# EU Consultation on Fake News

*IFLA Response, 2 February 2018*

*The below document includes the answers provided by IFLA in its response to the [EU consultation on fake news](#), launched on 13 November 2017.*

**1. In your opinion, which criteria should be used to define fake news for the purposes of scoping the problem?**
- Pretence of providing factual information (i.e. not opinion, or necessary conspiracy theories)
- Malicious intent to mislead (i.e. not error)
- Knowing repetition/relaying of sources (government or other) as fact, rather than quotation/opinion
- Apparent similarity to 'news' (i.e. focused on short-term information. This would not necessarily include poor research practice – this is already subject to professional procedures elsewhere – but would include deliberate mis-reporting of research results). Importantly, though, it should take account of how people source information now – focusing on newspapers alone is not enough.
- Refusal or reluctance to correct errors, or not giving prominence to these.

**2. Are the following categories of fake news likely to cause harm to society? Please answer on a scale from 1 to 4: 1 (no harm), 2 (not likely), 3 (likely) to 4 (highly likely).**

**Intentional disinformation aimed at influencing:**

**[HIGHLY LIKELY]:** public security
**[LIKELY]:** voting decisions at elections, health policies, immigration policies, trust in public institutions, environmental policies, economy or finance
**[NOT LIKELY]**:
**[NO HARM]**: advertisement revenues

**3. If you have remarks on these categories, please explain why and/or suggest additional categories of fake news.**
- Much depends on the way that you define fake news. The question above focuses on specific policy areas (save advertising revenues). It may be more appropriate to think about fake news aimed at influencing policy (dishonest lobbying), fake news aimed at selling things (dishonest advertising), fake news aimed at creating unhappiness or insecurity (misinformation/propaganda). There are also potential risks with trying to categorise things in this way – as we can see in some countries, 'security' all too often becomes an excuse for restricting free speech.
- It is also the case that intentional misinformation is not aimed at policy in general. We could also look at fake news intended to create fear of other cultures, to protect commercial profits, or to discredit science in general as a means of advancing our knowledge of our world.

**4. In your opinion, what are the main economic, social and technology-related factors which, in the current news media landscape, contribute to the increasing spread of fake news? For instance, you can address reading behaviour, advertising revenues, the changing role of journalists and/or the impact of sponsored articles.**

● It is clear that fake news has always existed, and has been instrumentalised by all actors in order to elicit reactions. It is clearly more visible now, but false rumours were also quick to spread in the past.
● In terms of relevant factors today, clearly the speed at which information is shared has gone up. People are also exposed to information and news potentially at all moments of the day, rather than when they sit down with a newspaper. People read information (at least that on websites) differently, skimming rather than deep reading, and almost all media has tended to include more clickbait in order to grab attention.
● An additional factor is public disillusionment with traditional news outlets, notably linked to a frequent unwillingness to print corrections or give due prominence, or a tendency to present sources' (including governments') opinions or claims as fact.

**5. In which media do you most commonly come across fake news? Select the most relevant options.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Traditional print newspapers and news magazines | |
| Traditional online newspapers and news magazines | |
| Online-only newspapers | |
| News agencies (e.g. Reuters, ANSA, AFP) | |
| Social media and messaging apps | |
| Online blogs/forums | |
| TV | |
| Radio | |
| News aggregators (e.g. Google News, Apple news, Yahoo news) | |
| Video sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube, DailyMotion, Vimeo) | |
| Information shared by friends or family | |
| No opinion | X |

**6. Indicate which of the following dissemination mechanisms, in your opinion, have the highest impact on the spread of fake news in the EU? Select the most relevant options.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Online sharing by human influencers / opinion makers | 2 |
| Online sharing done by bots (automated social media accounts) | 4 |
| Sharing among social media users | 3 |
| Recommendation algorithms used on online platforms | 5 |
| Media editorial decisions | 1 |
| Others | |

**7. Which of the following areas have, in your view, been <u>targeted</u> by fake news during the last two years? Please, for each area, use a scale from 1 to 4; 1 (not targeted), 2 (marginally targeted), 3 (moderately targeted), 4 (heavily targeted).**

**[HEAVILY TARGETED]**: political affairs (elections); security
**[MODERATELY TARGETED]**: personal life of public figures; minorities; immigration and refugees
**[MARGINALLY TARGETED]**: health (vaccines); environment (climate change); economy and finance; science and technology
**[NOT TARGETED]**: showbiz and entertainment;

**8. In your view, has <u>public opinion been impacted</u> by fake news in the following areas during the last two years? Please for each area use a scale from 1 to 4: 1 (no impact), 2 (some impact), 3 (substantial impact) to 4 (strong impact).**

**[STRONG IMPACT]**:
**[SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT]**: political affairs
**[SOME IMPACT]**: security; immigration; health; environment; science and technology
**[NO IMPACT]**: economy and finance; personal life of public figures; showbiz and entertainment; minorities;

**9. If you are an online platform or a news organisation, please explain the criteria you use to rank news content on your platform/online website and a description of their impact on the ranking of other sources of news.**
n/a

**10. To what extent, if at all, have the following measures reduced the spread of fake news? Please evaluate each of the following statements on a scale from 1 to 4; 1 (no contribution), 2 (minor contribution), 3 (appreciable contribution), 4 (great contribution).**

**[GREAT CONTRIBUTION]**:
**[APPRECIABLE CONTRIBUTION]**: warning to readers that a post or article has been flagged/disputed; closing of fake accounts and removal of automated social media accounts (based on platforms' codes of conduct; pop up messages on social media, encouraging readers to check news and sources; mechanisms to display information representing different viewpoints ('other sources say…'); mechanisms enabling readers to flag content that is misleading or fake; fact-checking through independent news organisations and civil society organisations
**[MINOR CONTRIBUTION]**:; mechanisms to block sponsored content from accounts that regularly post fake news;
**[NO CONTRIBUTION]**: mechanisms to display information from different sources representing similar viewpoints ('related articles')

**11. If you are an online platform or a news organisation and you have adopted measures aimed at countering the spread of disinformation on your online platform, news media or website, or on those operated by third parties, please explain the measures you took. Please provide a short description of their characteristics as well as their results.**
n/a

**12. If you are an online platform or a news organisation, which tools do you use to assess the content uploaded on your platform/the quality of online information used to produce news content? Please evaluate each of the following measures on a scale from 1 to 4; 1 (rarely), 2 (occasionally), 3 (often), 4 (always).**

n/a

**13. In your view, are readers sufficiently aware of the steps to take to verify veracity of news, when reading and sharing news online (e.g. check sources, compare sources, check whether claims are backed by facts)?**
- It is likely that the speed of change in information sharing has outpaced people's understanding of how to deal with this. There are, however, some interesting indications from UK research that those who have grown up with the Internet are naturally more sceptical about what they see online, and want to check sources. US research onto where

people go for reliable information, for example, shows that libraries remain a key source. Further effort is needed in order to give all members of society the opportunity to learn more – realising the potential of libraries in this should be a priority, as already recommended in a [European Parliament research paper](#).

**14. If you are an online platform or a news organisation, what does your organisation do in order to inform readers about the precautions they should take when reading and sharing news online (e.g. periodic notifications, media literacy programmes) ? How do you help them assess a specific article/post (tools to investigate the source, links to facts & figures, links to other sources etc.) ?**
- Libraries are important platforms – both in the sense of hosting or giving access to digital content, but also as physical places where people come to find and apply information. Many have anything from posters up encouraging people to think about how to assess what they read – IFLA has produced a well-used infographic to this end, to full training on information literacy. In the middle, there is everything from the traditional reference desk to friendly staff ready to offer guidance. Increasingly, libraries are supporting people to make the jump from being simple consumers of information to producers. Such activities offer new insights into how information is produced, further helping users to understand the dynamics behind news and other information.

**15. Do you think that more should be done to reduce the spread of disinformation online?**
- Yes in terms of correcting economic incentives that promote clickbait. At the same time, we would be very concerned about efforts to 'ban' fake news, which are likely to end up restricting speech and closing down debate. The best – and most thorough – response is a critical population which is ready to question sensationalist and unsubstantiated news stories. This could be achieved through a concerted effort to support both formal and informal education programmes, ensuring that young people leave school with the ability to think critically about what they see and read, and that all citizens are able to make independent judgements about information, including via new channels and technologies, throughout their lives.

**16. In your view, which measures could <u>online platforms</u> take in order to improve users' access to reliable information and prevent the spread of disinformation online?**
- Signposting flagged content, and links to local libraries and fact checking websites.
- Ensuring that malicious content does not prove profitable.
- Importantly, platforms should not be put in a position where they have an incentive to censor content pre-emptively. Legitimate content should be protected.

**17. How effective would the following measures by online platforms be in preventing the spread of disinformation? Please evaluate each action on a scale from 1 to 4; 1 (no impact), 2 (low impact), 3 (moderate impact), 4 (strong impact).**

**[STRONG IMPACT]**: investing in education and empowering users; informing users when content has been generated or shared by a bot; inform users about the criteria/algorithms used to personalise content for them; develop new forms of cooperation with media outlets, fact-checkers and civil society organisations to implement new approaches to counter fake news
**[MODERATE IMPACT]:** allow direct flagging of suspicious content between social media users; provide buttons next to each article that allow users to investigate or compare sources; support civil society organisations to improve monitoring and debunking of fake news; further limit advertisement revenues flowing to websites publishing fake news; improve and extend to all EU Member States online platforms' current practices, which label suspicious information after fact-checking

**[LOW IMPACT]**: provide greater remuneration to media organisations that produce reliable information online; allow more control to users on how to personalise the display of content; employ fact-checkers at the online platform

**[NO IMPACT]:** invest in technological solutions such as Artificial Intelligence to improve the discovery and tracking of fake news

**18. In your view, which measures could <u>news media organisations</u> take in order to improve the reach of reliable information and prevent the spread of disinformation online?**
- Limit pay-walling of quality material – open access promotes the wider spread of quality content
- Avoid clickbait – this harms the impression of quality of the rest of the content, and ma also draw people away from quality content
- Work closely with libraries and community institutions to promote stronger media and information literacy
- Greater speed and readiness to admit to errors, and high prominence to corrections, and in the longer term, better training of journalists and application of codes of professional ethics.

**19. How effective would the following measures by <u>news media organisations</u> be in strengthening reliable information and tackling fake news? Please evaluate each actions on a scale from 1 to 4; 1 (no impact), 2 (low impact), 3 (moderate impact), 4 (strong impact).**

**[STRONG IMPACT]**: Help readers develop media literacy skills to approach online news critically; help readers assess information when and where they read it (e.g. links to sources); support civil society organisations and participative platforms (for instance using the model of Wikipedia/Wikinews) to improve monitoring and debunking of fake news

**[MODERATE IMPACT]:** Invest more in new forms of journalism (i.e. data-based investigative journalism) to offer reliable and attractive narratives;

**[LOW IMPACT]**: Increase cooperation with other media organisations; invest in technological solutions to strengthen their content verification capabilities, in particular for user-generated content, in order not to contribute to the proliferation of fake news

**[NO IMPACT]:**

**20. In your view, which measures could <u>civil society organisations</u> take in order to support reliable information and prevent the spread of disinformation online?**
- Libraries could take a stronger role in partnership with schools and other organisations to promote media and information literacy throughout life
- All actors supporting digital literacy should include a strong focus on critical thinking in general

**21. How do you rate the added value of an independent observatory/website (linking platforms, news media organisations and fact-checking organisations) to track disinformation and emerging fake narratives, improve debunking and facilitate the exposure of different sources of information online? Please evaluate each of the following statements on a scale from 1 to 4; 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), 4 (strongly agree). If you find it useful, you can voice suggestions for independence hereunder - e.g. academic supervision, community-based structures or a hybrid such as Wikipedia.**

**[STRONGLY AGREE]**
**[AGREE]**: The public would benefit from an independent observatory that acts like a knowledge centre, gathering studies and providing general advice on how to tackle disinformation online; the public would benefit from an independent observatory that looks at popular social media posts, asks

fact-checkers to look at them, and provide warnings (to platforms, public authorities, etc.) that they need to be flagged.

**[DISAGREE]**: The public would benefit from an independent observatory/website that looks at popular social media posts, researches the facts and develops counter-narratives when necessary; the public would benefit from an independent observatory/website that does not look at posts, but instead helps to gather factual information (and possibly user ratings) for each source, to help create a factual snapshot of each source's activity and reputation

**[STRONGLY DISAGREE]**

*This is an interesting idea. Developing capacity across the EU (and elsewhere) to understand what works in terms of promoting media and information literacy would be highly valuable. A public factcheck.org could lead to legal issues – what do to if a specific story is wrongly condemned as fake news? It will also be important not to take judgement out of the hands of individuals – building skills and capacities remains crucial.*

**22. What actions, if any, should be taken by public authorities to counter the spread of fake news, and at what level (global, EU, national/regional) should such actions be taken?**
In line with the [European Parliament research paper](#) of 2016, support libraries and media and information literacy training in order to raise skill levels, and ensure that everyone knows where to turn if needs be. Schools, university, organisations for lifelong learning, courses of computer technology etc. can also play a useful role.

**23. Please provide any comment and/or link to research that you consider useful to bring to the Commission attention.**

Please see the research paper produced for the European Parliament in 2016, looking at the role of libraries in media literacy (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/573454/IPOL_IDA(2017)573454_EN.pdf). UNESCO's work on media and information literacy assessment framework continues to represent a gold standard for measuring the skills of people in evaluating the information they receive (http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/media-literacy/unesco-global-mil-assessment-framework/), and experimentations with its implementation in Europe could be valuable.