Council of Europe's report clarifies concepts and identifies strategies to tackle disinformation

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On 31 October 2017, the Council of Europe published a report entitled "Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making". The report, commissioned by the Council of Europe and authored by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, provides a conceptual framework for, and a structure for dialogue on information disorder, drawn up by policymakers, legislators and researchers. The document examines the way in which disinformation campaigns have become widespread and, heavily relying on social media, contribute to a global media environment of information disorder.

The authors acknowledge that information disorder cannot be solved overnight but they posit that understanding the complexity of the issue is a first significant step. They advocate for definitional rigour, rejecting the term 'fake news' as inadequate to describe the complex phenomena at stake. For that purpose, the authors identify three different types of "information disorder": misinformation, when false information is shared, but no harm is meant; disinformation, when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm; and malinformation, when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.

In addition, the report invites the readers to consider the three 'phases' (creation, production, distribution) and the three 'elements' (agents, messages and interpreters) to better understand information disorder.

A key argument throughout the publication is that we need to understand the emotional and ritualistic elements of communication. The most 'successful' of problematic content is that which plays on people's emotions, encouraging feelings of superiority, anger or fear. The authors claim that while they deem fact-checking and debunking initiatives admirable — an appendix to the report lists such actions in Europe — there is an urgent need to understand the most effective formats for sparking curiosity and scepticism in audiences about the information they consume and the sources from which that information comes.

In addition to the conceptual framework, the report provides a round-up of related research and practical initiatives connected to the topic of information disorder, as well as filter bubbles and echo chambers.

It also examines solutions that have been rolled out by the social networks and considers ideas for strengthening existing media, news literacy projects and regulation.

Key future trends are also highlighted, such as the implications of artificial intelligence technology for manufacturing as well as detecting disinformation.

The final chapter closes with 35 recommendations addressed to relevant stakeholders such as technology companies, national governments, media, civil society, and education ministries to help them identify suitable strategies to address the phenomenon.

Technology companies should (*inter alia*) create an independent, international council; provide researchers with the data related to initiatives aimed at improving the quality of information; provide transparent criteria for any algorithmic changes that down-rank content; and work collaboratively.

National governments should (*inter alia*) commission research to map information disorder; draft regulations to prevent any advertising from appearing on disinformation sites; require transparency around Facebook ads; and support public service media organisations and local news outlets.

Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making

https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-report-november-2017/1680764666