The Pursuit of Truth: Fixes for the Spread of Online Mis/Disinformation

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ABSTRACT

Recent worries about the propensity of generative AI to create false information — i.e., "hallucinate" and spread untruths — have added to the worries about the global information ecosystem. Mass mis/disinformation, whether about COVID-19 or Russia's war in Ukraine, spread by leading politicians and fueled by the growth of generative AI, is a problem that is here to stay. Using an original supply- and demand-side taxonomy, this Policy Report lays out the universe of supply- and demand-side policy fixes to determine actions that can help address the problem.

INTRODUCTION

Worries about the harmful effects of online mis/disinformation reached a crescendo in 2016, as Donald Trump's presidency, the UK vote for Brexit, and killings in India and Myanmar motivated by violent WhatsApp messages shook the world. Since then, the spread of vaccine rejection, COVID-19 denial, and disinformation about Russia's war in Ukraine, together with misinformation propagated by leading politicians in many parts of the world — including Hungary, the US, and Brazil — as well as the growth of generative AI, have made it clear that online mis/disinformation is a problem that is here to stay. In response, a number of initiatives have emerged with mixed success, including government regulations like the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA) that support quality news, journalist efforts to produce more quality information, and funding by various foundations that sponsor a myriad of initiatives.

There have been hundreds of conferences launched and academic papers published on this topic since 2016. The past year has seen a 10-point plan for fixing the internet, proposed by the Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa[1]; the launch of an International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE); and multiple recommendations from the Forum on Information and Democracy, launched by Reporters Without Borders.[2]

This report provides a comprehensive taxonomy of solutions that have emerged to deal with online mis/disinformation, explaining the pros and cons of each, and making recommendations as to what policies and regulations are most likely to work. This analytical framework weighs the influences of varied political realities on the part of governments, the profit motives of Big Tech, and concerns about free speech. Societies are handling the problem of online mis/disinformation and support for quality information in different ways. Columbia Law professor Anu Bradford suggests that there are now three different paths to tech governance — that of the European Union, the US, and China — and that the coming years will see governments having to make decisions about which framework to choose or having those choices made for them.[3]

DEMAND-SIDE VS. SUPPLY-SIDE SOLUTIONS

In this report, I assess the current discussions and consider the different fixes proposed, funded, and implemented in the period since 2016. Many of these initiatives call for stronger enforcement of data privacy rights, regulations to incentivize social media platforms to stop promoting potentially harmful falsehoods (while still respecting freedom of expression), increased transparency of algorithms, and the strengthening of the media ecosystem as a whole. The IPIE plans to act as a clearinghouse for research to help policymakers and companies determine what measures are most effective.

In 2017 I developed an analytical framework in order to understand the various policy proposals and was the first to create a taxonomy of solutions that divided these proposals into "supply-side" and "demand-side" solutions.[4] Such a taxonomy has proved useful when evaluating the ideas put forth to address the problem of online mis/disinformation. This report expands the taxonomy and provides more details about the pros and cons of each, incorporating research and laws that have since emerged.

Demand-side solutions

Demand-side solutions emphasize the role of the consumer, while supply-side solutions emphasize the supply of information — the producers and purveyors of information. In this taxonomy, supply-side solutions fall into two subcategories 1) suppressing poor-quality, dangerous, or illegal information, and 2) creating and/or promoting high-quality information either online or by supporting journalism.

Demand-side solutions include efforts to teach media literacy and promote audience engagement with journalists — for example, by having community members visit newsrooms or suggest story ideas. Further solutions involve verification efforts such as labeling and fact-checking. These solutions share an emphasis on audience demand for information and the role of individual choice. Media literacy attempts to build discernment skills among audiences so that they can identify which sources look unreliable and which look trustworthy. Similarly, solutions involving community participation include efforts by journalists to build trust by seeking to bolster engagement with reliable, relevant material. Solutions involving verification mechanisms, such as fact-checking and labeling, provide a means of establishing what is objectively correct or "true." A recent synthesis of hundreds of academic studies carried out by the IPIE found that demand-side interventions, such as media and information literacy, labeling, and publishing corrections, appeared effective in more than 10 percent of studies.[5] However, these solutions are time-consuming and can be difficult to scale.[6] Table 1 shows the range and classifications of supply-side and demand-side solutions.

Supply-side solutions

While the US has largely followed the demand-side path, other governments, including those in Europe, put less emphasis on consumer decisions and instead focus on the supply of information presented to consumers. Laws such as Germany's NetzDG, which attempts to hold social media responsible for combatting online speech deemed illegal under domestic law, or the European Digital Services Act of 2022 (DSA), which seeks to harmonize different national laws to address illegal content, aim to suppress false or potentially harmful mis/disinformation. So are defamation suits against purveyors of falsehoods and the use of AI to screen and filter information.

Efforts to promote good-quality journalism, provide accurate information on Google and YouTube, support public broadcasters, and fund local news are all attempts to boost the *supply* of high-quality information. There are, of course, overlaps between the supply-side and demand-side solutions. For example, Middleware, which includes rating systems like Newsguard, provides tools to counter misinformation, and the Journalism Trust Initiative (started by Reporters Without Borders but since spun off) develops and implements indicators for the trustworthiness of journalism. These services have implications for both supply and demand sides, as does the international fact-checking movement, which both protects the accuracy of information distribution and requires active consumer involvement.

Table 1: *Supply-Side vs. Demand-Side solutions*

Taxonomy of Solutions – Supply Side vs. Demand Side		
DEMAND-SIDE SOLUTIONS	**SUPPLY-SIDE SOLUTIONS** **Suppression of Poor-Quality Information**	**Promotion of a Healthy Information Ecosystem**
Media Literacy Training Assisting audiences to better distinguish between what is true and what is false	**Controlling Information Flows** Includes content suppression, downranking of content, removal of bots, and de-platforming to restrict what information is shown	**Increasing Quality Information Online** Attempts by YouTube to increase quality of content and by Google to highlight accurate information
Actors Governments, Schools, NGOs	**Actors** Big Tech Platforms	**Actors** Big Tech Platforms
Community Participation Includes journalists' efforts to establish trust in & engagement with high-quality information, as well as to build out citizen journalism	**Artificial Intelligence and Content Moderation** Using AI to distinguish between true/false/illegal information and supplementing with human content moderators where required	**Advancing Artificial Intelligence** Using AI to promote good-quality information while recognizing current limitations
Actors Foundations, News Organizations	**Actors** Big Tech Platforms	**Actors** AI Companies, News Organizations
Fact-Checking Includes labelling and browser extensions that audiences can use	**Regulation and Laws** Hate speech laws existing in many parts of the world, such as NetzDG and DSA	**Support for High-Quality Journalism** Policies such as funding the BBC, giving subscription vouchers, tax credits, and subsidies, and relying on innovation funds and philanthropic/donor support
Actors Big Tech Platforms, Foundations, News Organizations	**Actors** Governments	**Actors** EU, Foundations, Governments, News Organizations
Raising Awareness Reporting on the platforms for a stronger understanding of the effects of mis/disinformation	**Defamation Lawsuits** Demonstrating repercussions for actively spreading lies, such as the 2023 lawsuit *US Dominion vs. Fox News Network* about voting machines	**Healthy Journalism Business Model** Engaging with the private and public sector to ensure a healthier advertising ecosystem for journalism.
Actors Foundations, Governments, Journalists, News Organizations, NGOs	**Actors** Companies, Governments, Individuals	**Actors** Big Tech Platforms, Companies, Governments, News Organizations

MOTIVATION FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

Shortfalls in approaches taken by such diverse groups as regulators, journalists, academics, and civic defenders all point to the need for government action—a situation recognized by the UNESCO framework for regulating digital platforms. In the absence of government regulation, social media platforms have not done enough to solve the problems, partly because it is expensive and time-consuming. The new generation of regulation (such as the DSA) includes codes of conduct but goes beyond them to require that companies complete risk-based analysis of potential harms from the content they put online.

Regulators are in the distinct position of looking at the overall performance of the system, assessing, for instance, the extent to which self-regulation or media literacy has been able to curb mis/disinformation. However, one can view them as *actors of the last resort*. If the other mechanisms had worked effectively, then there would be no need for public intervention. Yet, the evidence to date is that the demand-side solutions have not been sufficient, and that there is a role for government. Simply put: small-scale interventions on fact-checking or local news are not enough when large companies have policies in place that repeatedly recommend a "firehose" of false or inflammatory information. In June 2023, YouTube announced that it would stop removing content questioning the validity of US elections, while the moves by Elon Musk to stop filtering false information disseminated on X (formerly Twitter) show the scale of the problem.[7]

Journalists, academics, and civil society groups spend vast amounts of time, effort, and resources to flag abuses for tech companies, who may or may not act on them. This system, which came into place just after 2016, is clearly inefficient. More generally, Shorenstein Center researcher Joan Donovan has described efforts to research, monitor, and debunk misinformation as "cleaning up the mess" that tech companies created, and Princeton politics professor Andrew Guess has talked about the opportunity costs involved. Press coverage of abuses is important, but the hope that this will generate enough public outrage to then impel companies and policymakers to act is a rather roundabout way of achieving change.

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Analogies proliferate when it comes to the online production and dissemination of false information. Speakers on media panels compare disinformation to environmental pollution, contamination, toxic waste, tainted meat, and all manner of other undesirable issues. Sometimes the comparisons are rather forced, but the larger principle holds true: tackling a systemic process on a case-by-case basis is inefficient and not how governments and regulators deal with other forms of oversight. Under the current system, Big Tech creates problems for society and then spends only a fraction of the time and money needed to fix them. Intervention by national governments, as well as the EU, could help end this situation. Moreover, the UNESCO framework for regulating digital platforms is built upon the concept that information is a public good and, therefore, can benefit from government protection and support. In short, the problem of online mis/disinformation is so vast that it not only requires government regulation of Big Tech to incentivize content moderation, but may also require gov-

ernment support for quality information. This support will vary. In Scandinavia, France, Australia, the UK, and Canada (to name a few examples), government support includes direct subsidies, tax credits for media outlets, quality public broadcasting, and the creation of funds to support local news where the grant making is done by intermediary organizations that are independent of the government and safeguard the freedom of editorial decisions.

THE DIGITAL SERVICES ACT (DSA)

In her recent work *Digital Empires: The Global Battle to Regulate Technology,* Bradford explains that the US digital economy followed a market-driven approach.[8] Believing that free speech, free internet, and innovation are essential, policymakers in the US felt the internet should remain unconstrained. In part, Bradford explains, this attitude was informed by the national tradition of free markets and free trade, as well as the US commitment to free speech. As a result, not regulating US tech companies was a cornerstone of the Obama administration's tech policy. Add to this the lobbying power of Silicon Valley, and the result is the US has not regulated Big Tech, with other countries now well ahead in regulating. In Europe and the UK, patience has worn thin with self-regulation by the Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs), designated as platforms with more than 45 million active users, or 10 percent of the EU's population. The EC has designated 17 VLOPs, which include platforms ranging from Facebook and Instagram to TikTok and Wikipedia.[9] The European Union is implementing the DSA, designed to curb online harms, and the UK is likely to pass the Online Safety Bill, drafted to introduce a broad new online regulatory regime by the end of 2023. These bills exemplify a more muscular approach. The DSA will require greater transparency around advertising, obligations to explain algorithms, and removals of illegal content at the risk of fines up to 6 percent of annual turnover.

A staffer at OFCOM, the UK's communications regulator, when describing the evolution of thinking that led to the Online Harms Safety bill, explained that there has been a "cognitive shift." The UK is now moving to support voluntary codes of conduct with regulations "The risk to Democracy was too high for us not to take action," said an EU diplomat, explaining the decision by the EU to pass similar regulation, culminating in the 2022 EU package of laws that included not only the DSA, but also the Digital Markets Act, which aims to promote competition and prevent abuses of market power.

The DSA is often compared to banking regulations, as the role of government is to confirm the efficacy of processes to prevent digital harms, not to censor individual pieces of content. There are currently 19 VLOPs that are required to carry out annual risk assessments of the content they host and circulate.[10] The companies are required to track and release data about their algorithms, provide greater transparency about their advertising recommendations, give users more options on the parameters of such targeting, and open avenues for redress on content moderation decisions.[11] These data transparency requirements are a major part of the DSA. Platforms will have to disclose quantitative and qualitative information about the functioning of their recommender systems, advertising, and bots; cooperate with a range of actors, including fact-checkers; and provide country-by-country (rather than EU-wide) data.[12]

Joanna Smolinska, from the EU's office in Silicon Valley, calls the DSA a "resource for the world [that] will bring granular data for researchers and civil society."[13] How this will happen is still a work in progress.[14] In addition to the DSA, the EU strengthened the 2018 Code of Practice on Disinformation in 2022 by doubling both its signatories and list of commitments, which will evolve into a co-regulatory code of conduct for VLOPs under the DSA.[15] Being a signatory to this Code of Practice on Disinformation can be considered a "risk mitigating measure," as required by the DSA, but it is not sufficient by itself to demonstrate compliance. Further, the Code strongly urges signatories to disincentivize the spread of disinformation by discouraging ads near disinformation, increasing transparency of political ads, tackling manipulative behavior, and strengthening reporting tools. These measures represent a significant step forward in legislation, but the DSA's field of influence is limited.

Limitations to the DSA

(1) Enforcement

Enforcing the DSA will be a heavy lift, argues Mathias Vermeulen, director of policy for AWO, a consultancy firm on technology policy. Noting that European countries had decades of data protection experience, but still found it difficult to enforce the Global Data Protection Regime (GDPR), Vermeulen said it will be "challenging to develop a common language for different enforcement authorities with different backgrounds."[16] Legislators will need to determine the evidentiary requirements and thresholds for the European Commission to launch investigations. According to Vermeulen, effective auditing will require "the creation of a whole new field. It's not clear that a PwC or other firms could take up that role. We're talking about training at universities and creating a pipeline for those who could become auditors and researchers."[17]

In addition, elements of the DSA need to be fine-tuned. While the DSA was being drafted, significant discussion arose about who should enforce it. The question remains whether to grant legal authority to the EU Commission or to balance it among member states, which may not have the same will or commitment to enforce the law. How this is resolved will be crucial to the effectiveness of the legislation.

Staffing the regulatory agencies will also be important and likely will require far more people than are currently hired. As Gustavo Gomez, the Executive Director for Observacom in Uruguay, pointed out at the 2022 UNESCO Internet for Trust Conference, regulators around the world are being asked to challenge behemoth digital platforms without consideration for the immense amount of resources required. A new regulating entity may not be possible, and some countries lack guidelines for how to empower existing regulating bodies with oversight responsibilities.

(2) Data Access

Researchers and journalists are both wondering whether they will be given the data they request, or if platforms will decline access requests, citing security concerns, trade secrets, or privacy reasons. New York University professor Laura Edelson and other academics argue that the Digital Services Coordinators, who under Article 38 will be responsible for national enforcement and implementation of the DSA beginning in 2024, should weigh countervailing considerations when deciding to approve research requests for data, common requests for standardized datasets,

and DSA grants for streamlining the approval process for European researchers (given that most European researchers will be funded by the EC). Edelson has proposed a "balancing test," a structured approach to evaluation, that she hopes will aid the Digital Services Coordinators in processing requests.

Nonprofits Overseeing Large, Profitable Monopolies[18]

The DSA is a co-regulatory mechanism in the sense that platforms themselves are supposed to regulate content, while public regulators regulate the corporate regulators.[19] The DSA will also require tech giants such as Google, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook (Meta) to spend heavily. It should not be acceptable for them to say the scale is too large for them to address. They earn massive profits, including profits originating from business practices that directly contribute to the spread of harmful information. Some of this profit needs to be invested in solving the problems they created.

PERSPECTIVES FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD

As Brazil updates its internet-related regulations with a package of regulations that in many ways resemble the DSA, UNESCO is undergoing a consultative process for its framework, and the UN is expected in 2024 to begin discussions on the Global Digital Compact. The conversation has turned to whether and when EU legislation will be adopted in other parts of the world, or, in other words, if the "Brussels Effect" will kick in.[20] Coined by Bradford, the term refers to the global influence of EU regulation, and, indeed, EU officials hope their model will become a global standard. Government officials on different parts of Africa have spoken regularly about their feeling that they are powerless to implement regulations like the DSA and are looking for global governance and global organizations, like the UN, to take the lead. For this reason, Brazil's Supreme Court decisions and new laws are likely to have global influence. In her new book, *Digital Empires,* Bradford writes extensively about China's model of heavy-handed surveillance and control over Big Tech and its attempt to export this model to the countries where it sells equipment or provides development aid.

THE UNITED STATES PERSPECTIVE

When considering solutions, many in the US wish to avoid a battle over the First Amendment and thus eschew regulations altogether. To date, the US has not passed *any* major legislation regulating the large platforms, although California has a privacy law comparable to Europe's data protection law (GDPR).

Some worry that any regulatory proposal to address online mis/disinformation represents an attack on free speech or the "thin end of the wedge" of censorship. However, the right to free speech is not the same as the right to virality (as Jack Dorsey, the former CEO of Twitter, has pointed out), and societies have always made judgments about what speech should be protected. Freedom of speech does not mean freedom of reach.[21] Societies have made distinctions between commercial speech and the rights of newspapers, but now that we are in a new information era, it is time to rebalance.

These are difficult decisions that become even more difficult when they are politicized or tarnished by special interests, such as by tech companies and their lobbyists. Hiding behind the First Amendment in the US has become an excuse to try to shut down critics, hobble political opponents, and protect profits. Yet groups with special interests should not be allowed to run, or to ruin, a discussion that must be had by citizens and governments.

It is heartening that some democratic governments, particularly in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, and at the EU in Brussels, are thinking deeply about digital harms and have made a conscientious decision to find the right balance. Clearly, deep distortions in the media ecology have been aggravated by the freedom from liability given to tech companies and by a social-media business model that derives profit from outrage and anger. For these extremely profitable monopolies to say they do not have the resources to fact-check or moderate content pushes the boundaries of belief. It seems clear that without modification of Section 230 in the US or the threat of fines, companies will not be incentivized to act. However, modification seems particularly unlikely since the Supreme Court decision last May.

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Modifying intermediary liability, however, is only one part of the solution. The problem of online mis/disinformation includes a range of harms caused by a range of bad actors and will require many solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No single fix discussed in this paper will solve the problem. Some address content, others address the business model of the tech companies. Still others require changes in audience behavior. There is a role for everyone in this fight: government, companies, audiences. The following is a bullet list of some of the actions that might be taken. In each instance, a large body of literature exists discussing both the measure's desirability and implementability. Despite difficulties in enacting many of the proposed solutions, we deeply believe that all of them could and should be adopted.

Addressing the Demand Side:

TECH PLATFORM ACTIONS
Fact-Checking: Fact-checking helps establish a culture of truth and can force public officials to be more careful about what they say. Some argue that tech companies should be made to meet the expenses involved, even those that refuse to fact-check claims made on their own platforms, given that social media both spreads false claims and originates them. In all circumstances, it is important to preserve the independence of fact-checking organizations from the tech companies that often fund them. Furthermore, tech companies should have a systematized way of using the information given to them, letting people know what their systems are, and explaining how false content is treated after it has been debunked (e.g. labeled, down-ranked, etc.).

GOVERNMENT ACTIONS
Algorithmic Transparency Laws: As mentioned above, the DSA requires far more algorithmic transparency than previous standards, and it is hoped that this change will provide more information for academic researchers, journalists, government, and the public to shed light on how these algorithms sort, target, and rank information. The Center for Regulation in Europe has a proposal as to how this can be done.[22] A major push is needed, and regulators will have to oversee the auditors.[23]

More Media Literacy Laws: In the US, some states have laws about teaching media literacy, including Washington, Colorado, and Texas (which restricts subjects such as the *New York Times'* 1619 Project, a long-form journalism project that has been attacked by the Right for emphasizing the history of the enslavement of Black people in the US).[24] In January 2023, New Jersey became the first US state to require media literacy education from K-12 grade.[25] It should be noted that technological advances will contribute to increasingly sophisticated mis/disinformation campaigns, making immediate and broad media literacy even more essential. The IPIE has called for "more standardized measures and definitions and focus on misleading information outside Western contexts."[26]

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIONS
Civic Journalism: The role of journalists continues to be key, and in many parts of the world like Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, and Argentina, networks of journalists fact-check public speeches and announcements by politicians, form partnerships during elections, and (in the case of Brazil) provide public health information. The International Fact-Checking Network, an independent alliance of

fact-checkers founded by journalism education institute Poynter, meets annually and has a code of principles with 114 signatories.[27] Considerable research has been done on fact-checking and labeling since the COVID-19 pandemic; extensive research on health messaging now ensures a better understanding of what is effective and what is not.[28]

Media and News Literacy Efforts: Media literacy programs are often hard to scale up because they cut across many different jurisdictions and government agencies. However, expanding media literacy education in schools and in public libraries can be seen as the minimum course of action. Such programs should be scaled up, systematized, properly funded, and offered in every school. Assessment criteria should be implemented, and benchmarks of skills at all ages should be offered. This action will require both federal and state laws, as well as funding and training of teachers. Globally, Finland is widely regarded as having one of the best media literacy programs in the world. Established for decades and involving both government and civil society, media literacy is taught across subjects in as early as primary school and is considered highly effective.[29]

Community Engagement Efforts: More funding is needed to help journalists connect with their audiences. Such efforts can give underserved communities a voice and access to needed information, as well as capture direct and harmful impacts afflicting targeted or protected groups. Many good ideas are circulating for how these local initiatives can be established: Free Press in the US and many other organizations have highlighted local efforts, such as cooperatives, public radio, and broadcasting, alongside traditional philanthropic funding.[30] Hundreds of hyper-local sites exist around the US, but without audience interest or sufficient or independent funding many have failed — it is almost impossible for hyper-local outlets to make much revenue from advertising and subscriptions. Many endure thanks to volunteer efforts and revenue from a range of activities and donors, but, clearly, do not have the scale of social media platforms.[31]

Addressing the Supply and Transmission Side:

TECH PLATFORM ACTIONS
Content Moderation: This action is essential, and more is needed than is currently evident. Tech companies need to be more transparent about their hiring process, clear about how decisions are made, and responsive to queries. The Facebook oversight board will almost surely not be able to address the volume of disputes that have already arisen and will arise in the future. Labor conditions and pay must be adequate. Whistleblowers such as Facebook content moderator Daniel Motaung, who was fired after he tried to unionize his workplace in Nairobi, have demonstrated that the exploitation of outsourced content moderators is all too common.[32]

GOVERNMENT ACTIONS
As Big Tech has become so big, regulatory responses must be robust. Regulating Big Tech requires disclosure of advertising revenues and data collection and transmission of information. Barring certain kinds of processes by the private sector, investing in education and skills development for regulators will improve public information quality. To ensure robust implementation, we need to put in place penalties, including fines, and greater enforcement of taxes and anti-competition law.

PHILANTHROPY AND CORPORATE ACTIONS

Funding: Philanthropists and foreign aid agencies are continuing to fund high-quality journalism in countries around the world. These efforts are key to diversifying the news landscapes of the countries where these outlets are present. The International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM) has raised close to $50 million to date, committing those funds to supporting high-quality journalism in the Global South.[33] IFPIM enters a field that is robust and international and has made impressive achievements over decades supporting an entire ecosystem of quality outlets in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. As well as supporting technological innovations, pilot projects, and niche outlets, philanthropists should be encouraged to fund advocacy for more public media spending, as well as educate governments about ways to improve policies that can support media. Examples include the Open Society Foundations helping to fund a study on legal responses to online harassment of journalists, and the Australia-based Minderoo foundation in 2022 working with smaller Australian news outlets so they could join forces and negotiate with Google for payment for news.[34] The development of Large Language Models has revolutionary consequences for the journalists (and others) who have spent their careers trying to report on and write up quality information. They are now being told that their intellectual property will be scooped up by the LLNetworks and will not even be recognized as such because the big AI companies don't know how to recognize inputs, they can just extract the main ideas. The work we've been doing on media bargaining codes and getting Big Tech to pay for quality news is relevant here. Lack of proper payment from AI companies will help destroy the news business, and that would be devastating for the world.

The problem of how to support healthy information environments and a strong and diverse media ecosystem is urgent and global; but the solutions remain limited, slow, and decentralized, with countries pursuing different strategies — or no strategy at all. Balancing freedom of expression with targeting misinformation will be an ongoing challenge. Each country will continue to have distinct values and approaches to tackling the problem, so the proliferation of solutions will inevitably continue. Yet countries can learn from each other. As can be seen from the recommendations above, many policies can and should be implemented, not just to fight online mis/disinformation, but to secure a healthy media ecosystem into the future.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

From this taxonomy and analysis flows a number of policy recommendations.

1 Increase regulation of online political advertising. Further updating of rules for labeling, disclosure, better screening of entities placing the adverts and more regulations on placement are urgently needed.[35] Again, the US could look at some of the requirements in the Digital Services Act as a model.

2 The US should adopt the restrictions on micro targeting and data collection required by the EU. This may help protect against some of the fears that generative AI will further spread online mis/disinformation by targeting individuals.

3 Collective bargaining by journalism organizations can help fund the next generation of quality information. Currently Google has been making direct payments, covered by Non Disclosure Agreements, to outlets and influencers around the world and threatening governments by saying they will block local news from search (as Meta did in Australia briefly and in Canada) As the use of generative AI spreads, collective bargaining becomes even more important especially for languages other than English.

4 Must-carry/must-pay obligations for the platforms are essential to stop platforms from dropping news rather than paying for it. Greater transparency of payments received by publishers from platforms is also essential. Google, alone, owes billions of dollars to publishers and is already influencing policy through its extensive lobbying, threats to drop local news and direct payments to both publishers and influencers which are shrouded in secrecy.

5 Global standards and enforcement mechanisms should be enacted. Online mis/disinformation is a global problem that crosses borders. Leaders across the Global South are asking for global bodies — including the UN — to help set tougher standards and be given the teeth to implement them.

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