



**FAKE
NEWS**

From Fake News to Weaponised Information: Europe's Response and the Future of PR

PR360 – Athens, 11 December 2025

Patrick Penninckx

**TRUE OR
FALSE?**





**TRUE
OR
FALSE?**

**TRUE OR
FALSE?**





**TRUE
OR
FALSE?**

PRESENTATION TOPICS:

- The infodemic of the digital world
- The societal impact
- Addressing information disorder
- The role of states and internet intermediaries
- Council of Europe action



Technology connects more and more





GAFAM are the main lobbyists in Brussels

140 lobbyists are influencing EU policies on behalf of 10 largest tech companies – Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft and also IBM, Huawei, Vodafone, Qualcomm and Intel.

The Brussels “digital lobby” spent €97 million – 10 times more than that of the automobile industry

In total 1500 lobbyists are mobilised by 612 companies from the technology sector for €32 million annually

1,3 bn users

100 mil in Europe



TikTok Threats and Controversies

Content worries - nasty, unethical, foul, and empowering porn.

Well being of users - spreads derogatory terms and extreme right fanaticism, such as anti-Semitism, intolerance, and xenophobia.

Falsehood - encouraged deceit associated with the COVID-19 epidemic.

Client and data security - collects usage data, IP addresses, a client's mobile carrier, unusual gadget IDs, keystroke examples, location information, "faceprints and voiceprints".

Cyberbullying - endemic cyberbullying, including bigotry and ableism.

Tiktok school threat - purportedly calls on students to commit violent acts

Source. [Yoar.com](https://www.yoar.com)

Deceptive information proliferates



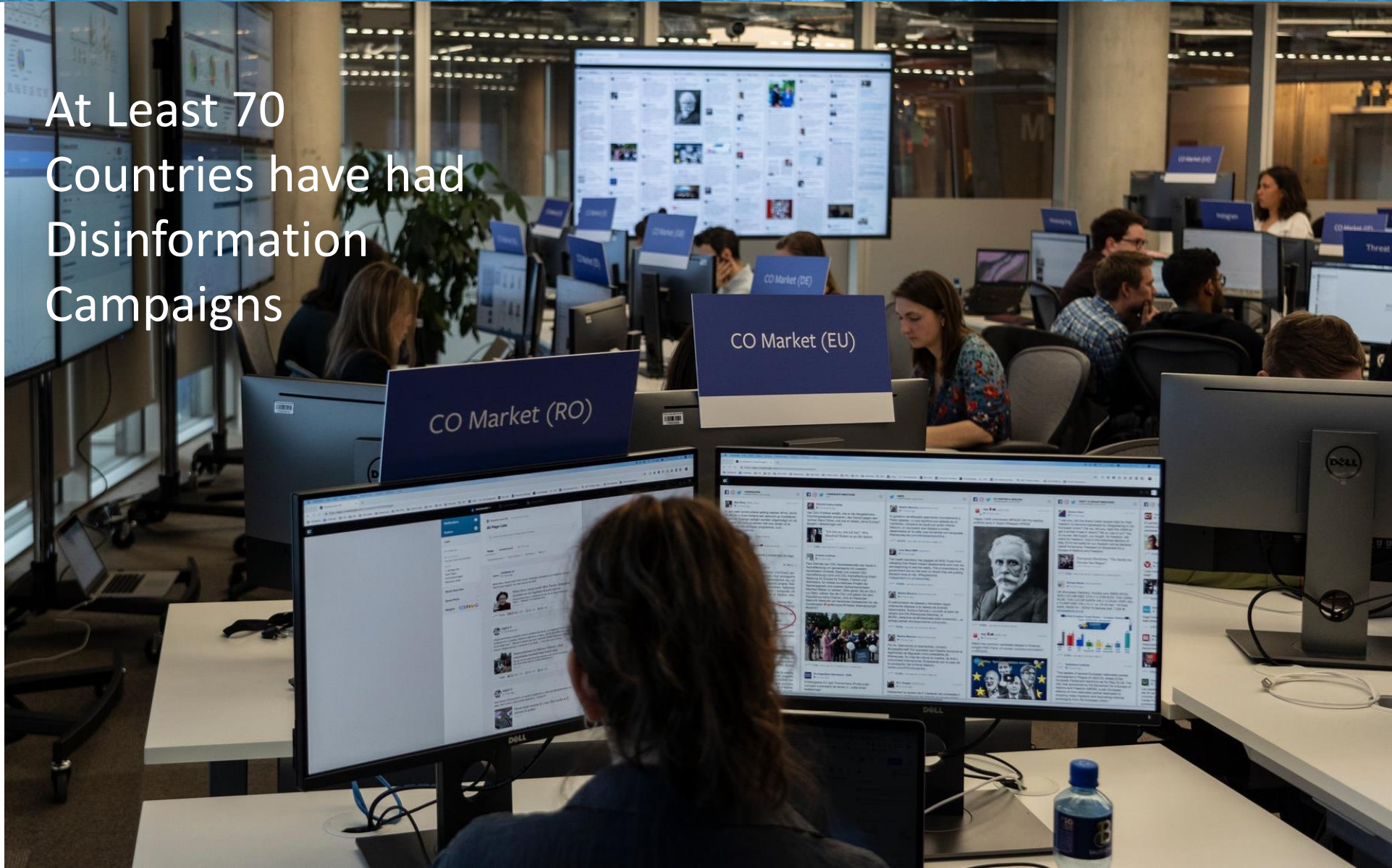
Fake news are spined online



... as well as hate speech



At Least 70
Countries have had
Disinformation
Campaigns



TOP DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES ABOUT BELARUS

Western
interference



Forced landing
of Ryanair
flight in Minsk



Conspiracy
theories



Deceitful EU



Russophobia



Links with
Fascism



Political scaremongering continues

LIES ON THREATS TO SOVEREIGNTY...

**"NATO will allow Turkey
to absorb Georgia"**

DiSiNFO

LIES ON THREATS TO SOVEREIGNTY...

**"Ukraine is no longer
an independent country"**

DiSiNFO

LIES ON THREATS TO SOVEREIGNTY...

**"Romania wants
to deprive Moldova
from sovereignty"**

DiSiNFO

LIES ON THREATS TO SOVEREIGNTY...

**"Germany is
an occupied state"**

DiSiNFO

Source:
euvsdisinfo.eu

Democracies are a target

ARTICLES WITH DISINFORMATION CLAIMS IN THE GERMAN LANGUAGE
HAVE BEEN LIKED, SHARED AND COMMENTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA MORE
THAN

100 000 TIMES*



Source:
euvsdisinfo.eu

*BASED ON THE EXAMPLES COLLECTED IN THE EUVSDISINFO DATABASE, 2015-2021

EVENTS

2022



FEBRUARY

RUSSIA LAUNCHES AN ALL-OUT ATTACK AND INVADES UKRAINE

RUSSIA RECOGNIZES THE INDEPENDENCE OF NON-GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED AREAS IN DONETSK AND LUHANSK AND MOVES "PEACEKEEPING" INTO THESE AREAS

RUSSIA HAS GATHERED MORE THAN 150 000 TROOPS AND HEAVY MILITARY EQUIPMENT NEAR THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE

JANUARY

RUSSIA MOVES TROOPS TO BELARUS FOR "JOINT EXERCISES"

ALLEGED RUSSIAN CYBERATTACKS AGAINST UKRAINE

DiSiNFO

DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES

RUSSIA IS CONDUCTING A LIMITED MILITARY OPERATION, IN SELF-DEFENCE, TO "DE-NAZIFY" UKRAINE. IT IS NOT AN OCCUPATION OF UKRAINE. RUSSIA IS READY TO NEGOTIATE. UKRAINE MUST HOLD ELECTIONS FOR A NEW GOVERNMENT.

UKRAINE IS A COLONY WITH A PUPPET REGIME. IT HAS NO SUSTAINABLE STATEHOOD.

RUSSIA IS NOT INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT IN EASTERN UKRAINE. **THE US WILL START A WAR IN UKRAINE** WHEN NATO IS READY AND USE UKRAINE TO LAUNCH AN ATTACK AGAINST RUSSIA. ANGLO-SAXONS TOGETHER WITH CENTRAL EUROPE SEEK CONFLICT WITH RUSSIA AT ALL COSTS, AND WANT TO TURN UKRAINIANS AGAINST RUSSIA.

THE US PLANS A FALSE FLAG CHEMICAL ATTACK ON DONBAS AND BLAME RUSSIA FOR IT. THE AMERICAN INVASION OF UKRAINE IS PUBLICLY PORTRAYED AS A RUSSIAN INVASION.

UKRAINE ORGANIZED THE CYBER-ATTACK ITSELF AND USED IT TO BLAME RUSSIA. THE WEST IS USING UKRAINE AS A PLATFORM TO ATTACK RUSSIA.

Source:
euvdsinfo.eu



Russia's Propaganda Machine Is Faltering Over Ukraine

Pedestrians cross a street in front of a billboard displaying the **symbol "Z"** in the colors of the ribbon of Saint George and a slogan reading, "We don't give up on our people," in St. Petersburg, Russia, on March 7, 2022

Source:
[foreignpolicy.com](https://www.foreignpolicy.com)

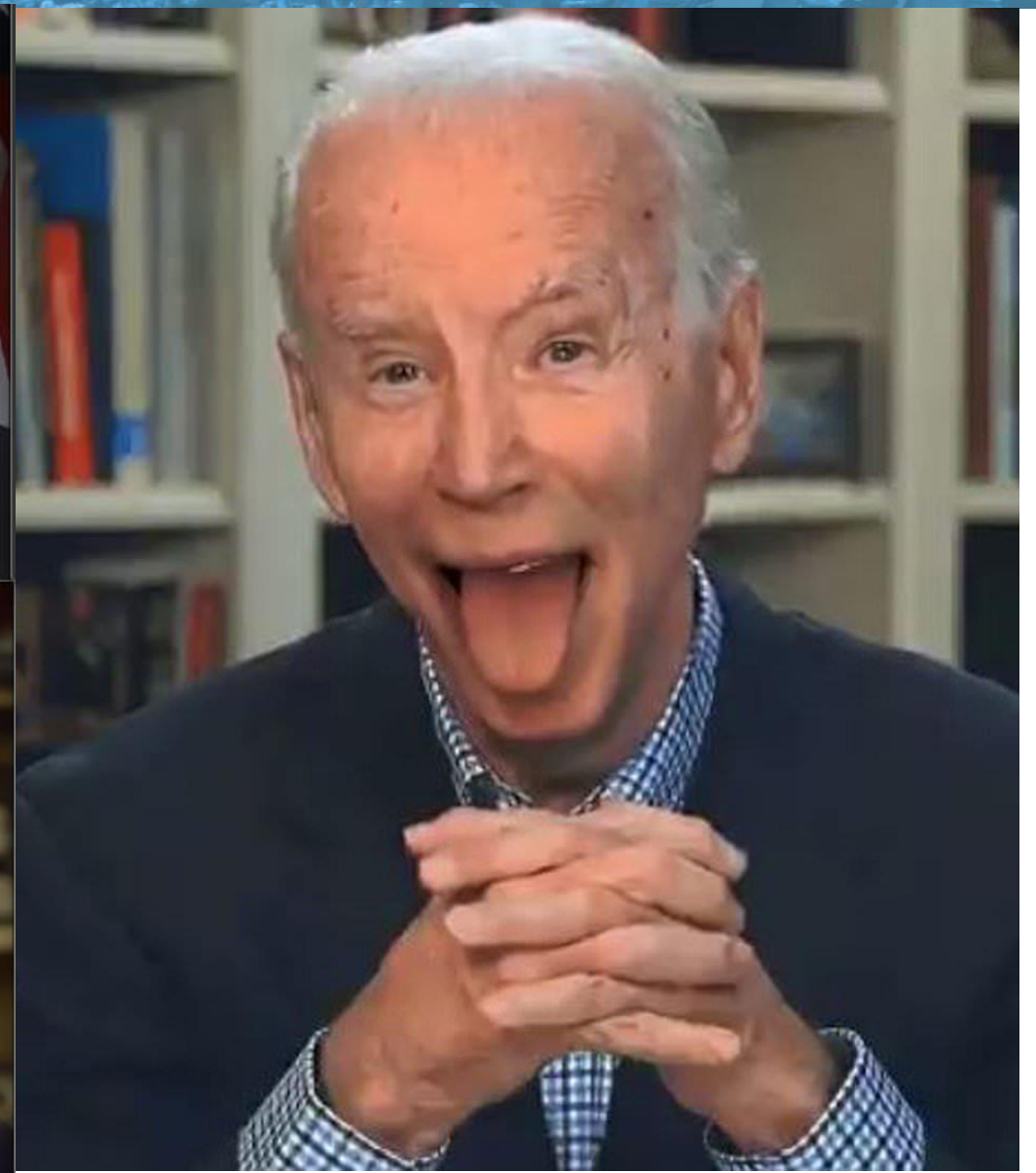
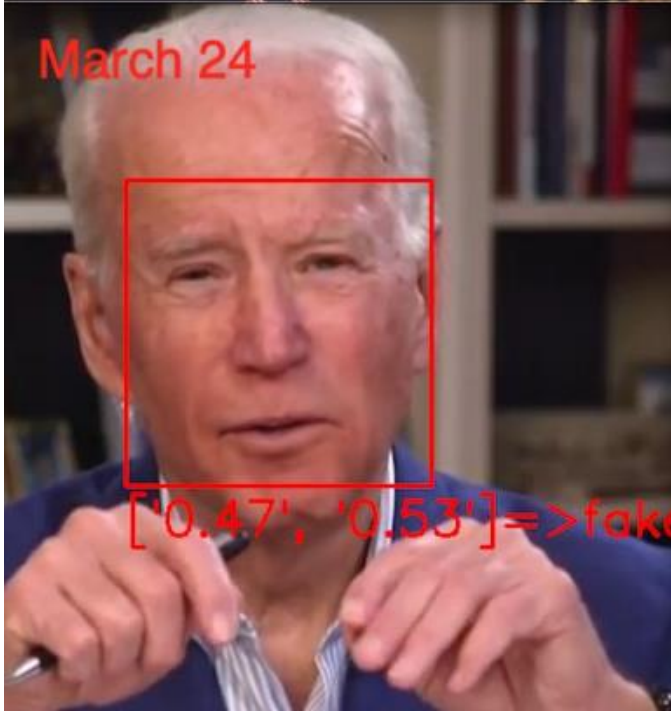
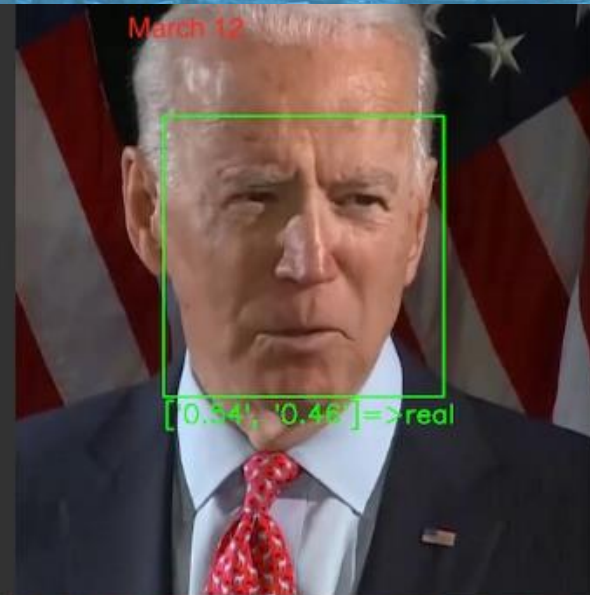
Fakes used as propaganda tools

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF MUSCOVITES WERE
BRIBED OR FORCED TO DEMONSTRATE UNITY
BEHIND THE LEADER.



Source:
euvdisinfo.eu

Deep fakes distort reality

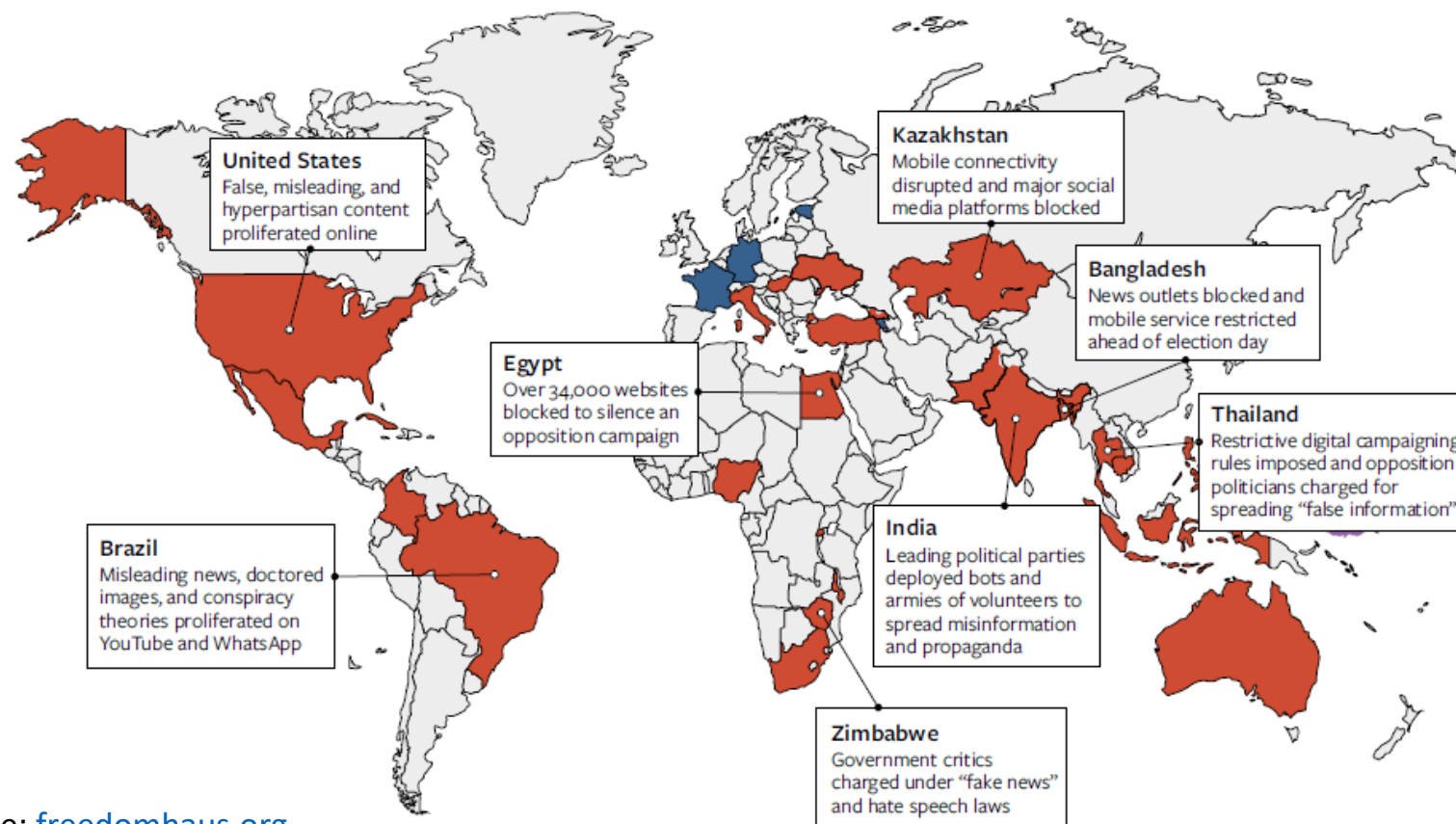


SM enhance a fake perception of reality



THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON OF DIGITAL ELECTION INTERFERENCE

Domestic actors interfered online in 26 of 30 countries that held elections or referendums over the past year.



Source: freedomhaus.org

■ With Election Interference ■ Without Election Interference ■ No Data

Disinformation rigs elections



Source: [The Journal](#)



**Politicians
and Platforms
are using
your data
to influence
your vote...**

Source:
news.northeastern.edu

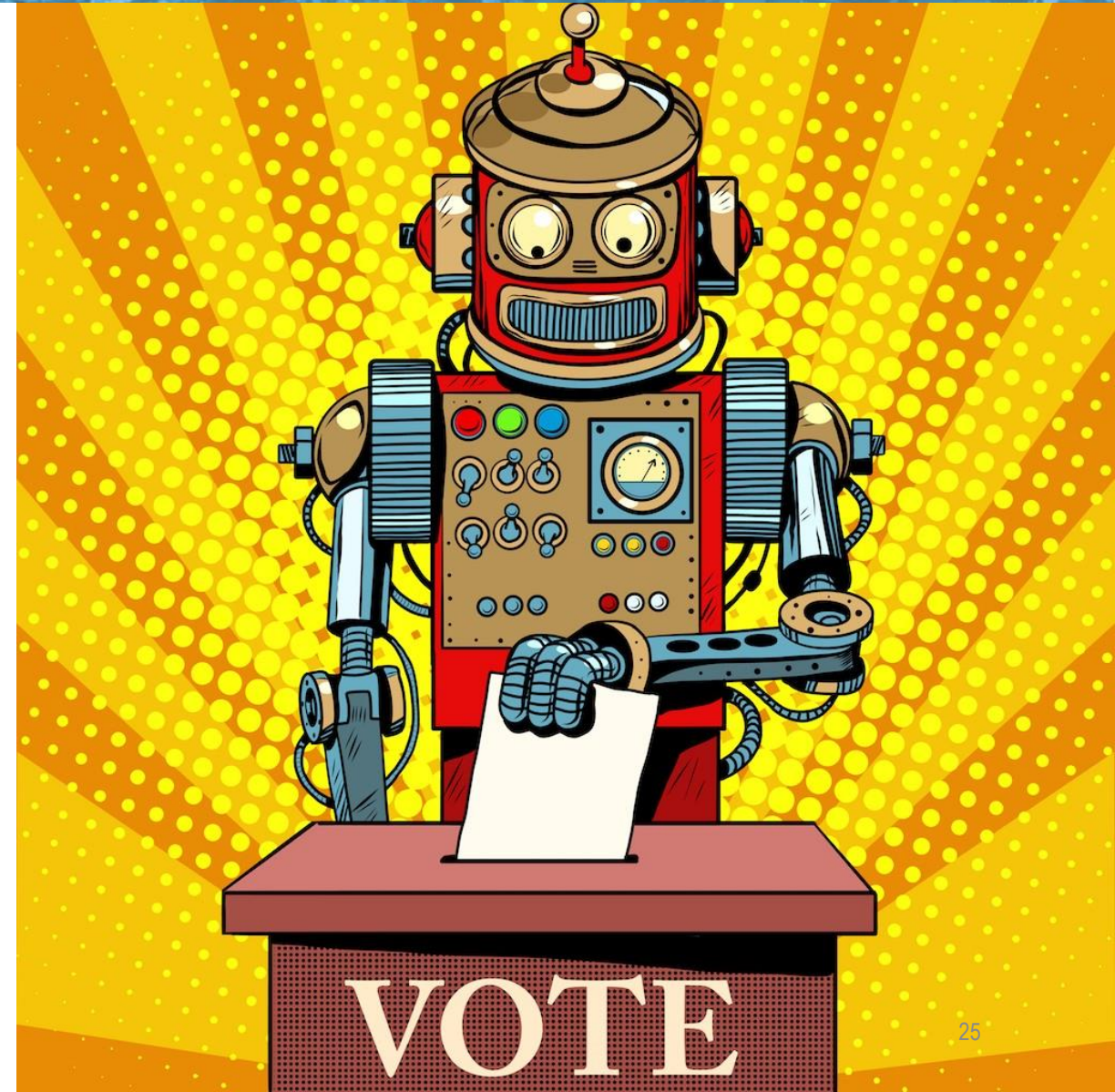
AI is used to spread misinformation

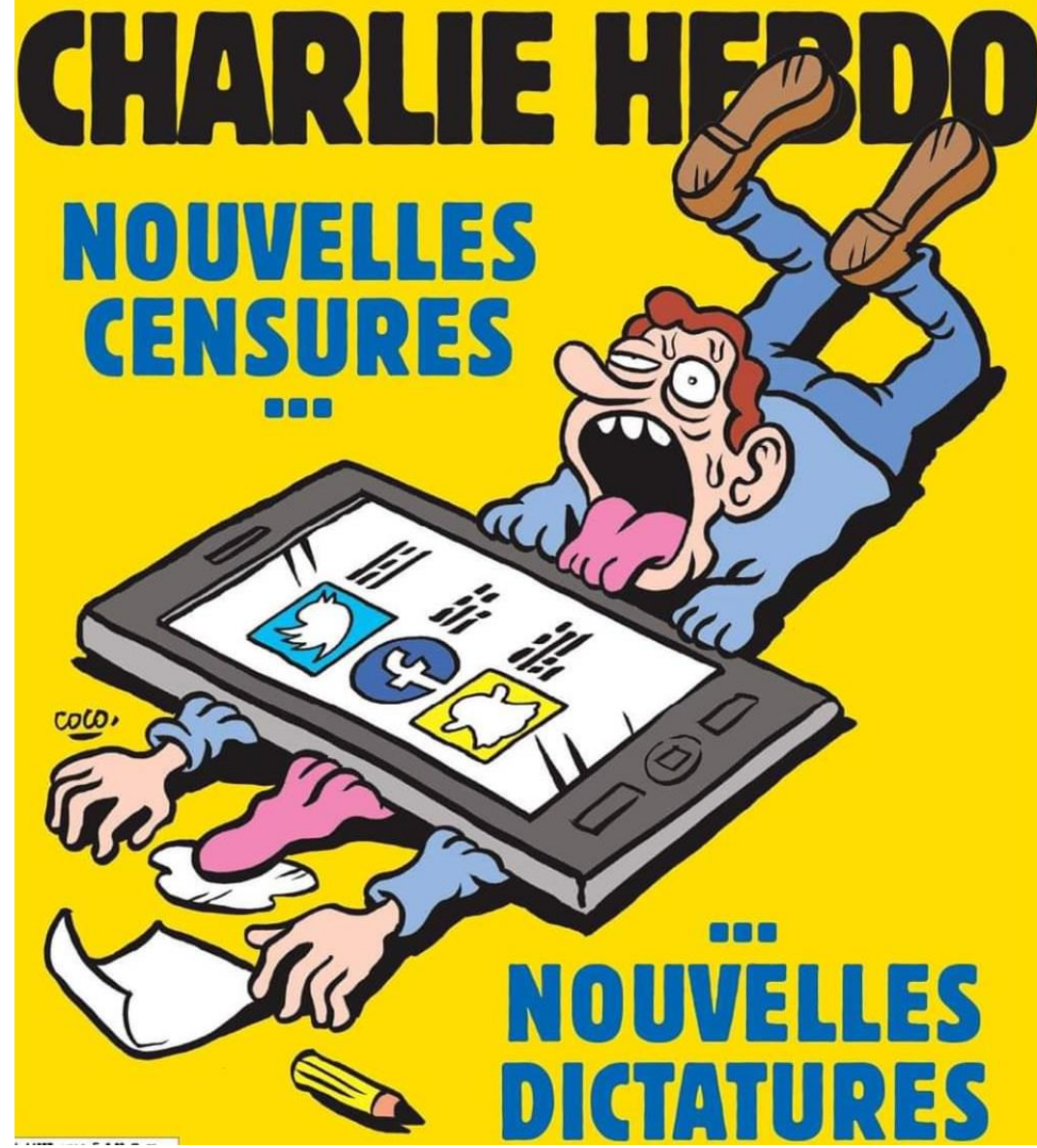
Facebook's own targeted advertising system was leveraged to display content and ads at users with respect to their **psychological profiles**.

By knowing the behavioural and psychographic profiles of voters, **AI can be used to send political messages that are insincere and fake**.

Source:

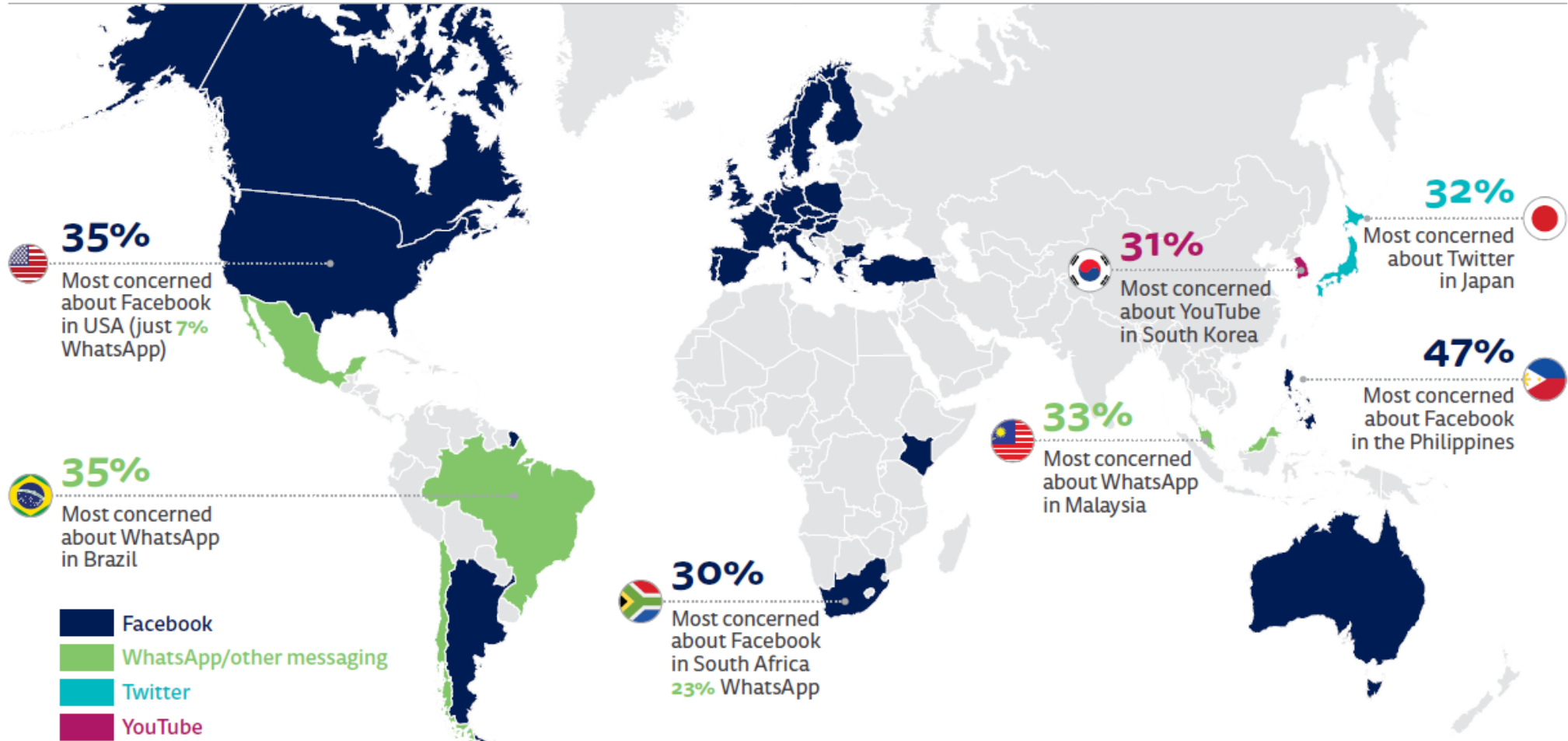
mygreatlearning.com





Who spreads more disinformation?

MOST CONCERNING PLATFORM FOR FALSE AND MISLEADING INFORMATION - ALL MARKETS

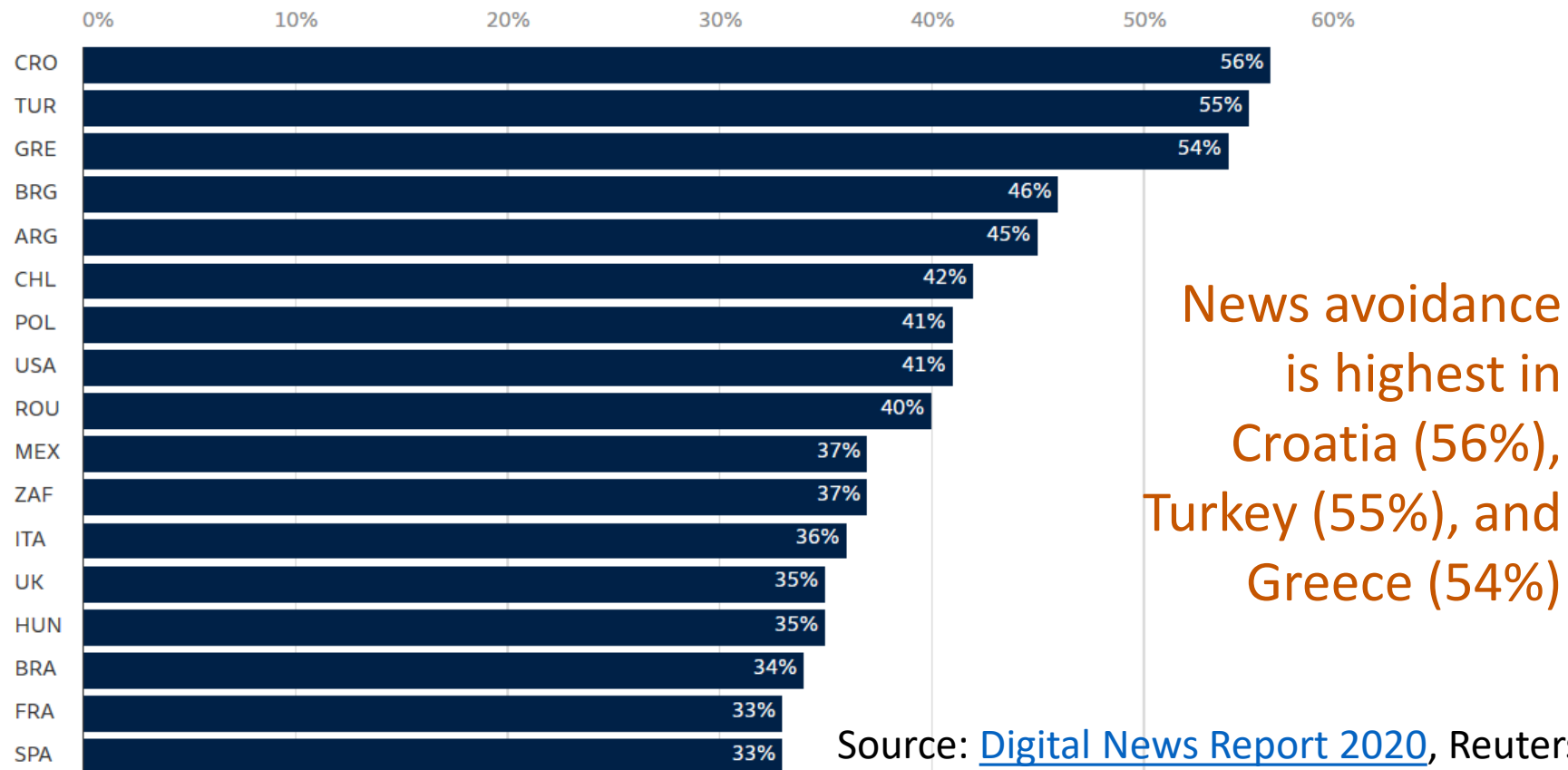




News avoidance extends

PROPORTION THAT OFTEN OR SOMETIMES ACTIVELY AVOIDS THE NEWS

All markets



Source: [Digital News Report 2020](#), Reuters Institute

Journalism threatened by fake content industry

Propaganda War



Freedom of the Press
Worldwide 2023

**NEARLY 1 OUT OF 2
RESPONDENTS VIEW
GOVERNMENT AND
MEDIA AS DIVISIVE
FORCES IN SOCIETY**

48%

Government

46%

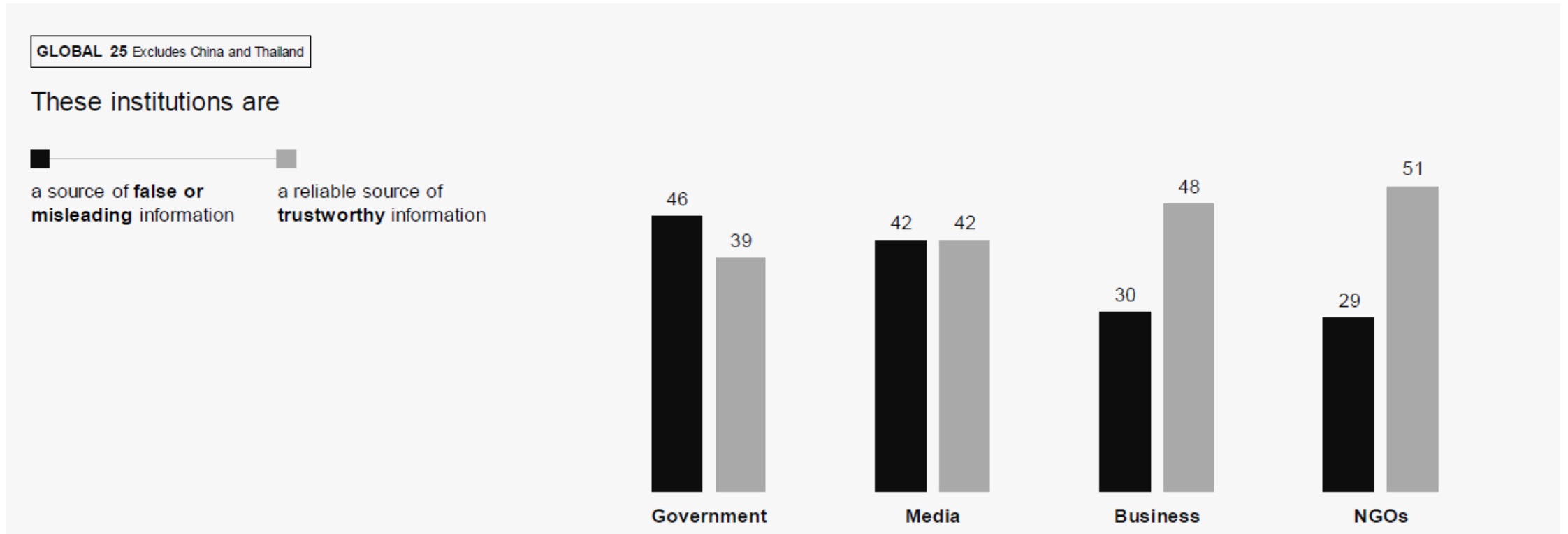
Media

VICIOUS CYCLE OF DISTRUST FUELED BY GOVERNMENT AND MEDIA

We find a world ensnared in a vicious cycle of distrust, fueled by a growing lack of faith in media and government. Through disinformation and division, these two institutions are feeding the cycle and exploiting it for commercial and political gain.

Government and Media Fuel Cycle of Distrust, Seen as Sources of Misleading Information

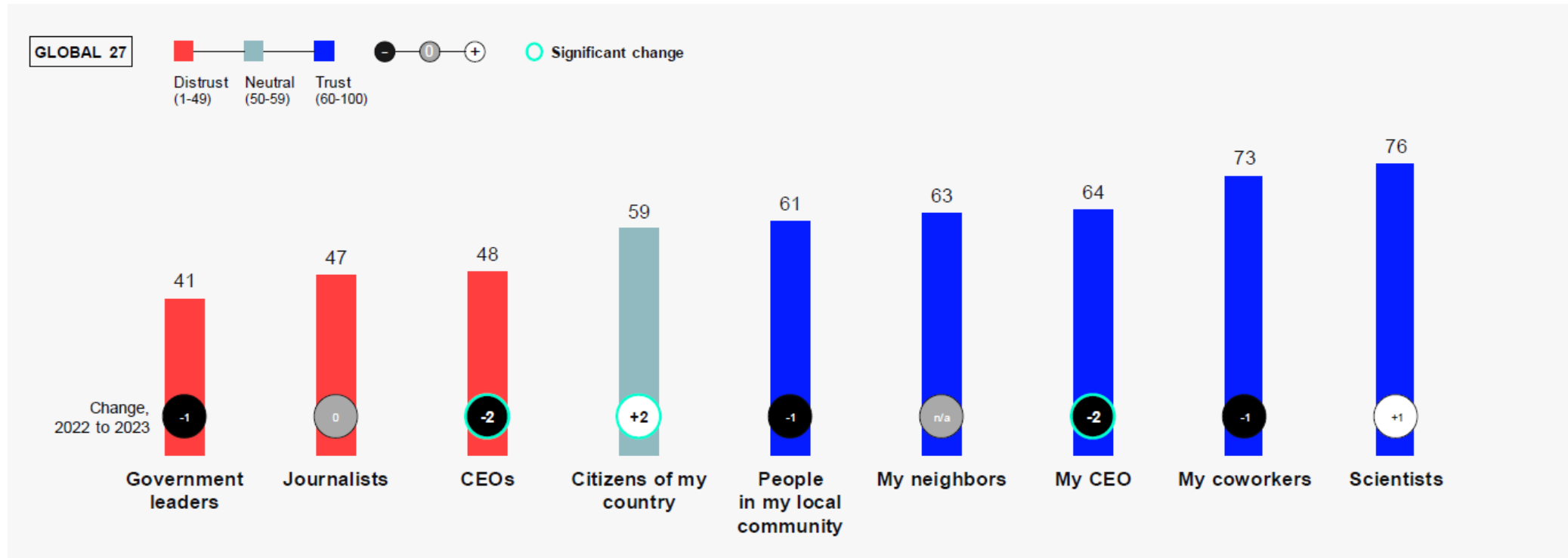
Percent who say



Source: [Edelman Trust Barometer 2023](#)

Institutional Leaders Distrusted

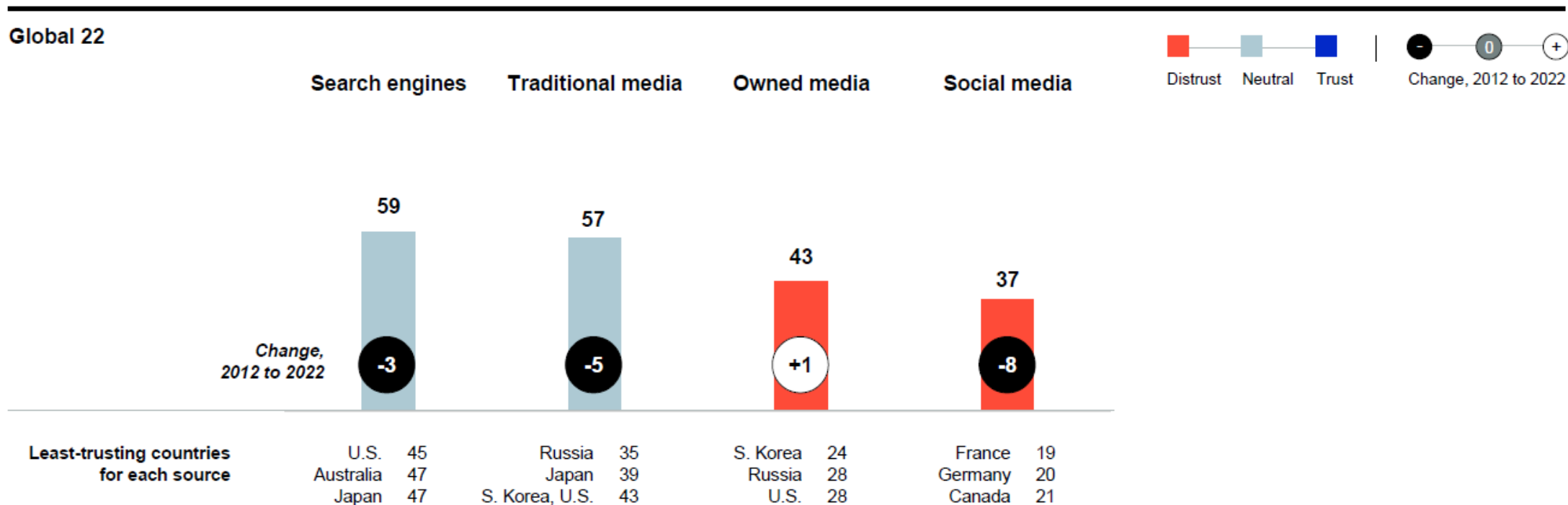
Percent trust



Source: [Edelman Trust Barometer 2023](#)

NEWS SOURCES FAIL TO FIX THEIR TRUST PROBLEM

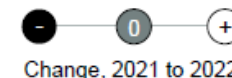
Percent trust



Source: [Edelman Trust Barometer 2022](#)

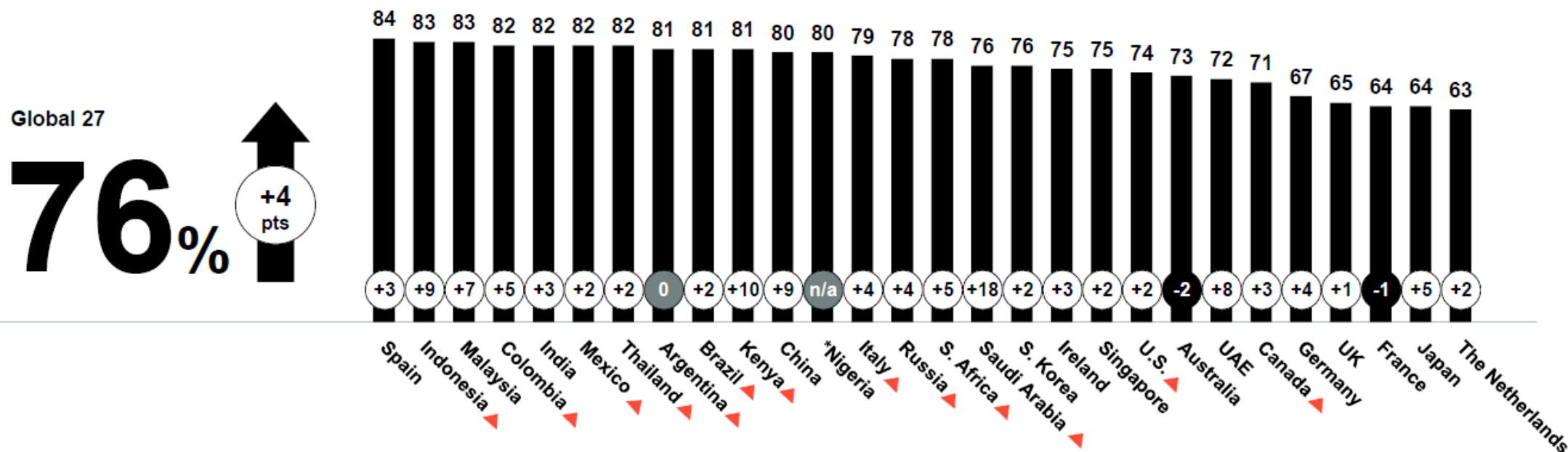
FAKE NEWS CONCERNS AT ALL-TIME HIGHS

Percent who agree



▲ All-time high in 13 of 27 countries

I worry about **false information or fake news** being used as a weapon

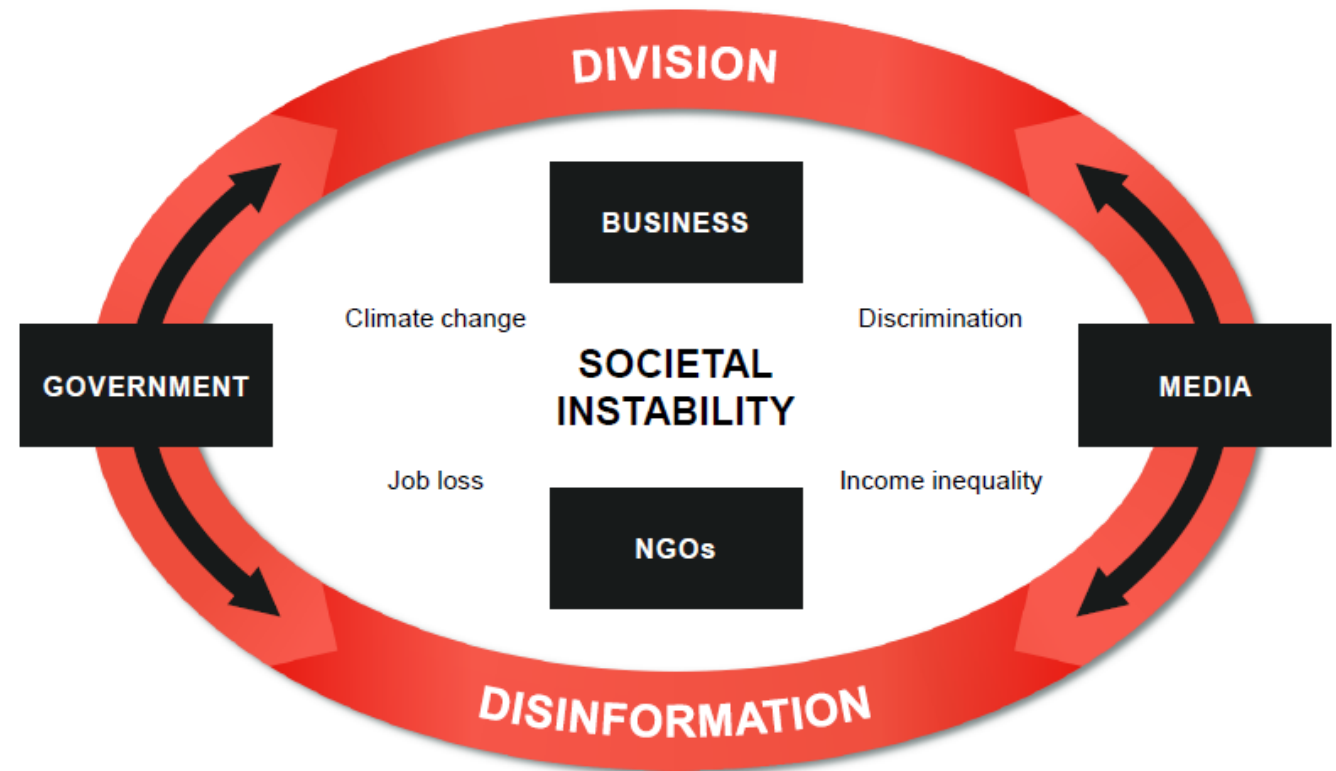


Source: [Edelman Trust Barometer 2022](#)

CYCLE OF DISTRUST THREATENS SOCIETAL STABILITY

Government and media feed cycle of division and disinformation for votes and clicks

NGOs and business pressured to take on societal problems beyond their abilities



MORE CONVINCED WE'RE BEING LIED TO BY SOCIETAL LEADERS

Percent who worry

Change, 2021 to 2022

67% ↑ +8 pts

Journalists and reporters

66% ↑ +9 pts

My country's government leaders

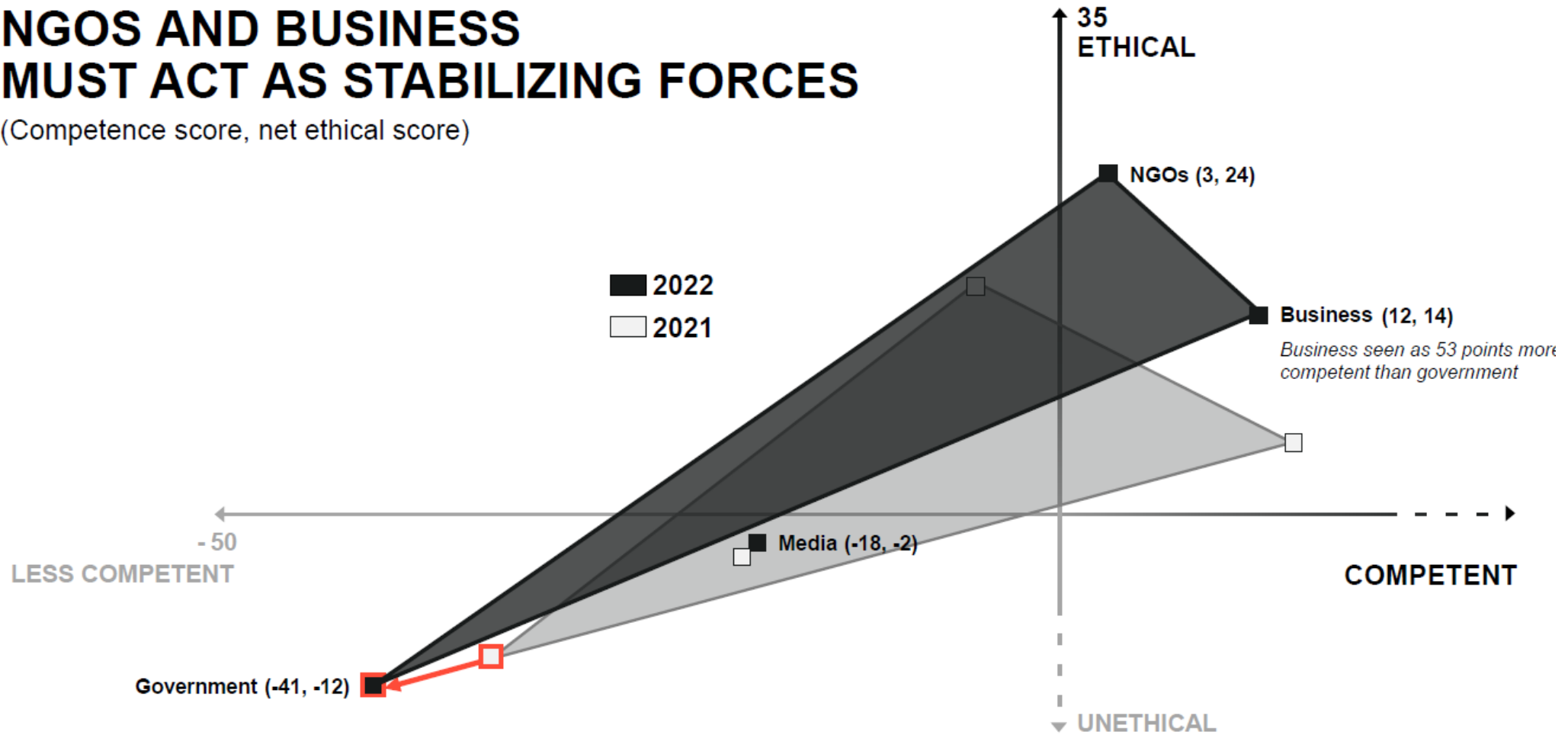
63% ↑ +7 pts

Business leaders

are **purposely trying to mislead people** by saying things they know are false or gross exaggerations

NGOS AND BUSINESS MUST ACT AS STABILIZING FORCES

(Competence score, net ethical score)



Source: [Edelman Trust Barometer 2022](#)

RESTORING TRUST IS KEY TO SOCIETAL STABILITY

Business societal role is here to stay

People want more business leadership, not less.

Demonstrate tangible progress

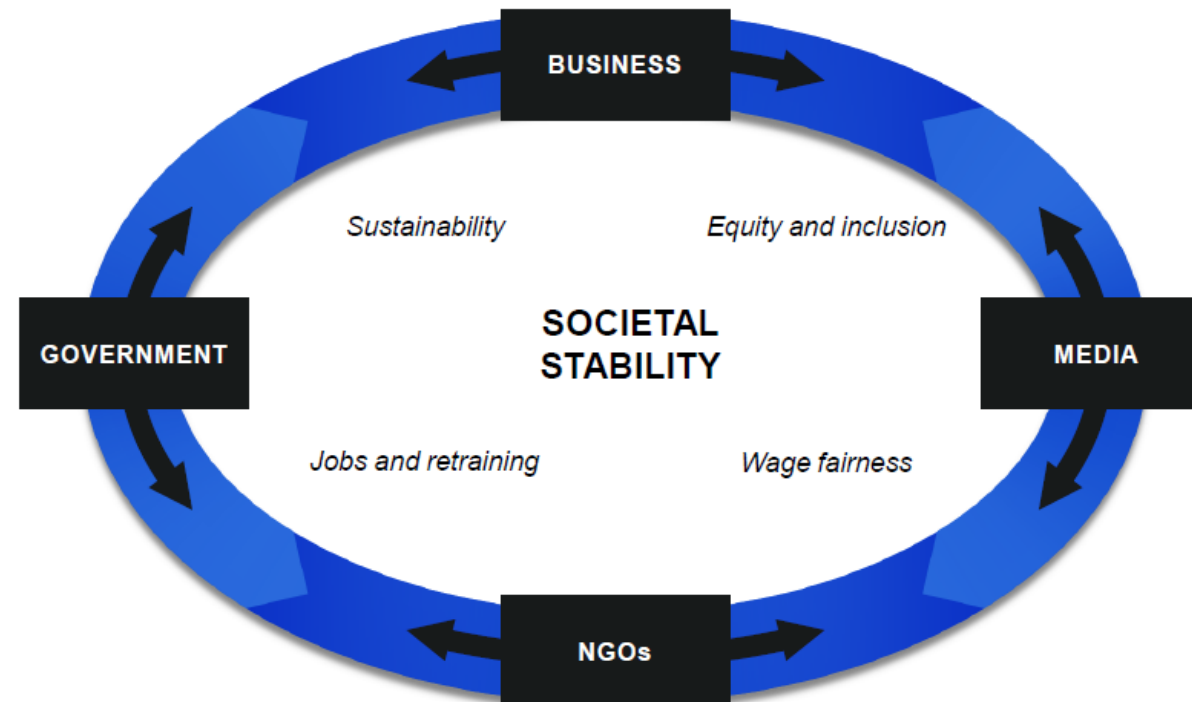
Restore belief in society's ability to build a better future: show the system works.

Leadership must focus on long-term thinking

Solutions over divisiveness; long-term thinking over short-term gain.

Every institution must provide trustworthy information

Clear, consistent, fact-based information is critical to breaking the cycle of distrust.



The new world is challenging



AI-powered propaganda, by ratcheting up cognitive manipulation and societal polarization, will increase.

Source: penser-critique.be

The next world will be... virtual

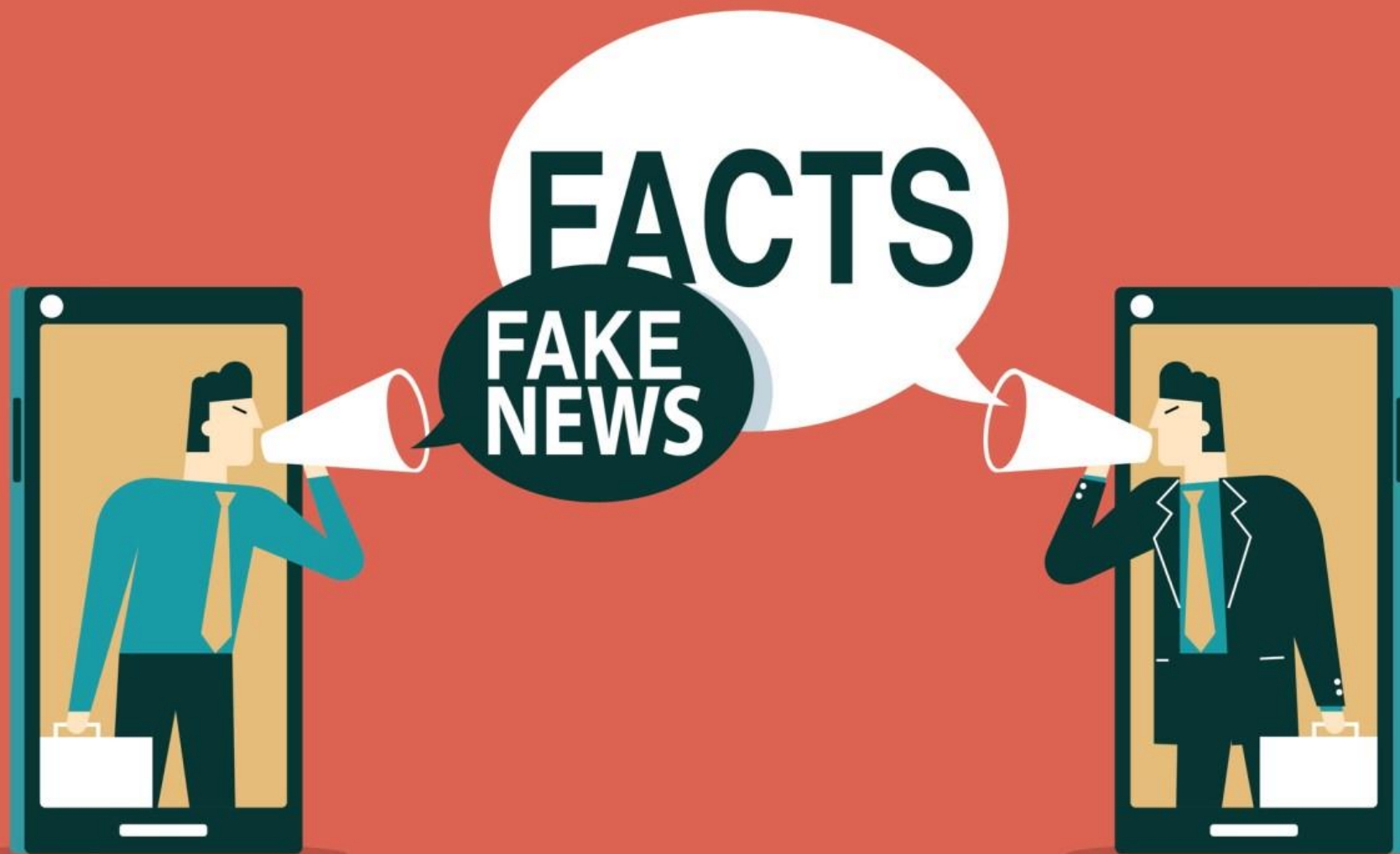


"... the metaverse is the ultimate expression of **social technology**".
M. Zuckerberg

The metaverse, short for "meta-universe," is a digital world where the real and virtual merge into a vision of science fiction.

Facebook announced it plans to **hire 10,000 people in the European Union** to build the metaverse.

Source: [euronews.com](https://www.euronews.com)



Information Disorder study



Examines the modern **information pollution** and provide a new framework for policy makers, legislators, researchers, technologists and practitioners on:

mis }
dis } **information**
mal }

Types of Information Disorder

FALSENESS

INTENT TO HARM

Misinformation

Unintentional mistakes such as inaccurate photo captions, dates, statistics, translations, or when satire is taken seriously.

Disinformation

Fabricated or deliberately manipulated audio/visual content. Intentionally created conspiracy theories or rumours.

Malinformation

Deliberate publication of private information for personal or corporate rather than public interest, such as revenge porn.
Deliberate change of context, date or time of genuine content.

Information Disorder

FIRSTDRAFT

7 CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION DISORDER



SATIRE OR PARODY

No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool



MISLEADING CONTENT

Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual



IMPOSTER CONTENT

When genuine sources are impersonated



FABRICATED CONTENT

New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm



FALSE CONNECTION

When headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content



FALSE CONTEXT

When genuine content is shared with false contextual information



MANIPULATED CONTENT

When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive

Address Information Disorder

**What can
we do?**

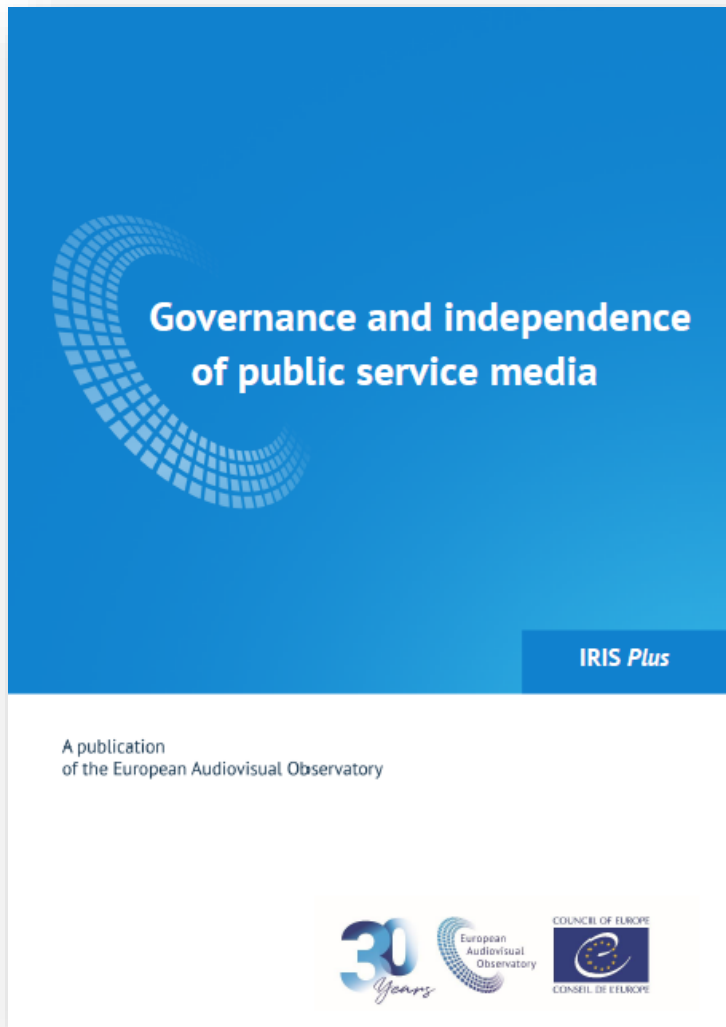
Technology Companies ?

National Governments ?

Media Organisations ?

Civil Society ?

International Institutions ?



Political challenges: the threats to democracy

- ✓ Threats to **institutional independence**
- ✓ Threats to **editorial independence**

Economic and technological challenges

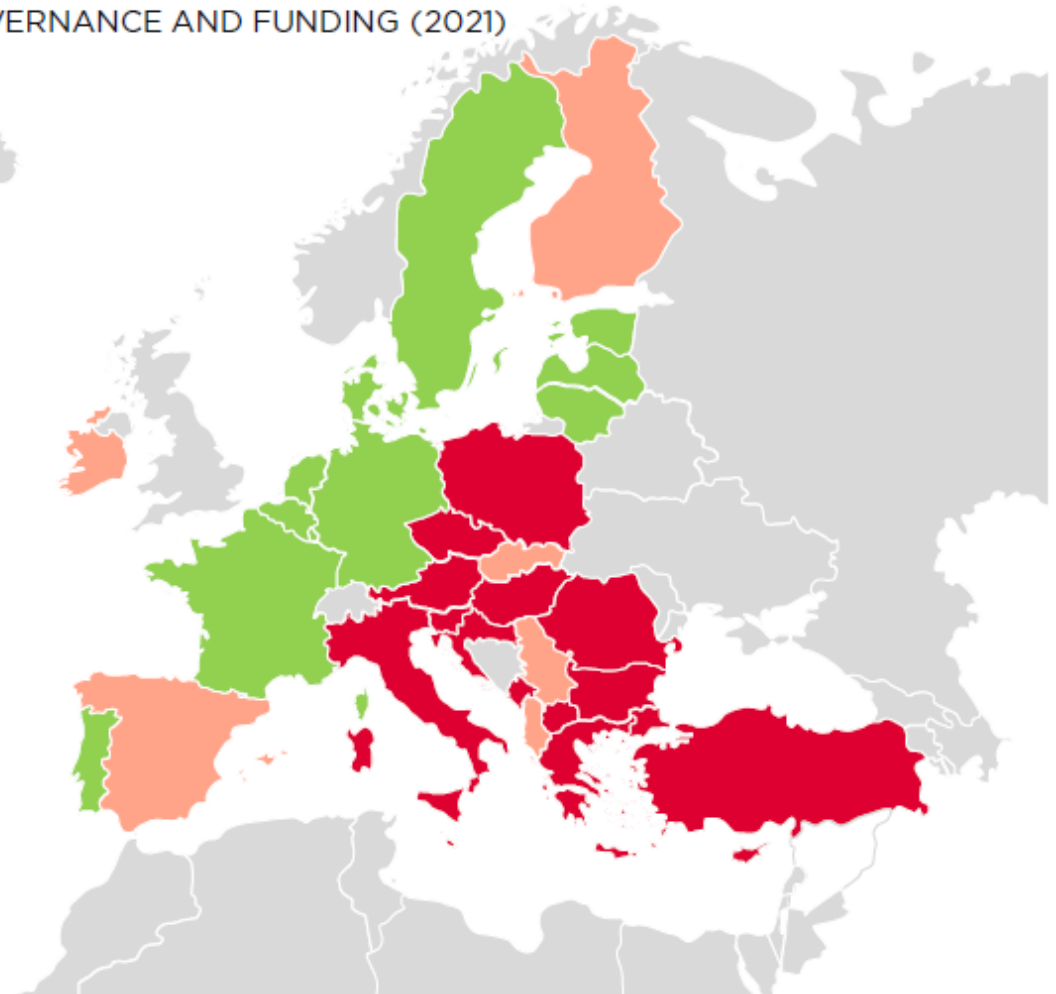
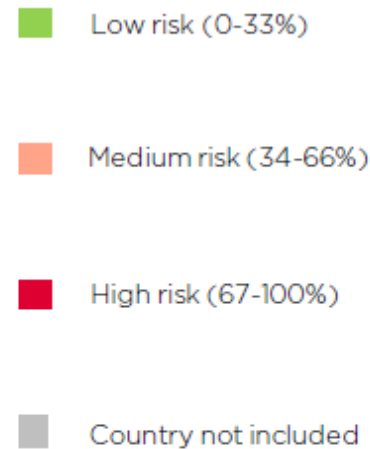
- ✓ Threats from **market pressure**
- ✓ Threats from **social media and algorithms**

Source: "[The independence of public service media through governance](#)", European Audiovisual Observatory, 2022

Public Service Media are at Risk

- ✓ Independence of PSM governance and funding is **at risk in almost 50% of countries**

RISK LEVEL FOR INDEPENDENCE OF PSM GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING (2021)



Source: "Democracy and PSM",
EBU, September 2021

Should platforms be regulated more?

Tech companies face the real threat of government regulation in reaction to socially harmful content they are publishing.

Research into industries including television, movies, and video games suggests effective self-regulation can benefit both society and companies, and keep government regulators at bay.



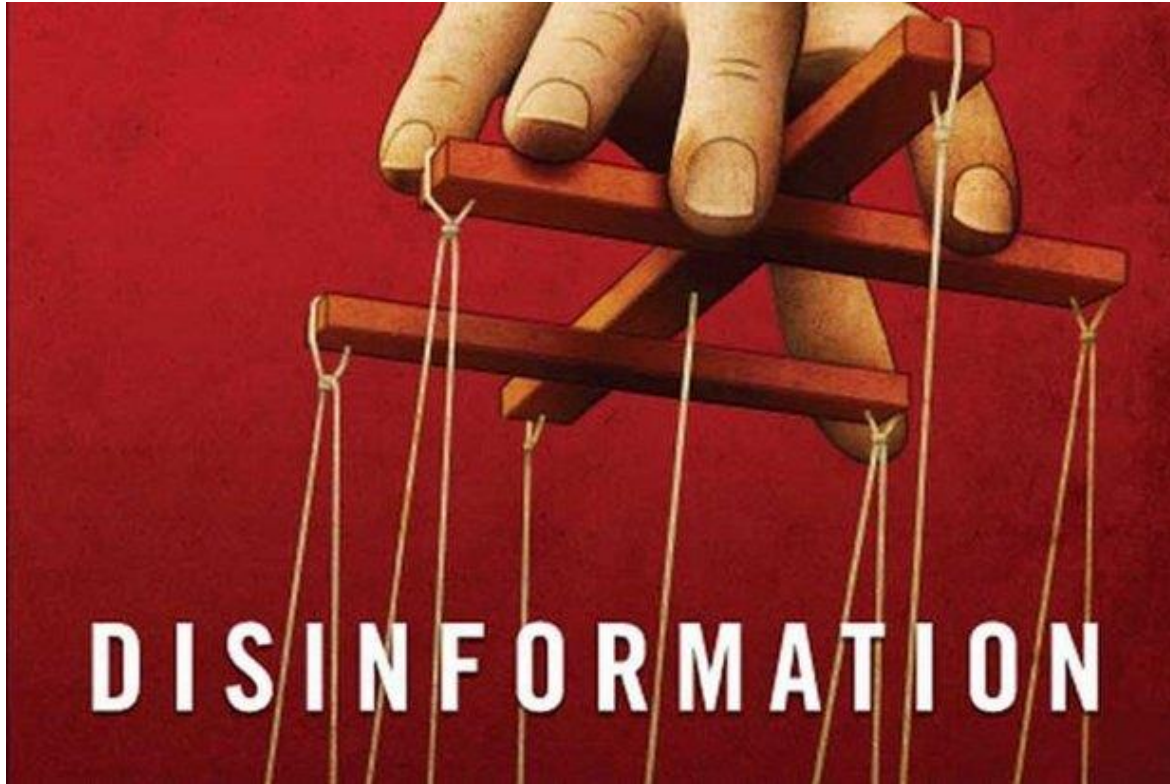
Social Media Companies Should Self-Regulate. NOW.

Given the increasing likelihood of government action, the goal of self-regulation should be to avoid a tragedy of the commons, where a lack of trust destroys the environment that has allowed digital platforms to thrive.

Safeguarding Democracy



- ✓ Tackling disinformation
- ✓ Addressing hate speech
- ✓ Developing media governance
- ✓ Promoting media pluralism
- ✓ Sustaining quality journalism
- ✓ Enhancing digital governance
- ✓ Framing artificial intelligence
- ✓ Promoting human rights in the digital world



Awareness raising

- Study “Information Disorder”
- Study “Discoverability of Public Interest Content Online”

Standards

- ✓ Convention on **Access to Official Documents**
- ✓ Recommendation on the roles and responsibilities of **internet intermediaries**
- ✓ Recommendation on the human rights impacts of **algorithmic systems**
- ✓ Recommendation on promoting a **favorable environment** for quality journalism in the digital age



Standards

- ✓ Recommendation on “hate speech”
- ✓ Recommendation on the media and the promotion of a culture of tolerance
- ✓ Recommendation on blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion
- ✓ Recommendation on a **Comprehensive approach to Combating Hate Speech**

Awareness raising

- “Addressing hate speech in the media: **the role of regulatory authorities and the judiciary**”, Regional conference, Zagreb 2018



Standards

- ✓ Guidance Note on **Content Moderation**
- ✓ Recommendation on **principles for media and communication governance**
- ✓ Recommendation on **electoral communication and media coverage of election campaigns**

Awareness raising

- ✓ Study: “Internet and electoral campaigns”
- ✓ Study “The Discoverability of Public Interest Content Online”
- ✓ Study on **Media and Information Literacy for seniors: “Digital Era? Also my era!”**

Standards

- Recommendation on **media pluralism and transparency of media ownership**
- Recommendation on the **roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries**



Awareness raising

- “Media Pluralism – How can we deliver?“, International Conference, Strasbourg, 2019



Standards

- ✓ Declaration on the **financial sustainability** of quality journalism in the digital age
- ✓ Recommendation on promoting a **favorable environment** for quality journalism in the digital age

Awareness raising

- ✓ “(Last) call for quality journalism?”
International conference, Ljubljana, 28-29 November 2019
- ✓ Study on supporting quality journalism through **media and information literacy**



Cooperation

- ✓ Partnership with Digital Companies
 - 26 companies and associations

Standards

- ✓ Recommendation with regard to **network neutrality**
- ✓ Recommendation on **Internet freedom**
- ✓ Recommendation on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries
- ✓ Recommendation on **the impacts of digital technologies on freedom of expression**

Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)2 on the role and responsibilities of internet intermediaries

acknowledges the curatorial and editorial roles of various platforms and calls on states to assign to them corresponding responsibilities.

- ✓ **states** are to ensure that laws and regulations applicable to intermediaries effectively safeguard the human rights and fundamental freedoms of users.
- ✓ **Internet intermediaries** have a similar responsibility to conform to international human rights standards. Transparency, oversight and effective remedies are key to human rights-compliant content moderation on the platforms.



The position of the European Court of Human Rights

Namely, search and **social media** platforms are taking **editorial decisions** through their content moderation practices for the purpose of restricting access to illegal content and dealing with legal, but contentious content.

Based on the landmark judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of **Delfi AS v. Estonia** (2015), **online publications have a duty to restrict hate speech and threats to physical integrity.**



Standards

- ✓ Declaration on on the manipulative capabilities of algorithmic processes
- ✓ Recommendation on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems
- ✓ Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights based on Council of Europe standards

Awareness raising

Study: “Algorithms and Human Rights”

Study: “Responsibility and AI”



Recommendation on disinformation

- a collection of tools to tackle the spread of disinformation and ensure the protection of EU values

Action plan on disinformation

- aims to strengthen EU capability and cooperation in the fight against disinformation;

European Media Freedom Act

- launches new rules to protect media pluralism and independence

Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)

- governs EU-wide coordination of national legislation on all audiovisual media — traditional TV broadcasts and on-demand services

Recommended PR tools and AI practices to build trust

Structural tools & frameworks

- Align with European frameworks
- Embed fact checking in workflows
- Crisis playbooks specifically for disinformation



Recommended PR tools and AI practices to build trust

Concrete PR/AI practices that build (not erode) trust

- Responsible use of generative AI
- Verification first content processes
- Radical transparency in campaigns
- Building resilient communities
- Measurement & accountability



**THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
ATTENTION !**



PR360

Communicating In A Post-Truth Era

11 December 2025

Wyndham Grand Athens, Athina Hall

Businesses and organisations around the world are turning to their communications leaders and agencies for strategic counsel and support, in their effort to make sense of a fast-changing world. Navigating through right and false, truth and lies, certainty and doubt, PR pros are utilizing all their unique skills to help companies speak their truth and engage with those who matter the most. PR360 will gather Greece's communications' industry this December to identify and share demanding conversations, practical case-studies and lots of inspiration, proving the effectiveness of a profession that has never been more valued and in demand.

