

Third General Assembly

Countering disinformation and misinformation in light of the changing face of modern media platforms



Forum	General Assembly 3
Issue:	Countering disinformation and misinformation in light of the changing face of modern media platforms
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Introduction

Misinformation, fake news, rumors on social media. These things can all be seen as minor problems, but in reality they can have real world consequences. They pose a real threat to politics, jobs, communities and actual lives. In our globalized world and modern technology, news can spread from one side of the world to the other within seconds, even if it's false. The power the media has nowadays is immeasurable. False news like political propaganda can be a dangerous weapon, history has shown this to be true. For example, propaganda was heavily used in the Second World War. Conspiracy theories can also be of danger when created to impose fear in others. Fear can make people do irrational things. This is reflected in our current pandemic, with people all over the world panic buying and others don't see the danger in the virus at all. It is vital for us to stop the ongoing infodemic to protect citizens and States.

Definition of Key Terms

Conspiracy theory

A theory or belief that distrusts an explanation of an occurrence, event or trend. Instead believing a different explanation that may or may not have any factual evidence.

Disinformation

The definition given by Oxford languages is "false information which is intended to mislead, especially propaganda issued by a government organization to a rival power or the media."



Hybrid threat

The definition of a hybrid threat that was given by Hybrid CoE is “The term hybrid threat refers to an action conducted by state or non-state actors, whose goal is to undermine or harm the target by influencing its decision-making at the local, regional, state or institutional level”

Infodemic

According to the WHO, “an overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.”

Misinformation

Inaccurate information. The main difference between misinformation and disinformation is that misinformation isn't spread with the deliberate intent to deceive.

General Overview

Technology nowadays can do amazing things. News can travel from one side of the world to the other within seconds. The problem is that anyone can 'report' on so-called news, without having a shred of information to back it up. This can and has been proven to be very dangerous, especially in times like this. Amid a global pandemic, false news and conspiracy theories have imposed fear and distrust toward governments among citizens all over the world. A series of protests have started fueled by misinformation about the COVID-19 virus. This not only puts protesters at risk, but also innocent bystanders, families and health care workers. The paranoia and hysteria false news have inflicted during this pandemic have also caused people to panic buy, briefly creating a shortage in everyday essentials.

Dangers to health

Misconceptions about health remedies can also be life threatening. People that distrust medical advice they're given by their governments, especially during a pandemic, will turn to the internet. People who don't have any medical qualifications can give out recommendations that aren't factually based and, at times, lead to life threatening consequences. A prime example is US president Donald Trump. During a briefing he suggested investigating in disinfectants and their effect on the body from the inside. Though



he did not explicitly tell citizens to inject themselves with disinfectants, which are hazardous and potentially deadly if taken in big amounts, he left an impression on some people that it would help, even though there was no scientific evidence behind it. The amount of hospitalizations related to ingestion of disinfectants went up. Confusing statements like this are unbelievably dangerous and should be vigorously combatted.

There have also been many conspiracy theories about vaccinations and other medical solutions. As a result of the distrust of medicine, there have been many outbreaks of dangerous diseases all over the world, even though they can be easily prevented.

Economical and political dangers

An MIT study proved that fake news travels much faster than real news, especially false politics-related news. The study also eradicated the belief that bots add to the spread of false news. The problem lies within the humans who spread it. Billions of people use social media. The more controversial a topic is, the faster it spread amongst these people. The fake news can have serious effects on political elections, as well as many businesses. False news can be detrimental to many businesses. Completely fake rumors can be started about a particular product or establishment, and their stock market value can significantly drop, even causing the business to go bankrupt.

Digital media

Digital media also falls under the dangers of misinformation and disinformation. Edited videos of mainly political leaders and powerful celebrities have been surfacing for a long time. In the past, it was usually pretty easy to spot fake from real, but with the development of technology and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) such videos are now so well made that it's extremely difficult make a distinction between what's fake and what's real. These videos now go by the name of deepfakes. Many speculate deepfakes can pose a real threat to elections and political careers.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

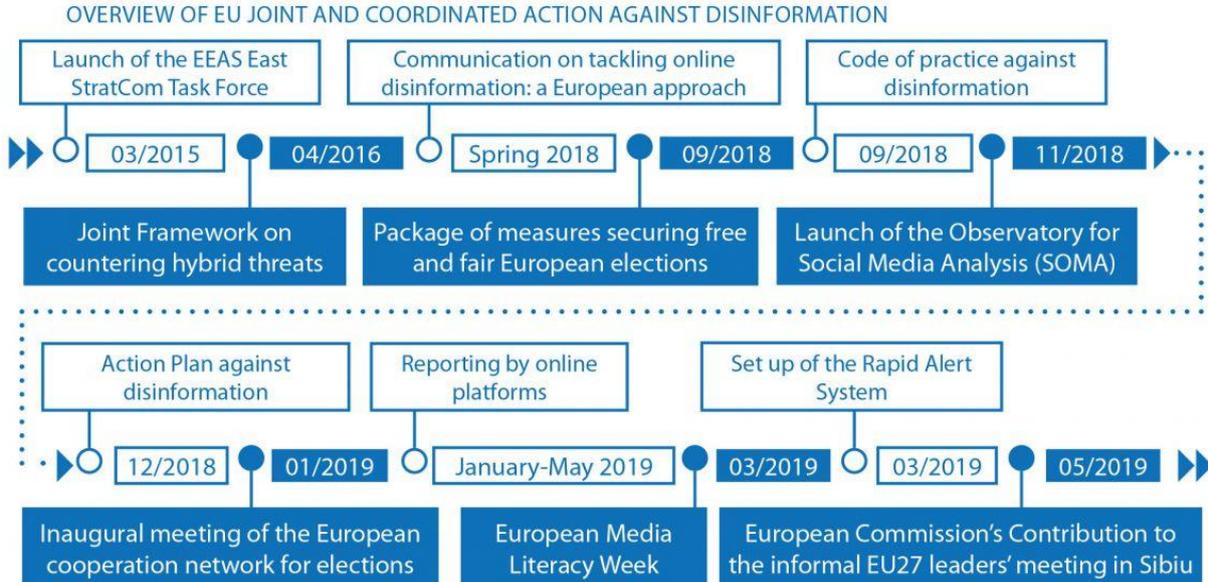
Bahrain

In Bahrain you can be arrested if caught spreading misinformation with intent to deceive.



European Union (EU)

The EU and its members has taken many steps to combat disinformation. The European Commission has created a high-level group of experts (HLEG) whose purpose is to analyze and advise on ways to combat disinformation, ranging from short-term solutions to long-term frameworks (see appendix¹). They have also created the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), an organisation that helps states understand and combat Hybrid threats.



Germany

Germany has been very outspoken about combatting disinformation. They have recently made a new law forcing companies to take stricter steps against illegal content, including disinformation. Companies who fail to do this face million-dollar fines. Germany has also instated many other initiatives aimed to protect their citizens from disinformation and propaganda.

World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO works to combat disinformation and misinformation that concerns the public's well being. For example, they are currently working on combating fake news concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, creating the Information Network for Epidemics (EPI-WIN). EPI-WIN will also combat misinformation in future disasters.

UNESCO

UNESCO has published 'Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training', in which they explain the issue of fake news and how to combat it with various different methods.

Finland

Finland takes the issues that come with fake news very seriously. They are leading the battle against the infodemic. Primary schools teach how misinformation can be spread in a wide range of different subjects, teaching kids to look out for and protect themselves against fake news from an early age.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
January, 2018	European Commission created a high-level group of experts
January, 2018	The United Kingdom implements a security unit to combat disinformation
October, 2017	Germany passes a law to combat spread of illegal content
September 17th, 2018	UNESCO published Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet, 5 July 2018 (A/HRC/RES/38/7)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Some social media platforms have recognized the dangers of misinformation and have taken steps to combat it. For example, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have strengthened the process of fact-checking, by making it possible for users to report what they deem as 'fake news', then checking the reports and finally if the 'fake news' claim is deemed real, placing a warning on the post informing other users of its false information status. This



is a good way to warn users against believing in false information, without infringing on the right to freedom of speech.

Organizations such as the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) have helped online platforms achieve their goals for combating fake news, by setting a standard for organizations devoted to fact-checking, by creating a blacklist for disreputable news sources, and constantly developing and implementing new ways to combat misinformation. IFCN is at the heart of major online platforms and the role they play against countering misinformation.

Possible Solutions

It is important that we take statistics of previous attempts to solve this issue into account when looking at new solutions. We should take examples from countries who are already successfully combating misinformation. It is also vital to carefully combat this issue, making sure not to infringe on the right to freedom of speech, as well as keeping in mind the livelihoods of journalists.

What makes false news so dangerous, is the fact that people believe it. Therefore, it is important that people know how to distinguish between what's false and what's not, by learning the characteristics of fake news. In Finland they've already started doing this. What's unique about their approach is that they start this in primary schools and incorporate the dangers of misinformation and false statistics into many subjects. Children can develop a sense for fake news early on, and are less likely to believe in fake news when they see it and spot fake news in the future.

Of course the population exists out of more than just children. Widespread ad-campaigns, seminars and workshops that teach the dangers of misinformation, how to spot misinformation and raise awareness about the issue would greatly benefit the situation.

Although there are already measures in place to fact-check posts online, that are in use by many of the major social media platforms, the media is constantly evolving. To get ahead of the problem, the measures that are already in place need to evolve too. (More) funding for existing organizations, and the forming of new organizations and research teams to analyze the extent of damage misinformation can cause, new forms of combating misinformation, the forms in which misinformation is spread and create more ways of protecting and informing citizens of the dangers of misinformation.



Implementing harsher consequences for companies who fail to fight misinformation and disinformation to the fullest extent of their capabilities, has also proven to be effective. Germany has imposed harsh fines for online platforms who do not combat misinformation properly. The results are positive and following suit would be a step in the right direction.

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Appendix or Appendices

- i. This report contains many approaches and potential solutions, some of which are already being implemented. http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=50271
- ii. How countries around the world are combatting misinformation
<https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/>

