Fake News in the food sector: consumer distrust and unfair competition

Luis González Vaqué
Fake News in the food sector: consumer distrust and unfair competition

Luis González Vaqué*

*Based on a talk given to the Fundación Triptolemos at Alimentaria 2018.

«De les nits més fosques neixen les albes més lluminoses»
Catalan saying
I. Introduction

Fake News refers to *fabrications* or falsehoods created in order to misinform. Several such types of disinformation have been identified:

- Misleading news: makes something appear true when it is not, with the aim of slandering or incriminating someone
- Slanderous news: lies about what someone has said or done;
- *Ad hoc* fabricated news: when downright fallacies are invented in order to mislead or harm someone;
- Falsely connected news: when news items make false connections between different facts which cannot be confirmed because there is no actual proven relationship between them;
- Disseminating the findings of a technical or scientific investigation when said findings are provisional rather than definitive and have yet to be validated.
- News in a false context: any information taken out of context with the aim of creating new and false news; and
- Manipulated news: that which blatantly misrepresents information and even retouches photos in order to create falsehoods.

Some lists also include “news parody” (humorous headlines made up to amuse rather than to cause any harm\(^2\)), but to my mind this does not really qualify as Fake News. Other lists include ideological Fake News, i.e. news that is manipulated to discredit the activity of a given political or social group or the positions they hold\(^3\).

Lastly, most Fake News is *emotional* in nature and seeks to upset, annoy or scare us. Those who consciously spread it rely on tried and tested methods of persuasion, and we tend to share it.

---


\(^3\) “news that manipulates the truth in order to maintain a *mental framework* closer to our beliefs than to reality. See Mayoral, A., “Bulos y noticias anti-sistema”. *BoDiAlCo*, No. 3, 2018, 3-4.
II. Impact x Ambiguity + Interest x Diffusion + Speed = Fake News

For Fake News to work, it must have an impact. The greater the sensation caused, the more the misinformation spreads, the better. The facts behind fake news are crucial: in order to spread, fake news must consist of an informative story that seems plausible but contains little data, as this could be quickly and easily verified and thereby discredit the news item in question. The more ambiguous the content or message in a false news item, the better.

III. Rumours and Fake News

Although in principle they are not the same thing, rumours of the kind we are all familiar with can easily go viral in the form of Fake News. I have made a non-exhaustive list of different circumstances in which rumours might become Fake News. These include:

- where there is a dearth of news topics or events of public interest.
- negligent information gathering, leading to inaccurate or incomplete data being published.
- when the news item contains ambiguous information.
- immediacy and the need to get a news exclusive in order to compete with other media.
- a failure to verify the facts in question.
- lack of failure to accurately reflect sources.
- seeking to hide information so that it does not become available.
- seeking to transmit and publicise an often-biased notion held by the communicator, based where possible on a widespread belief.
- lack of knowledge of an event that has taken place and/or its cause.
- fomenting and exploiting the mistrust typically felt by citizens.

---

In such circumstances the rumour takes on the appearance of a true and objective news item. Like Fake News, rumours are introduced into the press or other mediums so that they then spread and thus become part of the news. At other times they directly replace the news, with the sole purpose of shifting the gaze of public opinion.

IV. The “effects” of Fake News

The articles and reports about Fake News that I have consulted suggest that:

- those who knowingly spread Fake News should be regarded as criminals who exploit fear and shock;
- I Fake News spreads mainly as a result of proper information being unavailable; and
- lack of consumer trust in the system is a much-coveted ingredient of Fake News (where there is informational confusion any piece of news is given a place and even given credence).

In this context, false news that asks for help or support, or alerts us to a risk that might affect us, tends to go viral. Those who spread fake news stories have no qualms about making them credible by stating that their sources are official institutions, research laboratories, or even official inspection bodies or different competent authorities.

It is crucial in my view to make use of official sources and demand that journalists document each and every piece of information they circulate. I also cannot but recognise that by expecting instant information, we have opened the floodgates to Fake News. Let us make no bones about it: we as citizens devour information, and faced with an event as unusual, unexpected, and striking as food contamination, our thirst for news rises exponentially.

---


V. The European Commission's high-level group of experts

1. Fake News or disinformation?

In January 2018, the European Commission set up a high-level group of experts («the HLEG») to advise on policy initiatives to counter fake news and disinformation spread online. The HLEG consisted of 39 members and was chaired by Prof. Dr. Madeleine de Cock Buning. Its members had different backgrounds, including academia and journalism, written press and broadcasting organizations, online platforms as well as civil society and fact-checking organizations.

The HLEG’s tasks were to advise the Commission on all issues arising in the context of false information spread across traditional and social media and on possible ways to cope with its social and political consequences. The main deliverable of the HLEG was a report designed to review best practices in the light of fundamental principles, and suitable responses stemming from such principles. The analysis presented in this Report starts from a shared understanding of disinformation as a phenomenon that goes well beyond the term «fake news». It would appear that «this term has been appropriated and used misleadingly by powerful actors to dismiss coverage that is simply found disagreeable»\(^1\). Disinformation as defined in this Report includes all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit. It does not cover issues arising from the creation and dissemination online of illegal content (notably defamation, hate speech, incitement to violence), which are subject to regulatory remedies under EU or national laws. Nor does it cover other forms of deliberate but not misleading distortions of facts such as satire and parody.

For the HLEG, the problems of disinformation are deeply intertwined with the development of digital media. They are driven by actors — state or non-state political actors, for-profit actors, media, citizens, individually or in groups — and by manipulative uses of communication infrastructures that have been harnessed to produce, circulate and amplify disinformation on a larger scale than previously, often in new ways that are still poorly mapped and understood. The HLEG also acknowledged that, while not necessarily illegal, disinformation can nonetheless be harmful for citizens and society at large. The risk of harm includes threats to democratic political processes, including integrity of elections, and to democratic values that shape public policies in a variety of sectors, such as health (including food safety), science, finance and more. In light of these considerations, the HLEG pointed out that disinformation problems can be handled most effectively, and in a manner that is fully compliant with freedom of expression, free press and pluralism, only if all major stakeholders collaborate. In addition, continuous research, increased transparency and access to relevant data, combined with regular evaluation of responses, must be permanently ensured. This is particularly important as disinformation is a multifaceted and evolving problem.

\(^1\) See the Executive Summary of the Report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation “A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation”. 
that does not have one single root cause: «it does not have, therefore, one single solution»\(^{12}\).

The HLEG advised the Commission to disregard simplistic solutions. Any form of censorship either public or private should clearly be avoided. Fragmentation of the Internet, or any harmful consequences for its technical functioning should also be avoided. The HLEG’s recommendations aimed instead to provide short-term responses to the most pressing problems, longer-term responses to increase societal resilience to disinformation, and a framework for ensuring ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of these responses, while new evidence-based responses are developed. The multi-dimensional approach recommended by the HLEG is based on a number of interconnected and mutually reinforcing responses.

These responses rest on five pillars designed to:

- enhance transparency of online news, involving an adequate and privacy-compliant sharing of data about the systems that enable their circulation online;
- promote media and information literacy to counter disinformation and help users navigate the digital media environment;
- develop tools for empowering users and journalists to tackle disinformation and foster a positive engagement with fast-evolving information technologies;
- safeguard the diversity and sustainability of the European news media ecosystem; and
- promote continued research on the impact of disinformation in Europe to evaluate the measures taken by different actors and constantly adjust the necessary responses.

The HLEG called on the European Commission to adopt a multi-dimensional approach to identifying and refuting “fake news” and online disinformation. Such an approach, it argued, should be based on the above pillars and consist of concrete, inter-dependent actions:

- As a first step for the short to medium term, the HLEG proposed a self-regulatory approach based on a clearly defined multi-stakeholder engagement process, framed within a binding roadmap for implementation, and focused on a set of specific actions\(^{13}\): all relevant stakeholders, including online platforms, news media organisations (press and broadcasters), journalists, fact-checkers, independent content creators and the advertising industry, are called upon to commit to a Code of Practice (this Code should reflect

---

\(^{12}\) Ibidem.

\(^{13}\) For a different point of view see Mayoral, A., Op. Cit., 5-6.
stakeholders’ respective roles and responsibilities); the intent should be to promote an enabling environment for freedom of expression by fostering the transparency and intelligibility of different types of digital information channels. In particular, the HLEG has formulated 10 key principles to be enshrined in this Code, which define clear objectives for platforms. To make sure that the necessary steps will be taken, the HLEG recommends establishing a Coalition representing the relevant stakeholders for the purpose of elaborating such a Code of Practice and ensuring its implementation and continuous monitoring and review.

- As a second step, the Commission was invited to re-examine the matter in Spring 2019 and decide, on the basis of an intermediate and independent evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of these measures, whether further actions should be considered for the next European Commission term. This may cover options for additional fact-finding and/or policy initiatives, using any relevant instrument, including competition instruments or other mechanisms to ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Code.

These good practices must be backed by a structured cross-border and cross-sector cooperation involving all relevant stakeholders, in order to foster transparency, *algorithm* accountability and public trust in media to an appreciable extent. Given the fragmentation of the sector, public authorities should play a facilitating role. The HLEG therefore asked public authorities, both at the EU and national level, to support the development of a network of independent European Centres for (academic) research on disinformation.

This network should be open to fact- and source-checkers, accredited journalists, researchers from different relevant fields and platforms, with a view to:

- continually monitoring the scale, techniques and tools, and the precise nature and (potential) impact of disinformation in society;
- assessing the veracity of factual claims underpinning news and information across areas of general interest (public affairs and politics, health, science, education, finance, etc.);
- identifying and mapping disinformation sources and mechanisms that contribute to their digital amplification;
- providing a safe space for accessing and analysing platforms’ data and for a better understanding of the functioning of algorithms;
- contributing to the development of fair, objective and reliable indicators for source transparency; and
- sharing knowledge with news media and platforms to enhance public awareness about disinformation.
2. A Centre of Excellence or a Specialised Observatory?

In this context, the Commission might also consider establishing a Centre of Excellence, which would act independently and with full autonomy. Its goal should be to manage the infrastructure necessary to enable an effective networking of such national research centres and to ensure a wide dissemination of their independent research outcomes. The commitment required from public authorities involves the provision of sufficient independent funding for both the establishment and operation of such a network, and a renewed effort to support R&D activities in critical fields: «examples include advanced content verification tools for newsrooms, artificial intelligence and big data for media»\(^\text{14}\). However, while necessary, these actions alone would not be sufficient to “dilute” disinformation with trustworthy content made more visible and findable online. Additional measures aimed at strengthening societal resilience in the longer term need to be implemented in parallel. The HLEG therefore recommended a set of complementary measures. These measures were designed on the one hand to support the diversity and sustainability of the news media ecosystem and, on the other, to develop appropriate initiatives in the field of media and information literacy in order to foster a critical approach and a responsible behaviour across all European citizens.

Alternatively, it might be preferable to set up an Observatory to monitor the information disseminated in both the media and on labelling and advertising\(^\text{15}\).

VI. The European Parliament: political interference and financial losses

Unsurprisingly, the European Parliament (EP) has also taken an interest in Fake News. Its Report “on online platforms and the digital single market” of 31 May 2017(2016/2276(INI)) is lengthy and comprehensive, and so for the sake of brevity I shall limit myself to transcribing only those of its sections and recommendations which I consider relevant to present purposes:

- «Clarifying the liability of intermediaries»

[...]

- «33. Urges online platforms to strengthen measures to tackle illegal and harmful content online; welcomes the ongoing work on the AVMS Directive and the Commission’s intention to propose measures for video-sharing platforms in order to protect minors and for taking down content related to hate

\(^{14}\) See the Executive Summary of the Report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation “A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation”.

\(^{15}\) The latter being especially relevant to the food sector (See Vidreras Pérez, C., Op. Cit., 36-37).
speech; notes the absence of references to content relating to incitement to terrorism; calls for special attention to avoid bullying and violence against vulnerable people.»

► «34. Considers that the liability rules for online platforms should allow the tackling of issues related to illegal content and goods in an efficient manner, for instance by applying due diligence while maintaining a balanced and innovation-friendly approach; urges the Commission to define and further clarify the notice and takedown procedures and to provide guidance on voluntary measures aimed at addressing such content.»

► «35. Stresses the importance of taking action against the dissemination of fake news\(^\text{16}\); calls on the online platforms to provide users with tools to denounce fake news\(^\text{17}\) in such a way that other users can be informed that the veracity of the content has been contested; points out, at the same time, that the free exchange of opinions is fundamental to democracy and that the right to privacy also applies in the social media sphere; highlights the value of the free press with regard to providing citizens with reliable information.»

► «36. Calls on the Commission to analyse in depth the current situation and legal framework with regard to fake news\(^\text{18}\), and to verify the possibility of legislative intervention to limit the dissemination and spreading of fake content.»

► «37. Stresses the need for online platforms to combat illegal goods and content and unfair practices (e.g. the reselling of entertainment tickets at extortionate prices), through regulatory measures complemented by effective self-regulatory measures (e.g. through clear terms of use and appropriate mechanisms to identify repeat offenders, or by setting up specialised content moderation teams and tracing dangerous products) or hybrid measures.»

► «38. Welcomes the Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech for the industry, agreed in 2016 and supported by the Commission, and asks the Commission to develop adequate and reasonable means for online platforms to identify and remove illegal goods and content.»

[...]

● «Creating a level playing field»

[...]

\(^{16}\) Emphasis added.

\(^{17}\) Idem.

\(^{18}\) Idem.
«57. Calls on the Commission to address certain issues of platforms' review systems, such as *fake reviews*\(^{19}\) or deletion of negative reviews, with the aim of gaining competitive advantage; stresses the need to make reviews more reliable and useful for consumers and to ensure that platforms respect existing obligations and take measures in this respect against practices such as voluntary schemes; welcomes the guidance on the implementation of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive».

[...]

● «Increasing online trust and fostering innovation»

[...]

► «42. Urges the Commission to ensure a level playing field between online platform service providers and other services with which they compete, including B2B and C2C; stresses that regulatory certainty is essential to creating a thriving digital economy; notes that competitive pressure varies between different sectors and different actors within sectors; recalls therefore that 'one size fits all' solutions are rarely appropriate; considers that any tailor-made solutions or regulatory measures proposed have to take account of the specific characteristics of platforms in order to ensure fair competition on an equal footing.»

► «43. Draws attention to the fact that the size of online platforms varies from multinationals to micro-enterprises; stresses the importance of fair and effective competition between online platforms in order to promote consumer choice and avoid the creation of monopolies or dominant positions that distort the markets through abuse of market power; stresses that facilitating switching between online platforms or online services is an essential measure for preventing market failures and avoiding lock-in situations.»

► «44. Notes that online platforms are altering the highly regulated traditional business model; underlines that possible reforms of the existing regulatory framework should concentrate on the harmonisation of rules and reducing regulatory fragmentation, in order to secure an open and competitive market for online platforms while guaranteeing high standards of consumer protection; emphasises the need to avoid over-regulation and to continue the REFIT process and the implementation of the better regulation principle; stresses the importance of technology neutrality and of coherence between rules that apply online and offline in equivalent situations to the extent necessary and possible; stresses that regulatory certainty fosters competition, investment and innovation.»

► «45. Underlines the importance of investment in infrastructure in both urban and rural areas; stresses that fair competition ensures investment in quality high-speed broadband services; stresses that affordable access to and full deployment of reliable high-speed infrastructure, such as ultrafast connections

\(^{19}\) *Idem.*
and telecommunications, fosters the supply and use of online platform services; stresses the need for net neutrality and fair and non-discriminatory access to online platforms as a prerequisite for innovation and a truly competitive market; urges the Commission to streamline the funding schemes for related initiatives facilitating the digitisation process, in order to use the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and Horizon 2020 (H2020) and the contributions from Member States' national budgets; calls on the Commission to assess the potential of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs).»

[...]

As for the Report by the HLEG, published in March 2018, the EP appears to regret that the HLEG avoided the term 'fake news' and instead gave preference to the term disinformation, defined as false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted for profit or to intentionally cause public harm. Nevertheless, the EP does acknowledge the need to involve all relevant parties in any possible action, recommending primarily a self-regulatory approach (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-connected-digital-single-market/file-online-platforms-fake-news-and-online-disinformation).

The EP accepts in principle the majority of the recommendations of the HLEG report, including the following proposals:

- an EU-wide Code of Practice on Disinformation, to be published by July 2018 and aiming for measurable impact by October 2018;

- an independent European network of fact-checkers to establish common working methods and exchange best practices;

- enhancing media literacy to help Europeans identify online disinformation and view content critically;

- Member States are encouraged to boost their support for quality journalism to ensure a pluralistic, diverse and sustainable media environment;

- the Commission and the External Action Service will coordinate their communication activities, including outreach to counter false narratives, to tackle disinformation and extend this collaboration to other EU institutions. The Commission will report on the progress in June; and

- support for Member States to boost resilience of elections. The Commission has asked national authorities to identify best practices for countering cyberattacks and disinformation. The Network and Information Systems Cooperation Group will deliver a compendium of recommendations and measures that can be implemented by Member States to secure elections.
The EP is willing to support the proposed Draft Code of Practice to tackle online disinformation as long as its objectives include:

▶ improving the scrutiny of ad placements to demonetize purveyors of disinformation;

▶ ensuring transparency of political advertising and issue-based advertising to enable users to identify promoted content;

▶ ensuring the integrity of platforms’ services including by identifying and closing fake accounts and using appropriate mechanisms to signal bot-driven interactions;

▶ making it easier for users to discover and access different news sources representing alternative viewpoints; and

▶ empowering the research community by granting access to platforms’ data that are necessary to continuously monitor online disinformation.

VII. Other sources

For reasons of space we shall limit ourselves to providing a list of other sources that may be consulted:

● EP Legislative Observatory, Procedure file on Online platforms and the digital single market, 2016/0278(COD)

● European Parliament, Resolution of 15 June 2017 on online platforms and the digital single market, 2016/2276(INI)


● European Commission, Digital Single Market policy, Fake news, 26 October 2017

● Eurobarometer survey presentation, March 2018

● Report of the High-Level Expert Group on Fake news and Disinformation, 12 March 2018

● EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, draft, 17 July 2018\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{20}\) See also European Parliament, EPRS, Online disinformation and the EU's response, At a glance, May 2017; and European Parliament, EPRS, Understanding disinformation and 'fake news', At a glance, November 2017.
VIII. Conclusions

1. Disinformation in the food sector

As the reader is probably aware, Fake News can have disastrous consequences for the food sector, by for example blocking product sales, bankrupting companies, etc. This is nothing new – I remember the effect caused in the 1970s by the widely circulated ‘Villejuif leaflet’ (also known as the ‘Villejuif flyer’ or ‘Villejuif list’). The leaflet listed a number of safe food additives with their E numbers as alleged carcinogens. The leaflet caused mass panic in Europe in the late 1970s and 1980s. One of the entries on the list was citric acid (E330).

In the 1980s Dr. Carlos Barros, a Food Law pioneer in Europe and Latin America, coined the phrase «terrorismo informativo» - a term that does not really need translating....

Since then technological advances in online communication have increased the potential for disseminating Fake News immeasurably (often under the guise of anonymity and in ways that make it hard to trace). Moreover, globalisation means that information of every kind (including Fake News) can reach the five continents at the speed of light. At the same time, the universalisation of English means that the (same) news can reach a wide variety of media outlets.

Fake News stories are typically *sui generis* in nature, spreading false information about diseases, product withdrawal, the use of harmful ingredients, etc. The consequences of such stories are often so dramatic that refuting them is unadvisable as it only serves to further diminish consumer trust.

Another concern is that fake news often generates premature and incorrect alerts concerning the precautionary withdrawal of certain foodstuffs.

In general, although the points made in the seven sections of this article would appear to apply largely to Fake News online, they also apply to fake news in the food sector. Let us in any case offer some additional clues that might help us detect fake news:

► News content is unreal or highly implausible.

---


The media outlet hosting the news item is untrustworthy or we have doubts about it.

The news headline is excessively alarmist, silly or improbable.

We do not know who created the piece of news in question.

We can identify false news in the food sector by checking and verifying the information. Common sense, logic, our own cultural baggage and technical knowledge can all help us in this task. We should also find out if the competition or an ex-employee is aware of a vulnerability on our part, even if the activity in question is legal. In the case of competing firms, this might involve omitting a certain ingredient, or using it in lesser quantities than we do. Likewise, we need to find out if other countries are trying to discredit our products in order to replace them with their own.

Unfortunately, automatic fake news detection is a challenging problem in deception detection, and it has tremendous real-world political and social impacts. However, statistical approaches to combating fake news has been dramatically limited by the lack of labeled benchmark datasets (and not only in the food industry).

2. Recommendations for the short to medium-term

The recommendations contained in the Report “A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation” are reproduced below, divided according to which stakeholder group they apply to. This is the best way, in my view, to complement the information provided in this article. The recommendations are designed to foster transparency, algorithm accountability and trust-enhancing practices, while contributing to empower users and journalists, in line with the responses set out in the Report. They are based on a multi-stakeholders approach that recognises the need for cross-sector and cross-border cooperation as a precondition for tackling disinformation, a multi-faceted problem that does not have one single root cause and cannot therefore be addressed by a single measure.

The role of platforms, news media and factchecking organisations

---

23 A fake news detection system aims to assist users in detecting and filtering out varieties of potentially deceptive news. The prediction of the chances that a particular news item is intentionally deceptive is based on the analysis of previously seen truthful and deceptive news. A scarcity of deceptive news, available as corpora for predictive modeling, is a major stumbling block in this field of natural language processing (NLP) and deception detection. Furthermore, each economic or political sector must confront different types of fake news, each in contrast to genuine serious reporting, and weigh their pros and cons as a corpus for text analytics and predictive modeling. Filtering, vetting, and verifying online information continues to be essential in library and information science (LIS), as the lines between traditional news and online information are blurring.
- Establishment of a Coalition representing online platforms, news media organisations (including press and broadcasters) and civil society organisations with expertise in fact-checking, which will strive to involve all willing stakeholders from the relevant sectors during the process. Its main task will be to ensure the elaboration of the proposed multi-stakeholders Code of Practices and accompany its implementation and continuous monitoring.

- Definition of a multi-stakeholder Code of Practices setting out the concrete rules of conduct in function of the role which platforms, news media and fact-checking organisations have to play in order to protect an enabling environment for freedom of expression while fostering the transparency and intelligibility of different types of digital information channels. The Code should be built on the Key Principles set out in Section 4.e of this Report and provide for a binding Roadmap for implementation, including an initial Progress Assessment to be carried out by an independent expert entity by October/November 2018. The proposed Code is designed to ensure:

  • that the Key Principles\textsuperscript{24} are made operational in such a manner that the actions formulated in this Report are fully achieved;
  
  • a first elaboration and refinement of fair, objective and multi-dimensional source transparency indicators to improve public knowledge about online information sources, transparency of journalistic processes and findability of trustworthy content;
  
  • an effective cooperation to increase the transparency and efficiency of fact-and source checking practices to facilitate the dissemination of verified and reliable information;
  
  • active participation within the proposed European Centres for research on disinformation to facilitate access to data within a safe and privacy-compliant space, so as to foster a better understanding of the working of algorithms and of the mechanisms that enable the spread of disinformation online. The aim of such collaboration is to enhance research and define and adjust appropriate responses that take into account national or regional specificities and are proportionate to the risk of public harm likely to be caused.

▶ The role of public authorities

1. The European Commission should:

\textsuperscript{24} See the third chapter of the Report of the independent High-level Group on fake news and online disinformation “A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation”.
• Facilitate the creation of a multi-stakeholder Coalition against disinformation and assist stakeholders in developing a Code of Practices and in evaluating its effectiveness.

• In light of the Progress Assessment Report mentioned above, and by March 2019, consider options that may include additional fact-finding and/or additional policy initiatives, using any relevant instrument, such as competition instruments or mechanisms to ensure a continuous monitoring and evaluation of self-regulatory measures.

• Support the establishment of European Centres for research on disinformation, operating at national level and aimed at mapping the digital ecosystem for disinformation, its dominant technologies, tools and practices, monitoring the veracity of information through the most advanced fact-checking tools, artificial intelligence, language technologies and big data for media. In particular, the European Commission should provide adequate funding and organise a Centre of Excellence equipped with the necessary service infrastructure enabling an efficient network of such national Centres.

• Pursuing and intensifying efforts in support of media innovation projects, including through funding for R&I, to empower journalists in dealing with disinformation. The Commission is invited to tender by summer 2018 an independent study on Media sustainability to inform its policy and budget pipeline for 2019-2024.

2. Member States should:

• Facilitate the operation of the European Centres for research on disinformation by providing funding to research organisations that operate innovation hubs or living labs open to fact-checkers, accredited journalists and researchers from different relevant fields, as well as representatives of Press Councils and platforms.

3. Civil society organisations should:

• Work with academia, educational psychology professionals and the media industry to formulate skill and age-specific media and information literacy approaches and monitor their effectiveness. In so doing, CSOs and academia should focus where possible on adapting language to target audiences and on developing analytical frameworks to understand different types of disinformation;

• In collaboration with industry, facilitate the development of open source tools to tackle disinformation on an everyday basis.

• Design specific actions for citizens of different age groups aimed at sensitizing voters to the importance of integrity of elections; promote literacy
programmes to enhance the quality of information around elections; and support a fact-based and data-checked public debates.

• Step up efforts to build a community of practice linking up different media literacy organisations and communities at European level.

4. Platforms should:

• Develop tools to share standard information sheets to users developed by independent (educational) institutions within media and information literacy programs, raising awareness of digital disinformation and emerging findings about digital risks.

5. News media organisations should:

• Cooperate with CSOs and academia to formulate and implement skill and age-specific media and information literacy approaches, and for all ages, while pursuing their media literacy projects in cooperation with schools and other educational institutions that target younger generations;

• Subject to funding, notably from outside sources, continue investing in quality journalisms and equip newsrooms with professional automatic content verification tools for audio-visual and text-based reports spread online;

• Ensure the highest levels of compliance with ethical and professional standards to sustain a pluralistic and trustworthy news media ecosystem.