

Workshop 5: Fake News i en krisetid

Redaktør på TV2 News Jakob Tage Ramlyng blev 'Patient 0' i Danmark. På få måneder blev det meste af verdens befolkning sat i karantæne. Videnskaben tog kampen op og udgav i perioden 100,000 artikler, en fordobling hver 14. dag. Parallelt måtte politikerne reagere på narrativer, der udviklede sig fra dag til dag. Det stiller store krav til forskere i en krisetid, hvor fake news flourer og påvirker politikerne, der må handle hurtigt og beslutte på mangelfuldt grundlag. Kom og del din historie om, hvordan du holdt dig informeret under karantænen.

Speech of Vice President Věra Jourová on countering disinformation amid COVID-19: [From pandemic to infodemic](#), Brussels, 4 June 2020 European Commission

Check Against Delivery

The Coronavirus pandemic has been accompanied by an unprecedented 'infodemic', according to the World Health Organisation. Our conversation cannot be more timely. Not only has enough time passed since the beginning of this unprecedented COVID-19 crisis to start drawing some lessons. We also have the events around the globe that spark a fierce debate.

I am sure you all took note of the Twitter actions to tag some tweets of President Trump as factchecked or violating the policy of the platform by statements inciting to violence.

While this argument is happening in the US, Twitter, Facebook and other platforms are global and relevant for politicians and users in Europe as much as they are in the US.

I have been saying for a long time that I want platforms to become more responsible, therefore I support Twitter's action to implement transparent and consistent moderation policy. This is not about censorship. Everyone can still see the tweets. But it is about having some limits and taking some responsibility of what is happening in the digital world.

Obviously, this triggered an avalanche of reactions in the US and calls from the President to revise the US liability rules.

Luckily, in Europe we are far ahead in this debate. We are not only talking, we are acting. Next week, you will see a teaser with a Communication on disinformation in the COVID-19 context, and by the end of the year we will come with the Digital Services Act and the European Democracy Action Plan to give some regulatory ideas on how to advance this debate about disinformation and online responsibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic is just a reminder about the huge problem of misinformation, disinformation and digital hoaxes. This can create confusion and distrust and it can undermine an effective public health response.

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We have seen scammers trying to make money to people's fears, but we have also seen a systemic attack on Europe and our member states, promoted for instance by pro-Kremlin media about how badly we are dealing with the crisis or even that the virus was spread by NATO or that 5G masts are helping to spread the virus.

Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that proper information can save lives.

This is also a reminder for all of us that there are plenty of bad actors that want to exploit the crisis for economic or political gains. They want to divide us, sow division, instil fear and even put lives at risk.

Once again, online platforms are used as the main tools for disinformation and consumer hoaxes.

Let me first tell you about some actions we have taken so far, and about my plans what I would like to do in the future.

We acted very quickly. Already on 3 March I held the first meeting with the social media platforms. We agreed they would promote links to WHO and health authorities and remove ads that offer fake medicine or inflate prices for normal products. They also removed millions of pieces of content that is potentially harmful – like advice to drink bleach to kill corona.

I welcome those quick measures taken by the platforms. I support the approach that focuses on facilitating access to authoritative sources, tackling harmful content and systematic take down of exploitative or misleading ads while at the same time preserving the freedom of expression and information.

These quick measures were possible because in Europe we have not started from scratch. Thanks to the code of practice on disinformation, both platforms and authorities have developed tools that could be quickly deployed in this crisis.

We also used the Rapid Alert System to exchange information with Member States and created in the Commission an information hub about COVID-19, including exposing false stories.

But the job is not done. Far from it. The crisis showed us again that other State actors have powerful propaganda machines. I remember being shocked when I saw one opinion poll in Italy showing that Italians thought of China much more as a friend and Germany as an enemy.

One reason for this is that in the European Union we take helping each other for granted. Another that our Member States too easily roll out the red carpet and communicate about dubious help from outside, while forgetting to apply the same standards about EU.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all have home work to do and we cannot blame platforms alone.

To counter disinformation, we need a holistic approach:

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1. we need to equip authorities and improve cooperation among them in the EU
2. we need to beef up our cooperation with international partners, including NATO. Disinformation is part of the hybrid threats, so this is a security issue as well.
3. we need to engage civil society
4. we need to support free and independent media, resilient and critical citizens

To sum up, we all need to get better in detecting, analysing and exposing disinformation.

We must respond to this crisis in the “European way”, in full respect of our fundamental principles and values as set out in the Treaties.

I want to stress the importance, especially in moments like this, of protecting fundamental rights and in particular the freedom of speech and media freedom. We need journalism, employing professional standards, to provide reliable and accurate information and to scrutinise the measures taken in response to the global health threat. And we need to let journalists do their work freely.

This crisis showed us once again that social media are not a replacement for quality journalism.

I also think that the need for experts' information has increased significantly, which is a welcome shift. I think the public is not tired of experts, and we have to find a way to make their voices heard.

The sectors that are affected by disinformation, like a health sector, must mobilise to provide quick, clear and reliable information. They need to defend the truth. The health sector must also mobilise and earn the trust of the society.

The Communication on disinformation scheduled for adoption next week will take stock of the situation and of the actions taken so far to limit the impact of COVID-19 related disinformation and propose complementary actions to further protect European citizens from dangerous disinformation campaigns.

It will consider how the flow of reliable information can be strengthened within the EU and from outside.

The Communication will also address the need for more strategic communication. Far too often, we did not manage to get our story about EU support out - not in Member States, nor in neighbouring countries. It is high time to step up on this and not to allow others – such as China – to occupy the space.

The Communication will also include reflection on how to improve support for competent authorities, fact-checkers and researchers, also with the help of the newly created European Digital Media Observatory.

We need to get better at assessing the threats and liaising with partners such as NATO on this.

And we will have clear expectations from platforms to become more transparent and to remove financial incentives to spread disinformation. Lying sells better and flies quicker than the truth, which makes it a special challenge.

Politicians that gain political capital on lying should be accountable to their words.

We need to ensure transparency and accountability. Citizens need to know how information is reaching them, and where it comes from.

And we need to invest in a society that is media savvy and critical. Media literacy and digital skills need to improve to ensure a more resilient society.

We need a fair digital tax. The money raised from the platforms should be used to fix some problems created by those digital giants. Part of the money should be invested in education because our societies are not resilient enough.

Luckily, we are not starting from scratch. Our debate is advanced. We launched the public consultation on the Digital Services act. We are also working on the European Democracy Action Plan. Both will be key vehicles in that regard.

The aim is to improve accountability and responsibility of online players, to help improve the resilience of our democracies and to address threats, including of external interference in European elections. Countering disinformation and adapting to evolving threats and manipulations, as well as to support free and independent media, will also be part of the Action Plan.

We must not move into censoring, we must not create ministries of truth. I have spent enough time of my life leaving in an authoritarian country, Czechoslovakia, to know the answer is not in centrally dictating the truth. But we must equip ourselves better to address the challenges of our digital reality.

I know that I can count on the European Parliament and the Renew Group to continue to play an active role to support the fight against the infodemic.

Now, it's time to learn the lessons and to improve our digital environment, so our democracies can also flourish online.

Vice President,
Věra Jourová