and market power in the hands of a few social platforms**, with two major platforms having acquired gatekeeper roles,ⁱⁱⁱ and with traditional news organisations progressively losing control over distribution.
- Third, **a shift of advertisement-driven revenue flows** from news publishers to platforms: according to one source, for example, 75% of advertising spend on “programmatic” (automated bid-based) advertising on the Internet does not reach the publisher.^{iv}
- Fourth, **the increasing influence of social media in shaping journalism itself**. Audience reach and engagement with online news content is primarily determined by algorithms put in place by platforms. In addition, social media platforms are increasingly collaborating with news organisations.^v These developments bring the platforms' activities closer to editorial functions^{vi}.

In a multi-stakeholder conference on fake-news, organised by the Commission on 13 and 14 November 2017 (see ANNEX I), these trends also emerged as key elements which are facilitating the spreading of false information online. The fourth point is particularly relevant to fake news. There is empirical evidence that the weighting of signals driving the ranking of social media posts “makes strongly opinionated current affairs content – some of it on the spectrum of misinformation – achieve the best reach”.^{vii} This incentivises publishers to adjust their editorial mix away from fact-based news and towards more captivating “views”, thus contributing to a news environment tainted by sensationalistic (and sometimes misleading or fake) information.

Moreover, recent research suggests that, although algorithms expose most users to a greater number of sources than traditional distribution channels, the automatic ranking of sources tends to give visibility to homogenous sources reflecting the user's preferences – the so-called “filter bubble” issue.

These trends threaten the long-term viability of professional journalism and may undermine citizens' trust in both mainstream media and social media. They also threaten the integrity of democratic debate, as unscrupulous actors exploit vulnerabilities in the new media landscape to push fake news to targeted groups within Member States. The gravity of this challenge has prompted debate across the EU and elicited responses by some Member States. It also led the European Parliament in June 2017 to adopt a Resolution calling on the Commission “to analyse in depth the current situation and legal framework with regard to fake news and to verify the possibility of legislative intervention to limit the dissemination and spreading of fake content”. In addition, it calls “on the platforms to provide users with tools to denounce fake news in such a way that other users can be informed that the veracity of the content has been contested.”^{viii}

2. Fake news and policy responses

Fake news – intentionally-fabricated stories – has always existed. What makes this phenomenon more pervasive and impactful today is the ease with which news can be posted and shared by anyone on social media, the velocity with which it may spread, and the global reach it may attain. Overall, fake news still represents an ill-defined concept encompassing different types of misrepresentation or

distortion of reality in the form of news pieces (in text, audio, photographic or video formats). For the purposes of defining appropriate policy responses, however, a broad distinction can be drawn between (i) fake news that contains elements which are illegal under EU or national laws; and (ii) fake news that falls outside the scope of such laws.

2.1 Fake news embedding illegal content

Online content may be illegal in particular when it represents an incitement to hatred, terrorism or child abuse. National laws vary and impose limits on freedom of expression in some areas, e.g. in the context of defamation, libel, or holocaust denial. Illegal online content is currently subject to Article 14 of the E-commerce Directive, which allows platforms to be held liable unless they remove illegal content expeditiously once they are made aware of its existence. These provisions have been supplemented by a mix of legislative and self-regulatory actions, notably in the context of hate speech and incitement to terrorism.

The proposed revision of the Audiovisual and Media Services Directive (AVMSD), adopted by the Commission on 25 May 2016, would bring video-sharing platforms within the scope of the AVMSD in relation to hate speech and the dissemination of harmful content to minors. Video-sharing platforms would have to put mechanisms in place to protect minors from harmful content and to protect all citizens from incitement to hatred using, appropriate measures such as flagging and reporting mechanisms, age verification, and parental control systems.

Work is continuing on how to improve the effectiveness of illegal content removal, as foreseen in the Commission's May 2016 Communication on Online Platforms. In September 2017, the Commission adopted a [Communication on Tackling Illegal Content Online](#), which includes guidance on notice-and-action procedures and on the scope of online platforms' liability when putting in place voluntary, good-faith measures to fight illegal content online.

2.2 Fake news not necessarily related to illegal content

2.2.1 Definitional issues

Fake news also encompasses content that is not illegal per se. The proper scope of the term is subject to ongoing debate. The following categories of content are often cited as relevant:

- False information aimed at undermining the functioning of political institutions or the reputation of their representatives (while falling short of illegal defamation) or at influencing the outcome of democratic decisions;
- Manipulated or fabricated content around issues of societal importance affecting citizens' lives (e.g. false alerts; fake medical information, for example regarding the side-effects of vaccines; lies relating to climate change, immigration, the economy etc.); such issues may be subject to substantial debate, raising the issue of where the dividing line lies between fake news and partisan journalism (with its omissions and partial framing) covered by freedom of speech;
- Forms of state-sponsored propaganda and disinformation, such as those tackled by the European External Action Service (EEAS) in the eastern neighbourhood, in response to the [European Council Mandate from March 2015](#); and
- So-called "click-bait", the planting of sensationalist or false information on fake news websites in order to spread it via social media and generate revenue from online advertising.

Satirical content and pure journalistic error are commonly regarded as falling outside the concept of fake news.

2.2.2 Ongoing public policy actions

EU Level

In its May 2016 Communication on Online Platforms, the Commission encouraged industry to step up voluntary efforts to tackle problems relating to online content and activities. Concrete steps on fake news have been taken, in particular by Google, Facebook and Twitter. These include measures designed to deprive fake news websites of online advertising revenue ("follow-the-money"), closing fake accounts, flagging mechanisms (users and trusted-flaggers organisations alerting the platforms about content of dubious veracity), and collaborations with independent fact-checkers. While it is too early to draw conclusions, anecdotal evidence suggests that such measures may be having some positive impact but at the same time present shortcomings. For example, the mechanisms in place may only capture a small fraction of disinformation activity on social media and may require labour-intensive human verification of content. Some constituencies also voice concerns about private censorship of speech by the platforms.

The EU's Horizon 2020 program is funding several projects that address these shortcomings by helping journalists search for reliable information on social media and receive feedback on the trustworthiness of sources. Projects like "Invid"^{ix} or "Reveal"^x aim to create content verification platforms that detect emerging stories and assess the reliability of newsworthy content in the form of text, picture and video files spread through social media.

Ongoing EU actions in the field of media literacy and ongoing support for quality journalism and media pluralism can help reduce the impact of fake news online. The Commission's Media Literacy Expert Group facilitates the dissemination of research findings and the exchange of best practices. The group, in its last meeting, emphasised on the importance of investing on online media literacy in order to ensure that both young and old adults get educated on the functioning and use of social media. Moreover the group identified transparency of algorithms, financial flows, and sources/news dissemination patterns as a precondition for empowering citizens and enabling a critical assessment of online news.

The Commission also supports media literacy through the funding of studies.^{xi} In addition, a number of projects financed by the European Parliament and implemented by DG CONNECT seek to monitor, support and strengthen media freedom and pluralism across the EU.^{xii}

In the context of the copyright reform, the new publisher's right aims to strengthen the bargaining position of publishers and, ultimately, foster quality journalism and a pluralistic news media landscape.^{xiii} Also, the AVMSD, and notably its country of origin principle, should make it easier for audiovisual content providers to reach a greater audience online across borders.

Finally, these initiatives complement the work of the East StratCom Task Force, which focuses on state-orchestrated propaganda. This dedicated task force within the EEAS was set up following a request from the European Council in March 2015 to address Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns. Their objectives include capacity-building to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities by external actors, the effective communication of counter-narratives in the eastern neighbourhood, and the strengthening of the EU media environment through actions in support of media freedom and independence.

Member State Level:

On 30 November 2017, the Commission has organised a conference with Member States representatives on the topic of fake-news in order to gather their views on the problem and initiate a dialogue on how to tackle the problem. It came out clear from the conference that the problem of fake news is quite spread in Europe. In fact, a number of Member States have launched national initiatives on fake news:

- Germany recently adopted a law on hate speech (including illegal fake news) penalising non-removal of such content by platforms.
- In Italy, the head of the competition authority has called for an EU-wide approach, and the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies is supporting work on a Social Media observatory.
- The French Senate is considering an Internet Ombudsman approach, although not limited specifically to the issue of fake news. Moreover, a more comprehensive legislative initiative has recently been announced.
- The UK House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee has set up an inquiry into fake news.
- The Czech government set up a specialist “anti-fake news” unit to counter alleged Russian interference in advance of the recent Czech elections, in collaboration with the Eastern Neighbourhood Strategic Communication Task Force under High Representative Mogherini.
- According to the press, the Polish government is working on measures impacting online platforms' responsibilities.

A large number of Member States stressed on the importance of providing financial support to quality journalism as well as a redefinition of the media public service in order to restore trust on media and therefore leave less room for the spreading of false information.

References

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- ii Nic Newman and others, *Digital News Report 2017*, Reuters Institute
- iii <https://blog.parse.ly/post/5194/referral-traffic/>
- iv <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2017/jan/24/winning-back-advertisers-is-key-to-saving-the-newspaper-industry>
- v Facebook's Journalism Project and News Integrity Project and Google's Digital News Initiative are examples of such collaboration. Platforms have also recently released services to help newsrooms reach larger audiences (e.g. Facebook's Instant Articles and Trending Topics, Apple News, Google's AMP, Twitter's Moments, Snapchat's Our Story and Discover).
- Twitter has a team of curators who package together stories in Moments. The same happens with Facebook's Trending Topic section and with Snapchat, which created a Story on the San Bernardino shooting. YouTube and Instagram work directly with individuals to help them craft content for their platforms.
- vii M.Littunen, *News, disinformation and Facebook*, Enders Analysis, August 2017, <http://www.endersanalysis.com/content/publication/news-disinformation-and-facebook>
- viii [European Parliament resolution of 15 June 2017 on online platforms and the digital single market \(2016/2276\(INI\)\)](#)
- ix <http://www.invid-project.eu/contact/>
- x <https://revealproject.eu/>
- xi Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28 (March 2017), <http://www.obs.coe.int/en/-/pr-media-literacy?sessionId=695269951F5691447EF712EA412A026C>
- xii <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/media-freedom-projects>
- xiii <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/modernisation-eu-copyright-rules>

Notes from

Multi-stakeholder Conference on Fake News

Held in Brussels on 13/14 November 2017

Notes taken by the Coordination and Support action VITALMEDIA.

The Multi-stakeholder Conference was organised by European Commission as part of a series of discussions and activities on the challenges posed by "fake news" and the spread of disinformation online in the rapidly evolving digital news media landscape. The objective of the initiative is to help the Commission define the scope of the problem and reach a consensus on the state of the play and needed future actions, based on wide and open consultations with relevant stakeholders in Europe and world-wide.

The purpose of the Multi-stakeholder Conference was to obtain views and inputs from the full range of private-sector actors, including online platforms and media as well as academic and civil society organisations. The agenda for the conference was as follows:

Opening and introduction

By Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, and Paolo Cesarini, Head of EC unit I.4: Media Convergence & Social Media

Panel 1 – Fake news and disinformation online – the definition problem

Panel 2 – Current initiatives to counter fake news and their effectiveness

Panel 3 – Future actions to strengthen quality information and reduce the spread of disinformation online

Closing

By Giuseppe Abbamonte, Director, DG Connect, Directorate I (Media Policy)

Opening and introduction

The conference was opened with a speech by Ms. Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society ([link](#)).

Mr. Paolo Cesarini, Head of Unit, DG Connect/I.4 (Media Convergence & Social Media), welcomed participants and encouraged the audience to participate in the discussions.

Mr. Cesarini began by noting that the issue of fake news, or false news and information, is not new but has existed for centuries. However, new communications technologies and developments in the digital media landscape, such as the rise of the social media, magnify the impact of fake news. Therefore, fake news now presents substantial potential harms to citizens in Europe and around the world and to modern democratic societies.

He pointed out that fake news may consist of misinterpretations of true facts and does not necessarily represent illegal content. When illegal content is not present, the means to combat fake news are more limited.

Mr. Cesarini outlined the consultation process envisaged by the Commission, which starts with this Multi-stakeholder Conference and will be followed by a series of events, including an EU Member States Workshop, a meeting of the Media Literacy Expert Group, and the convening of a High-level Expert Group. In addition, a public consultation process has been launched, whereby citizens and legal entities are invited to provide their opinions, suggestions, and ideas via online questionnaire.

The results of the consultations will be considered in a Communication by the European Commission, which is planned to be issued during second quarter of 2018.

Panel 1 – Fake news and disinformation online – the definition problem

Vincent F Hendricks (University of Copenhagen)

Fake news can be defined as a bundle of incorrect facts and information combined with standard journalistic conventions, which is distributed through dedicated channels to targeted audiences.

Nowadays, as social media channels make available increasingly large amounts of content, users spend less time digesting particular news stories. At the same time, articles and other information are presented in a more compressed form. In this landscape, users cannot devote the attention necessary to distinguish true information from false information. Thus, rumours, false statements, and incorrect or distorted facts – fake news – find a perfect environment to be accepted as true.

The social media business model is based on users' attention, which is a limited resource. The more social media engage users' attention, the more advertising they can sell. Users' attention is

measured by visits and clicks, which are driven by readers' emotions. It follows that content which mobilises sentiments like anger, fear and indignation prevails over content which does not. The real customer of the platforms is the advertising industry; the end user and their data are the product that platforms sell to advertisers.

The fake news problem can be seen as analogous to the subprime loans crisis. Each involves inefficient markets. The market for information is fundamentally non-regulated and it is not efficient, as it allows bad information to prosper. Unintentionally, the market has created an environment for the efficient creation and distribution of fake news.

There is a need for all relevant public and private actors, working in collaboration and with open minds, to address the problem of fake news.

Lisa-Maria Neudert (Oxford University)

It is very difficult for the end users to detect fake news, because it often looks like true information and exploits existing biases and fears.

We all have different understandings of what "fake news" is. It has been identified as a main tool for negatively influencing democratic processes around the world, including elections, referenda, and other political decisions. These cases have been discussed extensively. However, fake news also affects other areas of importance beyond politics, such as medicine and science, and other topics in daily life. Overall, the intention is to manipulate.

Fake news can indeed be a part of well-prepared propaganda activities. Such activities are not unique to today's society or to social media. However, social media, which closely track users' behaviour, facilitate niche targeting and thus increase their impact. Moreover, fast-developing digital technologies allow much easier creation and distribution of fake news and act as enablers. For instance, during the 2018 US elections, for every piece of professional content shared, a piece of fake content was also shared. The latest European elections showed a lower incidence of fake news. However according to an Oxford University study, during recent election cycles 15% of social media content in France and 20% of social media content in the UK and Germany was fake news. Much of this content was indeed actively shared by thousands of automated accounts, but also by human users.

To cope with such problem, fact-checking is not enough. The sheer amount of false news articles, and the time scale required to find and remove fake news and false information is too long to ensure proper reaction.

However, we should also acknowledge that most of fake news stories spread through organic reach, meaning that the majority is actively shared by users, and not imposed upon us, as an analysis by Jonathan Albright from the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at the University of Columbia shows. Fake news directly uses the human attention logic, using elements like outrage, humour and

sensational information that confirm our opinions and biases. Social networks are designed to confirm our biases, as they are optimised to give users what they are interested in.

Fake news is closely interlinked with advertising, content monetisation and human attention logic. To solve this problem, we need to look at the scale, the dynamics and the ecosystem for each of the various different forms of fake news.

Giovanni Zagni (Pagellapolitica.it)

The application of publisher standards and self-regulation by platforms, journalists and other actors may be more effective at addressing fake news than centralised regulation of social media. At present, the social media platforms do not take on publisher responsibilities, but this perspective is changing.

Accordingly, the efforts of EU and the Member States to cope with fake news should focus on education in media and news literacy as well as development of tools to detect fake news and remove it from social media platforms.

Current discussions of fake news focus too much on political issues. Other areas, such as medicine and science, are seriously affected by the fake news as well. In addition to well-organised fake news campaigns, false statements are also randomly distributed on social media and in some cases can have the same negative impact.

Furthermore, social media does not create fake news as such but is used as a means to distribute it. The motivations for producing and distributing fake news come from citizens' perceptions of political processes and events in society at large. Social media opens doors for the dark sides of the society to spread propaganda. Citizens' perceptions of contemporary problems (e.g., globalisation, migration, wars) and the psychology behind such perceptions must be taken seriously. It is necessary to establish a citizens' front against fake news, based on well-informed users of social media.

Deborah Nash (Teneo cabinet DN)

Fake news is not a new issue but it has become increasingly prominent due to recent polarising political developments. Lack of definition is a major issue: what exactly constitutes fake news? The social media/internet users are typically just looking for information. Fake news reaches them, regardless of whether they are able to recognise it as fake.

Fake news is not illegal as such but may include illegal content. Illegal content is subject to well-established legal measures and regulatory measures, including the following:

- Defamation law
- Intellectual property law, including copyright
- Rules against cyberbullying/harassment
- Press codes (e.g. holding media outlets accountable for false claims)

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- Electoral laws

Legal action against fake news entails various shortcomings:

- Only individual cases are addressed
- Processes are slow and lengthy
- Jurisdictional issues may be raised
- Root causes are not addressed

Laws targeting fake news also pose risks to freedom of expression. Other actions that might reduce impact of fake news include media literacy actions to encourage critical thinking and the enforcement of community standards for platforms and ethical standards for media. Improving the reputations of established brands might reduce the market for fake news. Players in the ecosystem must work collaboratively on these objectives, with the support of the EU.

Ben de Pear (Channel 4)

Currently, clickbait websites and Facebook make a lot of money out of fake news, which is easy and cheap to produce and distribute. By contrast, Channel 4 and other professional media outlets spend millions to produce high-quality content and operate distribution channels.

Therefore, there is a need for alternative business models for the social media and corresponding regulatory measures. The challenge is to ensure the competitiveness of the social media platforms as news providers versus so-called fake news factories, which exist even within the European Union.

During the Brexit campaign, the regulator required Channel 4 to give 50/50 coverage to both the Remain and Leave camps, leaving no possibility to weigh the merits of their respective arguments. The result was that viewers were confused by the coverage and didn't know which arguments to believe. Fake news filled the vacuum with appeals to emotion.

Media companies are subject to regulation, while the platforms, which are monopolies, are unregulated. This is a problem for our democracies.

In addition, fake news, as the Macedonian case demonstrates, often use copyrighted material. Facebook doesn't do enough to protect copyright in these cases.

Main issues, questions and statements from the audience:

Contributions from: Jakub Kalenski (EEAS), Pascaline Gaborit (Euractiv), Giga Turk (University of Ljubljana), Aiden White (EJN), Giovanni Melogli (AEJ), Denis Teyssou (Agence France Presse, InVid project)

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- What tools are available for addressing the creation and distribution of fake news – what tools do we have and how can we improve them, considering that some channels which spread fake news are not publicly accessible (like email chains, Telegram, Whatsapp)?
 - How should we target amplifiers on social media?

Panel reactions:

- For amplifiers on social media, the tools currently exist, but we are not making sufficient use of them. Some publishers, for example, have tools such as NewsWeb that track the spread of their stories. Public data might also be exploited to track trending fake news
- Debunking is a tool. However, it must be considered case-by-case whether debunking is effective
- How can the process for removing fake news (and other dangerous material, e.g. hate speech) be improved to react in real time?
- The current imbalance in the sharing of advertising revenues is pushing professional news outlets to embrace some characteristics of fake news (e.g. the use of sensational headlines to attract views). For every advertising dollar spent, Facebook and Google take 85 cents.
- One of the main points is to re-build trust in mainstream media. This applies to both social media and journalism.

Panel reactions:

- In some countries, trust in media is actually at an all-time high. However, on social media people are likely to trust the friend that shared the article.
- Is fake news the problem or is it the manifestation of deeper problems?
- There is a need to establish editorial standards for providing news on social media, similar to the publisher standards that already existing for established media.
- Both Google and Facebook already have editorial standards. Are there common denominators by which we can work together?
- Copyright law should be used more often to address fake news which incorporates copyrighted material. We should take away the financial incentives for the Macedonian teenagers and others to spread fake news.
- If the existing platforms restrict freedom of expression, then other platforms will be established. The real answer is media literacy.
- Freedom of expression is not compromised, provided there is the possibility of launching new platforms.
- Why are we still speaking of "fake news". It's a buzzword and I think we should use "disinformation" to solve the problem.
- Platforms are not prepared to take editorial responsibility for content. Governments will therefore need to intervene and force them to do so.

Panel reactions:

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- Media literacy is key. Also professional media must re-connect with its audiences.
 - We need to be careful with giving editorial choices to platforms.
 - The market of information is non-efficient. Before addressing legislation we need to speak of corporate social responsibility.
 - We need to be careful with easy answers. Fake news is a manifestation of deeper problems.

Panel 2 – Current initiatives to counter fake news and their effectiveness

Jon Steinberg (Google)

Mr. Steinberg emphasised that the phenomenon of fake news goes against Google's mission to "organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful". Google focuses its activities on continuously testing and improving its search mechanisms.

Furthermore, Google's news service defines clear criteria for third parties participating in the service and does not take editorial actions on news made available, which is accessible to users through direct links to the news publishers.

Google is continuously reviewing and improving its policy on news search and publication by updating Google's indexing and ranking functions and through several related activities such as:

- The Digital News Initiative, which promotes high-quality journalism
- Provision of fact checked tags, not only for news but also for searches in general. This allows end users to further check received facts and news by consulting appropriate websites and social media sources.
- Following financial/ advertising flows around recognised fake news producers, with the aim of preventing the distribution of the fake news. This activity is supported by the possibility for the end users to report false information and the fake news.
- Provision of the Google feed service, which allows end users to receive a wide set of information on particular topics of interest.
- Cooperation and training with publishers and journalists on fact checking.

Thomas Myrup Kristensen (Facebook)

Mr. Kristensen noted that the phenomenon of the fake news is not new, having existed since the dawn of news publishing; what is new is the speed with which fake news may be spread, including, but not only, through social media. Facebook continually builds new products to make sure a healthy news ecosystem can thrive on the platform and is open to collaboration with all relevant organisations, including media companies, journalists, schools, civil society and also governments.

Facebook constantly builds, test and improves its products to limit the spread of false news and help people find a more diverse range of topics, news stories and viewpoints on the platform. That includes for example "Related articles and information", to help people discover new articles they may find interesting about the same topic or perspectives, a tool that is specifically used during elections' time to expose people to a diverse set of candidate viewpoints.

Facebook also cooperates with fact-checking organisations. When a news article is disputed, it is marked as such on the portal but not automatically removed. However, there will be a link provided to the corresponding article that will explain why the story is disputed. Facebook also works to address the issue of click-bait headlines that are designed to get attention and lure visitors into clicking on the link. The company made an update to News Feed to reduce stories from sources that consistently post clickbait headlines.

Facebook also introduced a policy in place since last year to prevent advertisers with low-quality web page experiences from advertising on its platform. Now, the company is increasing enforcement on ads and also taking into account organic posts in News Feed.

Facebook is cautious about policy and regulation that addresses news content or quotas for surfacing only certain types of information on platforms, including rules that require platforms to promote or remove specific content or dictate what content people can or cannot share. This may affect freedom of speech and ultimately reduce consumer choice.

Liz Corbin (Editor Reality Check, BBC)

Ms. Corbin presented experiences of a Reality Check team at BBC, which is dedicated to identifying and correcting fake news. As part of a public news provider, the Reality Check team strives to be impartial and serve its entire audience and to support decision-making on true and false news without fear or favour. The Reality Check also operates under the umbrella of freedom of speech and diversity of opinion, which are very important consideration when dealing with fake news.

The presentation reviewed concrete examples of fake news and follow-up from BBC's initiative "Tomorrow's World – Make it Digital".

BBC also provides training to journalists to cope with the problem of the fake news.

Phoebe Arnold (Full Fact)

Full Fact acts against fake news by fact-checking and following up with sources to correct or stop dissemination of false information.

Full Fact works on re-establishing trust. It is a neutral organisation, supported by multiple and independent sources of funding. Its goal is not to create opinion but to help people to make up their minds when consuming different types of information. Transparency of Full Fact's processes is key.

Full Fact regularly performs fact checking for debates in the UK parliament, for some BBC programmes, and for other occasions. Fake news and false information are not only marked, but action is taken to implement corrections and to provide side referenced, confirming the correctness of news. When possible, service is offered to journalists to check information in real time, at the moment it is received.

Full Fact is exploring opportunities to apply artificial intelligence in the fact-checking process. Furthermore, Full Fact is working to identify information gaps on particular subjects and fill them by providing relevant and correct information.

Full Fact is already working with other stakeholders, among them Facebook and Google. It believes there a strong need for all relevant stakeholders, on a global scale, to collaborate on the problem of fake news. However, actions should take into account cultural and local factors, including specifics of languages.

Adrien Senecat (Les Decodeurs, Le Monde)

At *Le Monde*, a team of twelve people is working on the detection and correction of the fake news. The large amount of information to review is challenging for any organisation dealing with fact checking. In particular it is very difficult to identify all main sources of fake news.

A simple tool – DECODEX – has been developed to support this work. It identifies fake news by fact checking and also finds links to sources of false information spread online. The tool also identifies entries which might appear to be false or fake news but In fact are not (e.g. satire).

DECODEX capabilities can be easily included in most common browsers as a plug-in. This enables users to be notified when they access a source that has been identified as spreading fake news. (1000 sources, 150 fact check linked to 5000 stories on the internet).

Finally, Mr. Senecat emphasised that education and promotion of literacy among social media users may be the best way to reduce the negative impacts of fake news.

Juliane von Reppert-Bismarck (Lie Detectors)

Ms. von Reppert-Bismarck discussed the mission of Lie Detectors, a non-profit that trains and sends journalists to schools to teach children about media literacy in order to provide what technology, algorithms and debunking initiatives cannot do, to draw out the contrasts with disinformation online.

Typically the group organises sessions for children in the 10-11 year-old and 14-15 year-old age groups. Children show a strong interest in the subject, and even the youngest students have some understanding of social media and concepts such as click-bait and cyber-bullying. The sessions are illuminating for teachers as well. The group will be rolling out workshops in Germany and Belgium.

Ms. von Reppert-Bismarck mentioned also that disinformation messages circulate also on platforms different from Google and Facebook. She gave the example of a jpeg picture massively shared

through in Germany using Instagram reporting false information. Messages in such a format are more difficult to detect and debunk.

Main issues, questions and statements from the audience

Contributions from: Gianni Riotta (Catchy), Christophe Leclercq (Euractiv), Marc Tuters (University of Amsterdam), ICT Coalition, Stephen Turner (Twitter), Jakub Kalenski (EEAS), Mikko Salo (Faktabaari), Denis Teyssou (Agence France Presse, InVid project)

- Why there is still so much difficulty in removing hate speech, especially images?

Panel reactions:

- The platforms have signed up to a code of conduct with the Commission. Removing hate speech and other illegal content from the social media platforms is happening. The platform providers are getting better, but there is still room available for improvement, in particular the removal of illegal visual content, including faster reaction.
- Machine-learning technology can help improve performance of current tools; however, human intervention will be always needed for grey zone issues.
- Do the platforms agree that we are in a co-regulation phase, which might lead to strong centralised regulation in the event that co-regulation does not work?

Panel reactions:

- The platforms are committed to cooperation with public services and on private initiatives to address the issue of fake news, since it relates to trust in online media. However, we do not want to pre-judge where the process will end up.
- It's time now to consider a common framework where everybody contributes to define an appropriate set of standards and regulation for checking the available information and take action when needed.
- What is the role of media literacy in the battle against fake news?

Panel reactions:

- Efforts to empower citizens to better deal with online information should be shared among various disciplines
- In order to analyse the problem and develop better tools, it is necessary that the main platform providers open their APIs and data for research and to fact-checkers.

Panel reactions:

- Facebook is looking at this but there are privacy issues that need to be taken into account.

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- Debunking doesn't work because people are sceptical of established sources. Re-establishment of trust is needed to successfully cope with the fake news problem.

Panel reactions:

- It's important to let audiences know how news is created in order to rebuild trust.
- Quality journalism should channel content where people look for it (e.g. social media platforms, video content aggregators) and should target a more diverse audience.
- There are trusted media brands in Europe (e.g. the BBC and public broadcasters in Germany).
- Media outlets specialised in deception still appear as top sources in Google Feed, This is unfair towards professional media. Why is it so difficult to resolve this problem?

Panel reactions:

- Google is going to just launch a new product with labels identifying sources.
- Platforms should share more information to enable the measuring of their efforts to tackle fake news.

Panel reactions:

- Facebook is testing how new tools are working. There is some initial evidence that putting a label on disputed content significantly limits sharing of that content.
- Google always wants to improve search results and offer content that is interesting and relevant. It is open to improving transparency and collaboration with fact-checkers.

Panel 3 – Future actions to strengthen quality information and reduce the spread of disinformation online

Wout van Wijk (News Media Europe)

The reputation of digital media has been damaged and can be repaired by reestablishment of the lost trust between social media and end users. One way of doing so is to ensure high-quality journalism, which is expensive. Financing content is one of the main problems for professional journalism and it is being exacerbated by the ongoing development of the digital media and news.

Proposed actions:

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- Publisher rights / rules are required, so that some forms of fake news can be addressed through copyright laws.
 - Regulation might not be of help and could damage press freedom and freedom of speech. On the other hand, social media companies could and should take more responsibility.
 - Media (news) literacy education should be offered to all EU citizens.

Nicola Frank (EBU)

Fake news is one phenomenon in a much wider problem: 'information disorder'. This problem is characterized by a number of elements: the power of platforms; i.e. distribution and presentation of information, the relationship with audience and monetization are in the hands of the platforms. This means that the economic model for quality journalism is in danger. Another element is a lack of findability of quality news with sometimes non-transparent de-ranking, including in the news feed. Moreover, the line between fake news and opposing views becomes blurred and can lead to increasing distrust of professional media. 'Virality' becomes more important than journalistic quality. 'Information disorder' has implications for democracy: democracies rely on people being properly informed so that they can have debate and make a reasoned decision.

The provision of high-quality, independent news is at the very heart of public service media's remit and the EBU has launched a quality journalism initiative and runs the Eurovision News Exchange. Public service media organisations provide for quality news and analysis, continuous upskilling and training of staff.

Public service media have their own fact-checking initiatives, some cooperate with First Draft or Facebook initiatives; and the EBU has launched a dialogue with platforms. Public service media also invest in media literacy to improve the digital media literacy skills of audiences, especially children.

Proposed actions:

- Platforms:
 - To recognise societal responsibility and promote quality journalism
 - To increase findability of diverse, qualitative news
 - To improve transparency in all processes and accountability (e.g. as news distributors) as well as support activities on fact-checking and providing related feedback and corrections
- Governments/regulatory bodies
 - To support quality journalism and independent and sustainable public service media
 - To support the necessary media innovation and encourage self- or co-regulation among the social media players
- Media – To cooperate in fact-checking and support innovation as well as adopt multi-platform approach for spreading information and news

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- All – To promote digital media (news) literacy

Walter Quattrociocchi (University of Venice Ca'Foscari)

Social media provide a unique means for accessing knowledge anywhere on the earth. However, the complexity of the social media world is great and opens doors for misuse.

One of the prominent examples of misuse is of course the phenomenon of fake news, which is not created by social media but is rather an outcome of polarisation. Polarisation fuels fake news (e.g. 93% of fake news topics are polarised).

Fact-checking is not enough. In order to limit fake news we should combat polarisation.

- Thus, the most efficient solution for preventing fake news is to detect polarisation at an early stage. Of course, it is difficult to observe all possible sources of polarisation.
- How to let new narratives into echo-chambers? We need to understand why people are polarised and bring together journalists and psychologists to frame a narrative that can penetrate the echo-chambers
- Another important point is re-establishment of trust, as already mentioned, but it cannot be accomplished by a single actor. Freedom of speech and diversity of opinion are pillars of our society. Trust exists for certain topics, but to increase trust we need to increase transparency and accountability.

Renate Schroeder (EJF)

The media ecosystem currently faces three broad threats: 1) the unsustainable structure of contemporary journalism; the business model of the low-cost journalism is mainly responsible for fake news; 2) the decline of trust in journalism; Germany is cited as having trust in journalism, but even there trust is polarised; 3) the power of social media, coupled with a lack of accountability and responsibility.

Besides funding issues, a general protection of journalists (e.g. against pressure from politics and other power centres) is also very important, also in context of the fake news problematic.

Further actions should include:

- Media literacy and journalist training;
- Public funding for fact-checking and putting tools at the disposal of the public;
- Common and open databases, in cooperation with the main platforms, to enable research activities, including data analysis;
- Self-regulation measures, as already discussed within other presentations;
- Algorithms that support quality news;
- Stronger collaboration of media and researchers in order to develop in house systems to gather data

Phoebe Arnold (Full Fact)

Ms. Arnold emphasised the complexity of fact-checking processes and the limitations of existing tools, including methods using artificial intelligence. Automated fact checking is efficient but not sufficient to fulfil the fact checking mission; so manual intervention is needed.

To reduce the impact of fake news, wide collaboration is needed, including standards and regulation as well as cooperation with different regions, taking into account cultural and language related factors.

Stephen Turner (Twitter)

All discussions in Twitter are open. Journalists and news organisations are key Twitter stakeholders. Twitter makes sure they are verified, and are distributing information and news from their official individual or organisational accounts, to prevent the misuse.

Twitter's open and real-time nature is a powerful antidote to the spreading of all types of false information. This is important because Twitter cannot distinguish whether every single Tweet from every person is truthful or not, and should not be in the role of arbiter of truth. Journalists, experts and engaged citizens tweet side-by-side correcting and challenging public discourse in seconds. These vital interactions happen on Twitter every day, and Twitter is working to ensure we are surfacing the highest quality and most relevant content and context first.

As patterns of malicious activity evolve, Twitter is adapting to meet them head-on, with automated systems catching more than 3.2 million suspicious accounts globally per week. As detection of automated accounts and content improves, Twitter is better able to catch malicious accounts when they log in or first start to create spam.

To do this, Twitter has built systems to identify suspicious attempts to log in to Twitter, including signs that a login may be automated or scripted. They are also improving how to detect and cluster accounts that were created by a single entity or a single suspicious source. And through using signals like the frequency and timing of Tweets and engagements, building models that can detect whether an activity on Twitter is likely to have been automated.

Educating children about media literacy is key. Twitter is providing appropriate tools for classrooms, which enable children to create newsrooms and practice how to deal with challenges of the today's social media. We would like to extend media literacy activities to all of Europe

In the next months, Twitter will implement several new actions against spam and suspicious activities, including introducing new and escalating enforcement measures against suspicious logins, Tweets, and engagements, and shortening the amount of time suspicious accounts remain visible on Twitter while pending confirmation. Twitter will continue to work with reporters and media organizations to ensure that Twitter's real-time capacity for dispelling untruths is built into the approach of newsrooms and established media outlets worldwide.

Guy Berger (UNESCO)

Mr. Berger reviewed UN perspectives and initiatives on fake news, which are in line with the discussions by other conference participants.

- To keep using the term "fake news" discredits news itself and journalism. We should talk of disinformation which imitates the form of news/journalism.
- Media literacy education should have a broader scope than the news ecosystem and include other concepts which are key in the digital domain (e.g. privacy).
- Media should embrace more diverse views and not focus only on the views of elites. News institutions have to improve their professional standards and strengthen redress mechanisms.
- Self-regulation in the news industry has had a great impact and internet intermediaries should learn from their experience. In particular, algorithm censorship should be complemented by redress processes.
- We need new business models in the social media, based on social inclusiveness and diversity, rather than business models that create filter bubbles.

Main issues, questions and statements from the audience

Vincent Need (AER), Vincent Need (AFP), Christophe Leclercq (Euractiv), Gianni Riotta (Catchy), Jakub Kalenski (EEAS), Giovanni Melogli (AIJ), Paolo Celot (EAVI), Mikko Salo (Faktabaari), Marie de Cordier (EMMA), Ulrik Smed (EPSC)

- Radio is a well trusted media. It can be used as a tool to tackle fake news since it is a broadcast media that does not fuel filter bubbles.
- Fact-checking does not always work – what would be the criteria for successful debunking?

Panel reactions:

- For successful fact-checking, we first must understand the narrative behind fake news and then provide information that convinces.
- Neutrality is central to fact-checking.
- Journalists must be at the centre of fact-checking activities.
- Saying that fact-checking doesn't work overlooks the point that there are people who have the intention to interfere with our democracy. There will always be people who believe in conspiracies. However, fact-checking can be a useful tool to counter lies and influence citizens who do not have strong opinions on issues.
- What can be done to strip out emotion from news?

Panel reactions:

- Journalists should be trained about the impact of headlines, which are central to clickbait – it's important to stick to the truth in the headlines.

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- News brands cater to particular audiences. Facts should come first, but we cannot get away from framing and tailoring to audiences based on geography, education level, etc.
 - Emotions cannot be split from facts. However, to reduce polarisation, we need to move towards empathy.
 - There is a need to analyse in details all processes related to creation and distribution of fake news to ensure full understanding of the problem. Collaboration among various actors is needed here as well as access to data and availability of appropriate open source based tools. Furthermore, a multidisciplinary approach is needed when investigating the broad context of the fake news.
 - There is a need to improve social media technologies, in particular fact-checking tools, and develop new solutions and processes. In particular, there is a need to pool fact checking tools and improve their performance; currently, there too many fact-checking tools – as many as 30 to 40 different instruments. The EU can play a key role in this effort.
 - Tools should be open source to allow adaptation to the local context.
 - Should platforms pay levies for the work done by professional media?
 - The ranking of news distributors in search results and social media should be based on reputation.

Panel reactions:

- Ranking/ratings might not work since fact-checking is never completely accurate.
- New regulation should not give to social media or states the power to decide what can and cannot be said online. This is the role of the courts. Similarly, closing accounts should be handled transparently, and not by vigilantes in social media. An alternative would be to promote the use of real identities in social media in order to foster responsibility. This could include persons responsible for bots.
- Should platforms treat sources differently, depending on whether the source provides information about location and legal representatives?
- Education in media (news) literacy is crucial. Children in particular are targets. “Older” populations may also be vulnerable to conspiracy theories.
- There is an imbalance, as those who invest in quality journalism and fact-checking do not benefit from the advertising revenues.
- There is a need for regulation in the social media and extension of publishers and other related rights/rules/laws in this direction. However, regulation is a sensitive issue, so that the first target should be a kind of self-regulation among the social media actors.
- The current business models applied by social media actors are acting in favour of fake news and should be reconsidered – maybe through appropriate regulation and taxing measures.

In his closing remarks, Giuseppe Abbamonte, Director of the Media Policy Directorate, has highlighted the importance to build a structured dialogues among all relevant stakeholders in order to find effective solution to tackle the problem of disinformation online.
