STUDENT POLICY BRIEF
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MEDIA LITERACY IN THE EU: FOSTERING HIGH-QUALITY JOURNALISM

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Who is this aimed at

- EU media policy makers and planners in governments and institutions
- Journalists
- Media literacy educators, social media activists

Key messages

- The loss of trust in public broadcasters is a cause for concern across Europe. Disinformation and the lack of media literacy undermine trust in institutions and society, which can lead to severe consequences.
- Tackling disinformation in the media requires a comprehensive strategy based on collaboration, transparency, technology and media literacy.
- A collaborative European network is urgently needed to educate and inform EU citizens about the importance and relevance of media literacy and high-quality journalism.

Introduction

In recent years, Europe has witnessed a decline in public trust towards public broadcasters, increasing fragmentation of the public and a notable increase in the dissemination of fake news and misinformation, primarily through digital social media platforms.

The loss of trust in public broadcasters is a cause for concern across Europe. According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, the trust in various media outlets has reached low levels, with only half of the European population expecting fact checked and balanced news from TV and radio stations. This decline in trust has far-reaching consequences, as public broadcasters play a vital role in providing accurate information to the public, fostering informed citizenship and therefore upholding democratic values.

In addition to the loss of trust in European broadcasters, the public sphere has become increasingly fragmented. Social media platforms and digital technologies have transformed the way information is consumed, leading to the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles.

The "Media and News Survey 2022", conducted by the European Parliament, comes to conclusion that 52% of the people asked feel "somewhat confident" when it comes to identifying false information. When divided by gender, less than six in ten women feel confident in uncovering disinformation in news reporting. This phenomenon has profound implications for democratic processes, public discourse and societal cohesion.

The consequences of low media literacy

Disinformation and the lack of media literacy undermine trust in institutions and society, which can lead to severe consequences. Thinking of the communication industry, disinformation can undermine customer confidence in the credibility and integrity of communication companies. A lack of media literacy can result in employees spreading incorrect news. Secondly, disinformation can influence political decisions and undermine public trust in political institutions. A lack of media literacy can result in politicians being unable to identify and correct misinformation. Disinformation has an impact on the public opinion, political discourse as well as democratic processes.

A lack of media literacy therefore results in misinformed voters, not being able to make truthful decisions. Disinformation can create a differentiated society by reinforcing bias and stereotypes. A lack of media literacy is thus causing false information in public, which can lead to further conflicts in the society.

Disinformation turns out to be a significant challenge in the fields of policy, as it undermines the effectiveness of policies, leads to public mistrust and can have a severe impact on decision-making.

The ability to use media effectively enables individuals to critically assess the information they receive and identify false or misleading content. Media literacy can be an essential tool for policymakers in the decision-making process. Disinformation in media poses several challenges that need to be overcome. Fake news can spread rapidly through social media platforms, making it difficult to control and counteract. Disinformation is also used for political manipulation, which can have serious consequences for the integrity of elections and public policy. To overcome these challenges, we need to promote media literacy, invest in fact-checking and verification tools and encourage responsible journalism and social media usage.

By advocating for media literacy among policymakers and the public, the goal is to cultivate a more knowledgeable and resilient society, capable of effectively confronting the challenges posed by disinformation.

If no political action is taken to regulate media literacy, negative consequences such as the loss of trust in media and distortion of public opinion can lead to disrupted democratic processes or further to right-wing populism. Without regulations, there might be a lack of accountability for media organizations, potentially allowing biased reporting or unethical practices.

A consistent plan across Europe is missing to strengthen the reputation and image of public service broadcasters. It is therefore important that governments, educational institutions and media organizations work together to promote media literacy in the society. The aim is to ensure that people are able to think critically, make truthful decisions and that accurate and reliable information is accessible to everyone.

What has been done?

The freedom of media and its pluralism are enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in the European Convention on Human Rights. However, recent reports by the EU- and Monitoring Commission highlight a number of concerns, such as the politicization of the media, the transparency of media ownership and the independence of media regulators. EU member states have therefore agreed on a new law to protect freedom, pluralism and independence of the media in the European Union. This should create a common framework for media services in the internal market and guidelines that protect journalists and media providers from political influence.

The aim of the founded **European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)** is the protection against political interference in editorial decisions and surveillance. The set of rules is focusing independent public service media with a stable source of funding, state advertising and the transparency of media ownership. It is important to disclose conflicts of interest, to ensure media pluralism and prevent media concentration, which can be realised with a European media panel, respectively a "guardian" of media freedom.

Understanding media literacy as a collaborative process

There are several approaches for supporting media literacy among adults, such as providing educational programs and training, encouraging critical thinking, and raising awareness of the effects of misinformation. It is important that individuals are aware of how they interact with media and how to process information in order to build an appropriate opinion. Tackling disinformation in the media requires a comprehensive strategy based on collaboration, transparency, technology and media literacy. It is therefore important that communication companies, politicians, the public and educational institutions take action to reduce the spread of misinformation and improve media literacy.

There are several ways to counter disinformation in the media. The first and most important step is fact checking. Media companies can conduct fact checks to identify and correct inaccurate information.

This helps to build public confidence in the credibility of the media. Educational institutions can contribute by incorporating media literacy into their curricula. It is important for the public to be media literate in order to recognise and avoid misinformation. Moreover, media companies can work together to combat disinformation. This can be done by establishing networks or working with fact-checking organizations. By disclosing their sources and explaining the reporting, media companies also ensure transparency, which leads to more public trust in media. Technology companies can fight disinformation by developing algorithms that detect and remove false information. This may reduce the spreading of disinformation on social media.

Recommendations for further actions

Establishing a European Identification Network for journalistic quality in news reporting. A collaborative European network is urgently needed to educate and inform EU citizens about the importance and relevance of media literacy. Linked to the recently founded European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), a transnational network of public broadcaster committing to the use of journalistic principles, balanced news reporting and protection of plurality in news coverage will play a pivotal role in educating EU citizens. Furthermore, a network of European public service media companies will help to counter disinformation that is being spread throughout various social media platforms.

The European Commission therefore is strongly advised to implement a network to foster media literacy throughout all members while simultaneously advising media outlets to promote a collaborative approach in securing the values of journalistic guidelines. The main objective of this initiative should lie in the **implementation of a label** that will identify qualitative news reporting especially in online journalism. Taking inspiration from other industry fields (e.g. climate certificates, "fair trade"-label) a consistent, unified logo will help adults recognising balanced and fact-checked articles, reports and news.

With this initiative, the public will also be educated about the various ways media outlets may persuade their targeted audience. Providing guidance, the **identification network** will help to create informed and vigilant citizens that will also strengthen the importance of high-quality journalism. On social media platforms, the implementation of a seal of quality will help EU citizens to identify misleading news reporting accordingly and will provide users support in forming educated and well researched opinions on current events and therefore strengthen the European public discourse and democratic values.

A transnational, European **Identification Network for journalistic quality in news reporting** will:

1. Help to ensure balanced and fact-checked news reporting in the European Union
2. Commit European media outlets to comply to common, journalistic principles
3. Fight the spread of fake news and disinformation especially on social media platforms
4. Educate and inform EU citizens about the importance of media literacy
5. Foster the general perception of high-quality journalism
6. Strengthen the European public discourse and democratic values

Conclusions

In light of the challenges posed by disinformation and the decline in public trust towards media, fostering high-quality journalism through media literacy initiatives becomes imperative. Europe's public broadcasters, which have long played a crucial role in delivering accurate information and fostering informed citizenship, face unprecedented challenges in an era of digital social media platforms and information fragmentation. Media literacy serves as a powerful tool to combat disinformation, enabling individuals to critically evaluate information and make truthful decisions. The establishment of a collaborative European Identification Network for journalistic quality in news reporting, as recommended in this policy brief, holds the potential to fortify European media's integrity and credibility. By promoting media literacy among policymakers and the public and investing in fact-checking and verification tools, a more knowledgeable and resilient society can be nurtured. Through this concerted effort, a well-informed citizenry can contribute to a strengthened European public discourse and uphold democratic values, paving the way for a better-equipped society to face the challenges of disinformation in the future.

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The Policy Brief is published in the framework of the FREuDe project. The project aims to intervene for positive future social change that derives from the commitment and intellectual input across disciplines, such as Sociology, Law, Education, Childhood and Youth studies, European studies and Politics, as well as Communication scholarship and Security studies. Moreover, the Centre addresses the question from the perspective of future autonomous citizens, today's children, and explore closely the ways in which information and Europe feature in their lives.

Jean Monnet Communication, Facts and Regulation for European Democracy (FREuDe)
Centre of Excellence

- stimulates new forward thinking with regards the role of facts and place of regulation for securing a future democratic Europe
- generates new research and policy-oriented thinking about integration on the basis of informational rights and enabling informational environments across disciplines not traditionally involved in studying Europe:
- develops new agendas for research, policy and teaching across disciplines and across stakeholder communities
- provides an impetus for future oriented thinking, by researching the needs and perceptions of Europe's future autonomous citizens, young people and in particular children for factual information in and about Europe
- mobilises knowledges and competencies of a range of experts and especially aiming to "hear from" stakeholders which have historically been permitted least input to questions of right to accurate and comprehensive information as a civil and human right.

MEDIA GOVERNANCE lab

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