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# Disinformation and its Countermeasures

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MEDIA LITERACY IRELAND

# Defining the problem

| | |
|---|---|
| **Disinformation** | **False information** created/shared **with intent** to deceive |
| **Misinformation** | **False information** created/shared **without intent** to deceive |

Wardle C and Derakhshan H (2017) *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*. DGI(2017)09. Brussels: Council of Europe.

# Defining the problem

| | |
|---|---|
| **Intended information** | Is is true or false? Was it created to deceive or cause harm? |
| **Public outcomes** | Is the public good undermined? Are people misinformed? |

# Understanding ‘bad actors’

Who are they: individual or group?

What is their main motivation: ideological, social, financial?

How organised are they: isolated or coordinated?

Who is their target audience: specific stakeholders or general public?

# Understanding disinformation audiences

**Exposure does not mean influence**: influence is often complex and diffuse. It is rarely a simple case of cause (exposure) and effect (false beliefs).

**Engagement does not mean belief**: motivations for engagement are diverse including a desire to inform others, express opinion, warn others, and be entertained.

# Countermeasures: different actors

## States/Authorities

Coordination
Funding
Regulation

## Platforms

Moderate content/users
Educate users
Fund initiatives
Facilitate research
Transparency initiatives

## Civil Society

Monitoring content
Investigations
Fact-checking
ML education
Research
R&D
Standards development

# Countermeasures: who is targeted?

| Citizens | Content | Research | Media | Platforms |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Upskilling citizens to be resilient | Labelling problem content | Funding R&D, training | Supporting high-quality news | Changing business models |

Individual level actions V system level actions

# Countermeasures: the time-frame

## Short-Term

E.G. labelling content, fact-checks

## Medium-Term

E.G. Funding R&D

## Long-Term

E.G. Changes to education curriculum

Best practices in debunking false claims

Fact-checking initiatives

Research on disinformation

Tools and mechanisms in Ireland

EU Code of Practice on Disinformation

Access to platform data

Media literacy initiatives

Independent, high-quality journalism

Transparency about content moderation

## Tools and mechanisms in Ireland

**Key activities:**

- News & factchecking (TheJournal)
- Monitoring: EDMO Ireland, ISD
- Media Literacy Ireland
- Research & R&D
- NGOs/advocacy groups

**Key challenges (international):**

- Funding and data access
- Duplication of work
- Lack of skills diffusion and knowledge sharing

## Best practices in debunking false claims

Evidence-based best-practices have been established, but often fail to trickle down to practitioners. => lack of awareness, access, training.

Verification and monitoring expertise exists in Ireland and media monitoring tools, but may not be focussed on Irish topics.

## Research on disinformation

Different kinds of research:

- **Monitoring** provides insight into evolving threats/trends
- **Investigations** uncover plots, financing
- **Academic research** provides evidence for harms and the effectiveness of countermeasures
- **R&D** provides new tools

## Access to platform data

**Very poor relationship between researchers and platforms**: API access/tools withdrawn at short notice; researchers threatened with legal cases; questions about the quality of data.

**An EU priority that has not resulted in data access**: Code of Practice -> EDMO Taskforce -> report published 2022. => framework exists but nothing to compel sharing yet.

## Media literacy initiatives

A well-established network in Ireland

However, there are conceptual challenges (media/digital/information literacy) and a need for research to demonstrate the effectiveness of media literacy as a countermeasure and/or a clear understanding of the value of media literacy in itself.

## Fact-checking initiatives

US body IFCN verifies credentials, sets standards, and facilitates collaboration. EU only funds IFCN accredited outlets (TheJournal, FactCheck NI) and EDMO is the EU's main structure to support factchecking.

Key issues in sector: time, resources, public awareness, developing best-practices, dealing with grey area content.

## Independent, high-quality journalism

**Wide-ranging EU actions**: Media Action Plan; Action on SLAPPs (also in Ireland); monitoring structures (Local media for democracy); funding schemes (often difficult for news outlets to access)

**Ireland FOMC recommendations**: Recognising public service content; Expanded funding schemes; Tax changes incl. encouraging rise of non-profit news

**Disinformation specifically:** need for skills development, data access, and knowledge transfer.

## EU Code of Practice on Disinformation

Ireland has already worked extensively on the Code (BAI/Media Commission and DCU FuJo.

Not all platforms are signatories; contributions are often slight and superficial.

Expectations that 2022 ‘strengthened’ Code will be better, but no evidence of that yet.

## Transparency about content moderation

Difference between transparency and accountability. Accountability implies the skills, resources, and access to investigate platform practices (cf. DSA audits).

Santa Clara principles on content moderation are a widely accepted standard, but they are not backed with any power of implementation.