

HANDBOOK on Identifying and Countering Disinformation

Research Team



Digital cOMPetences INformatiOn EcoSystem

ID: 2021-1-RO01-KA220-HED-000031163

Introduction

The Handbook on Identifying and Countering Disinformation is the product of DOMINOES ERASMUS+ funded project, developed and implemented in a consortium with partners from Spain, Malta and Romania. The main goal of the project is to develop the citizens' abilities to recognise, evaluate and react appropriately to disinformation spread in the online environment. The research contained in this handbook focuses on six aspects.



1. Emerging trends in disinformation

The first chapter examines the current trends in the informational environment, the evolution of mainstream media and social media and how they influence the ways in which citizens gain access to information and the types of information they are exposed to. It also explores how narratives can be used in disinformation and propaganda campaigns, paying special attention to the rise in conspiracy theory dissemination. Another important issue that is investigated is the novel approach to employing intelligence in strategic communication as a means of setting the right frame of understanding for current societal evolutions.



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2. Aggravating factors for the dissemination of fake news

The second chapter focuses on aggravating factors for the dissemination of disinformation such as individual and group factors, the role of influencers and pseudo-analysts, societal factors and technological factors so as to better understand how they interact in order to facilitate the spread of disinformation and to set the scene for analysing the best approaches to countering or limiting its effects and effectiveness.



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3. Mitigating factors for the dissemination of fake news

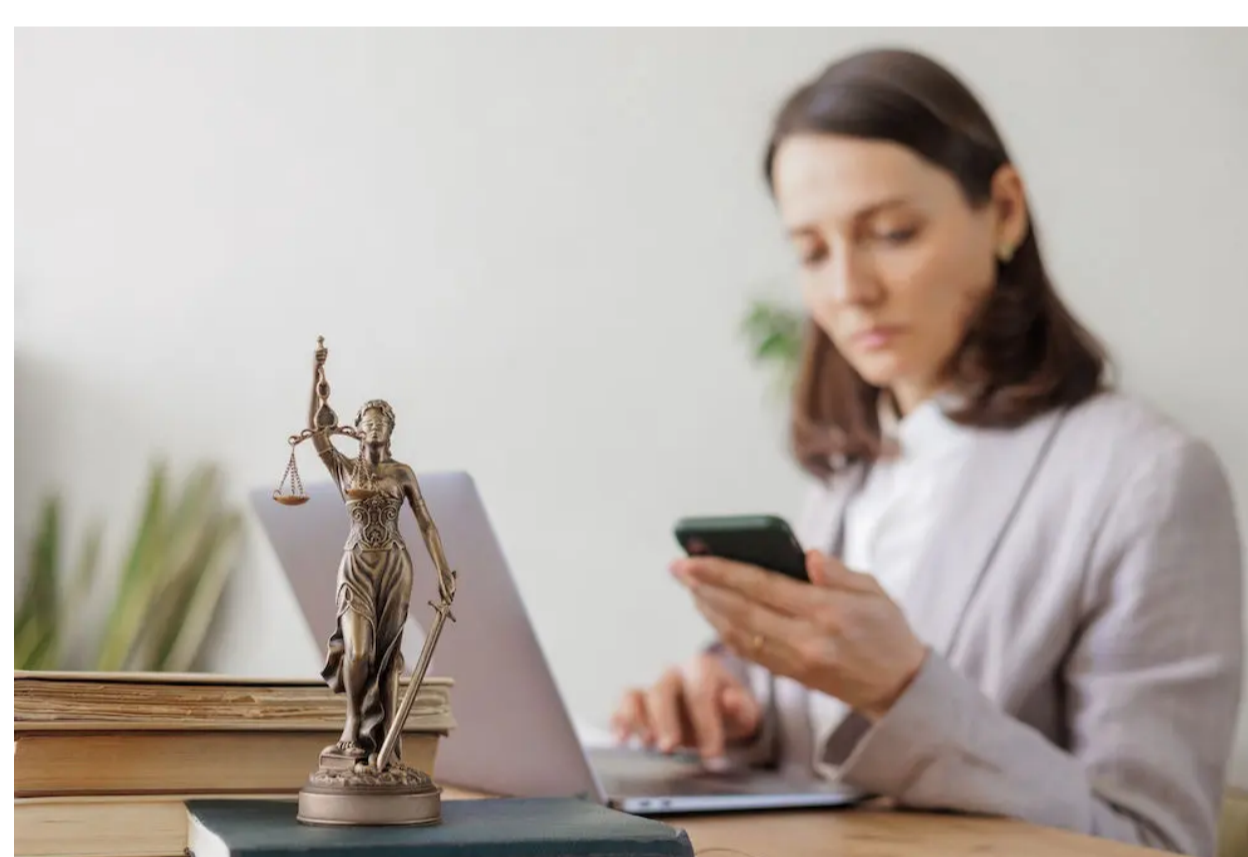
The third chapter delves into the best known and most-widely employed methods to mitigate the dissemination of disinformation. Firstly, it examines the discursive, argumentative, narrative mechanisms that make disinformation attractive to audiences, and secondly, it explores the advantages and possible short-comings of critical thinking, media literacy, debunking, fact-checking and prebunking as the most extensively used and recommended means of countering disinformation.



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4. Legal framework for countering disinformation

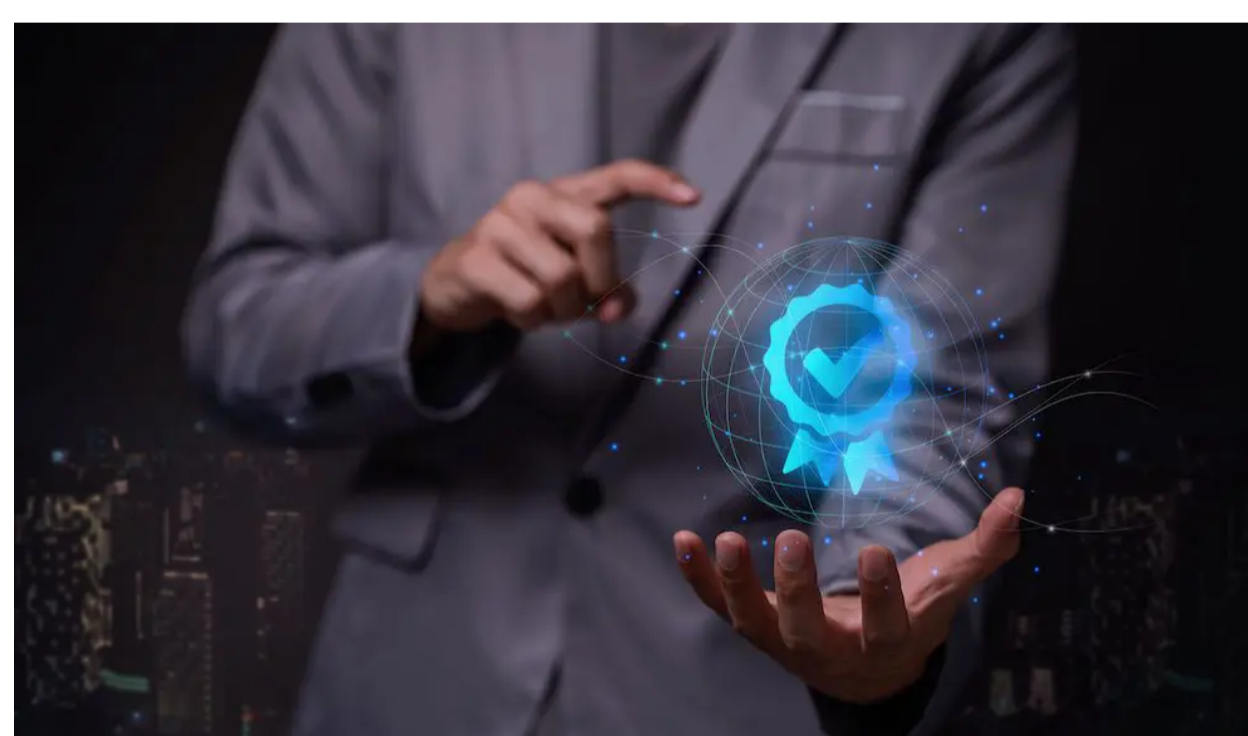
The fourth chapter presents and evaluates the existing legal framework for countering disinformation and propaganda, focusing on how the legislation interacts with media freedom and the right to free speech, what role data protection can play in countering disinformation and providing case studies of how existing legislation is formulated in three countries: Spain, Malta and Romania.



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5. Tech-driven solutions

The fifth chapter presents an overview of technological solutions, both existing and emerging, that could be employed to counter disinformation. The chapter introduces the technological solutions for spotting, flagging and removing disinformation as well as serious games solutions which are designed to prepare and train citizens to recognise it and thus limit its negative impact. The last section of the chapter explores the limitations that technology has with respect to identifying disinformation attempts.



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6. Public policy analysis

The sixth chapter provides an analysis of public policies operating at the European level, as well as at a national level, in the three countries Spain, Malta and Romania, and explores their strong points as well as their limitations with respect to their potential effects on stopping the spread of disinformation. The chapter also provides a potentially innovative policy solution, by translating an approach so far employed in intelligence: the whole-of-society approach.



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All the chapters in the Handbook on Identifying and Countering Disinformation are linked to a series of digital competencies extracted from Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (2022).

The handbook represents a basis for the development of these competencies, by explaining what disinformation is, how it operates, what effects it produces, what measures can be taken against it, all the time providing clear examples, case studies, presenting lessons learnt and good practices, and also explicitly analysing what still needs to be done and what the main challenges in the fight against disinformation are. Thus, the handbook represents a first necessary step to developing societal resilience against this increasingly wide-spread phenomenon that attempts to shape, or better said, misshape, public discourse and debate, as well as democratic processes and societies.