

Government and platform policy monitoring

Executive summary of D3.3.2

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EDMO BELUX is the Belgian and Luxembourgish hub for research on digital media and disinformation.

It brings together an experienced and extensive network of fact-checkers, media, disinformation analysts, media literacy organisations and academics to detect, analyse and expose emerging harmful disinformation campaigns. Through rapid alerts in the network, fact checks and investigative reporting reach first responders to disinformation (media, civil society, government) in order to minimize the impact of disinformation campaigns. In addition, through media literacy campaigns, EDMO BELUX raises awareness and builds resilience among citizens and media to combat disinformation. Finally, the hub embeds its disinformation monitoring, analysis and awareness into a multidisciplinary research framework on the impact of disinformation and platform responses on democratic processes.

Government responses to online disinformation unpacked by Samuel Cipers, Trisha Meyer and Jonas Lefevere

<https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/government-responses-to-online-disinformation-unpacked> (published in Internet Policy Review in Dec 2023)

This article collects, categorises and analyses responses (n=239) to online disinformation from 103 countries, ten international and regional organisations across six continents (through 2021). We categorised each initiative into eleven non-mutually exclusive categories according to intent, objective and type of disinformation targeted. We also set up a comparative research design to assess whether different types of governments (democratic/authoritarian) approach the fight against online disinformation differently, whether the amount of press freedom in a country has a significant correlation with the response types, and whether the overall wealth of a nation (measured in GDP per capita) impact the (diversity of) responses. The results show an evolution of the focus of government responses to online disinformation over time. Most crucially, we find that democracies, with high levels of press freedom, have a more holistic approach to countering online disinformation, focusing comparatively more on the integrity of their election process, media and education initiatives, and that countries with a higher GDP have more initiatives and legislation in place than countries with a lower GDP. Authoritarian countries generally formulate broad legislation that is also often incorporated into their penal code.

“Free Speech is Not Free Reach”. How Platforms Self-regulate Misinformation, Political Ads and Election Campaigns by Samuel Cipers and Trisha Meyer

(accepted for *Revue Politique Européenne* – please contact trisha.meyer@vub.be for access)

Social media platforms are not mere ‘soapboxes’ in the public square. Their algorithms, advertising rules, content moderation and account policies shape what is acceptable form and speech. This article analyses platform measures on online political campaigning. We track four social media platforms (Meta, Google, Twitter and TikTok), assessing which types of content and account moderation they prioritise and the frequency and timing of (self-reported) interventions taken in the fight against (political/election) mis/disinformation. In addition, we analyse their policies on online political campaigning, which overlap with, yet are distinct from misinformation measures and compare these approaches against the priorities and goals set out in the renewed EU Code of Practice on Disinformation and the proposed EU Regulation on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising. The article contributes to the special issue on EU digital policies with insights on social media platforms’ audited self-regulatory role. By studying the role, strategies, success and ultimately the power of these actors, we broaden our understanding of EU policy-making in the digital domain. We argue that platform policies and practices merit analytical scrutiny as they determine the boundaries of acceptable speech online, and that measures to regulate political speech should be understood as more than addressing political advertising alone, but also include policies regarding political accounts and political/election misinformation.

Transparency as an empty signifier? Assessing transparency in EU and platform initiatives on online political advertising and actors by *Trisha Meyer and Agnieszka Vetulani- Cęgiel*

(under review with European Journal for Political Research – please contact trisha.meyer@vub.be for access)

The aim of the paper is to investigate how ‘transparency’ in political advertising is understood by the EU and online platforms, and what the projected responsibility of platforms is, in a context of ongoing political and policy debates on regulating online platforms. We compare and confront ongoing EU policy initiatives (the revised Code of Practice on Disinformation and the proposed Regulation on Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising) with platform policies (community standards) and practices (platform design) undertaken to moderate political actors and advertising. We argue that the concept of transparency is used as an ‘empty signifier’: meaningful at the political and declarative level but when translated into practice, leads to diverse results. After briefly reviewing literature on the digital public sphere, platform accountability and transparency in the context of online political advertising, the paper traces the concepts of ‘political advertising’, ‘political actor’, ‘transparency’ and the projected platform responsibility in the aforementioned EU policy initiatives, compared against the policies and practices of several platforms (Google, Mastodon, Meta, Microsoft, Telegram, TikTok, Twitter/X). The paper thus seeks to contribute to academic and policy debates on platform and political advertising transparency in light of the upcoming European elections.