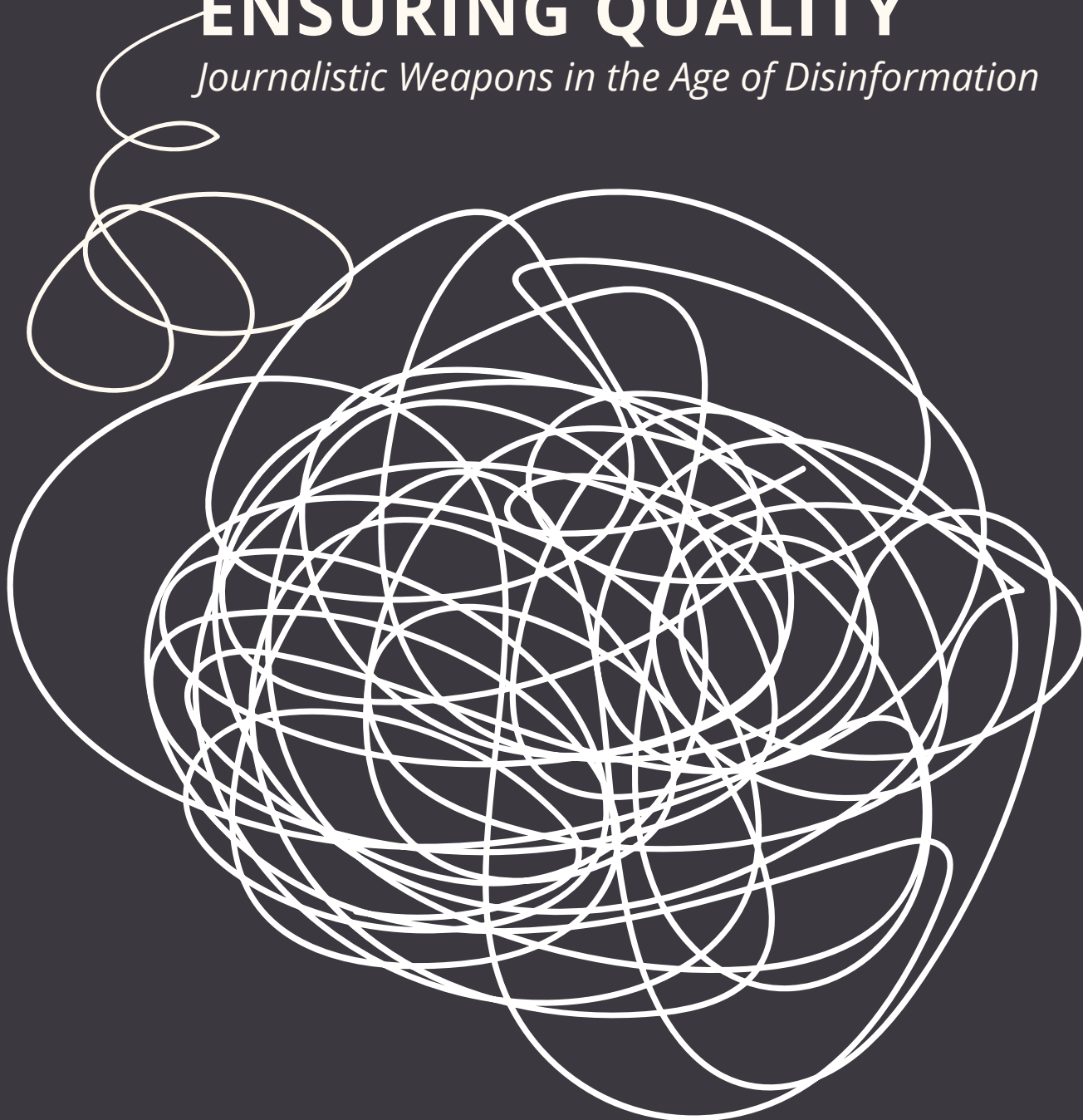


SEEKING TRUTH, ENSURING QUALITY

Journalistic Weapons in the Age of Disinformation



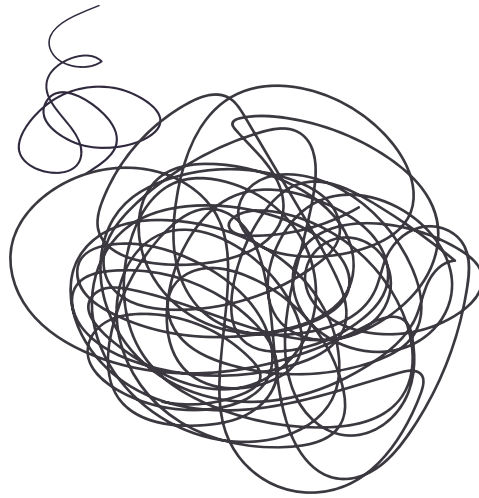
Media Cluster
Norway



NORDIS



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About this publication

Seeking Truth, Ensuring Quality: Journalistic Weapons in the Age of Disinformation brings together leading perspectives from European media to address journalism's urgent challenges. Published by the University of Bergen in collaboration with Media Cluster Norway, this publication is a part of the Journalistic Weapons conference organised in Brussels on April 28 2025. It highlights the diverse efforts that are underway to uphold information integrity, counter disinformation, and strengthen journalism's role as a cornerstone of democratic life.

In addition to documenting ongoing initiatives, the publication aims to raise awareness of the urgent need for sustained support for journalism through a multi-stakeholder approach. With voices from newsrooms, academia, civil society, and public institutions, it emphasises the shared responsibility of all sectors to preserve the democratic value of journalism. Therefore, this publication also intends to be a resource for everyone involved in safeguarding public discourse, from newsroom professionals to policymakers and academics.

About the University of Bergen



UNIVERSITY
OF BERGEN

The University of Bergen (UiB) is a modern, international research university. We are a classical knowledge- and culture-bearing institution founded on European democratic values, with academic freedom as a guiding principle. Long-term and fundamental research of high international quality, along with research-based education, form the foundation of all our activities. UiB has participated in the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation since their inception and is among the most successful universities in Norway in securing funding across the Programmes' diverse funding portfolio.

At the Department of Information Science and Media Studies, researchers explore how digitalisation transforms media, technology, and society by bridging media studies and information science. Media research examines the role of media in democracy, culture, and communication, drawing on both historical and social perspectives. Information science investigates digital technologies, their development, and societal impact, integrating informatics with social science theories. Research at the department is highly interdisciplinary, combining insights from the humanities, social sciences, and technology to address key challenges such as semantic technologies, cultural dissemination, and media regulation in the digital age.

About Media Cluster Norway



Media Cluster
Norway

Media Cluster Norway is a leading innovation cluster, bringing together news media, academia and cutting-edge media technology, thus encompassing the entire media value chain in one integrated ecosystem. This makes the cluster uniquely positioned to foster collaboration on groundbreaking projects such as Project Reynir, a leading initiative to combat the threat of disinformation powered by generative AI, and to ensure content authenticity. Globally recognized as a centre of expertise, Media Cluster Norway sets the standard for innovation and collaboration in the media industry.

About NORDIS



The Nordic Observatory for Digital Media and Information Disorder (NORDIS) is the EDMO hub dedicated to addressing the challenges of misinformation, disinformation and other forms of digital information disorder in the Nordic region. As an independent, non-partisan consortium, NORDIS brings together leading universities, fact-checking organisations and civil society actors from Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Its mission is to investigate the roots and patterns of information disorder, while empowering citizens through media literacy initiatives and public education. By identifying the most critical sources and drivers of harmful content online, NORDIS develops practical models, tools and strategies to strengthen democratic resilience in Northern Europe.

Within the broader European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) network, NORDIS contributes to a pan-European effort to counter digital threats through multidisciplinary collaboration. NORDIS partners publish fact-checks, conduct rigorous research, develop educational programmes and provide actionable recommendations to public institutions, civil society and the private sector. In close alignment with EDMO's guiding principles, NORDIS supports transparent, evidence-based responses to disinformation and strengthens an information ecosystem that is both trustworthy and inclusive. The NORDIS consortium includes Faktisk.no (Norway), University of Bergen (Norway), Källkritikbyrå (Sweden), TjekDet (Denmark), Avoin Yhteiskunta Ry (Finland), Factive (Norway) and Linneuniversitetet (Sweden).

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INTRODUCTION

Seeking truth, ensuring quality: Journalistic weapons in the age of disinformation

Journalism, a fundamental pillar of European democratic life, is today under pressure in new and unprecedented ways. A range of complex challenges are increasingly testing its role and cultural authority, threatening not only its status as a trusted knowledge-producing institution but also the very foundation of democracy itself. Yet, despite its critical importance, the democratic value of journalism continues to be underestimated.

Among the most pressing challenges are structural shifts in the information environment, a decline in institutional trust, political polarisation, and new threats of mis- and disinformation, lately amplified by emerging AI technologies. The rise of social media has fuelled news avoidance, with many people relying on fragmented and often misleading information, further eroding trust in traditional journalism. Journalists themselves have become easy targets for those seeking to discredit credible reporting, with increasing harassment and threats undermining their ability to do their jobs. In this environment, where actors hostile to democracy intentionally spread lies and stoke rage, efforts to maintain and support independent, truth-seeking, quality journalism seem more urgent than ever. Fact-checking and investigative reporting are essential not only to expose falsehoods but also to rebuild trust and engage meaningfully with audiences.

However, quality journalism is both time-consuming and resource-intensive. It requires skilled professionals, financial investment, and editorial independence at a time when many newsrooms are under-resourced and struggling for sustainable business models. Funding therefore remains a key concern, as does the need for closer and better collaboration, not just within the media industry itself but also across different sectors. Going forward, collaboration between journalists, technologists, and academics seems like the best and most effective weapon in defense of quality journalism that can make a difference for democracy.

In this collection, the University of Bergen (UIB) has invited nine key stakeholders from across European organisations to address these matters. The contributors will expand on some of these pressing threats currently facing journalism and showcase how independent, truth-seeking quality journalism can serve as a countermeasure in the public interest and contribute to a more enlightened and just society. Together, these inspiring contributions point toward different ways journalism can respond to the current crisis of the “information disorder” through responsible innovation, more cross-border and cross-sector collaboration, better and more sustainable funding models.

The value of journalism extends far beyond money, and in these challenging times, it requires ongoing support – including political support and funding – as a critical tool to safeguard our democracies. The relationship between quality journalism and democracy is reciprocal; Europe can have neither without the other.

Fredrik Bjercknes and Laurence Dierickx
Researchers, University of Bergen

From global to regional:

How a global research synthesis on information ecosystems can bring key insights for the evaluation of the EU news media landscape



CAMILLE GRENIER
Executive Director,
Forum on Information and
Democracy

If you are a climate activist, the international research community has brought you at least a couple of gifts: an authoritative consensus on the fact that, yes, humankind is causing global warming, and a figure you can rely on to call on decision makers to act, the 1.5°C limit. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has given societies around the world a common framework to understand the changes we witness in our daily lives, measure the risk and act.

What equivalent do we have for the information space? As an important part of humanity does experience a sort of global warming in the public debate, what does research tell us about the current situation of information ecosystems? How can we measure its health? What kinds of data are available for us, as societies, to understand the changes we witness, measure the risk and act?

When launching the Observatory on Information and Democracy in 2022 and its first research cycle in 2023, this was the ambition: build on thousands of papers from and outside of academia to depict the most precise picture of information ecosystems, its underlying structure and impact on the public debate and democracy.

The first report of the Observatory is one of the first attempts to, despite the lack of data, reach a clear depiction of the scientific consensus on what we know, and what we don't know. And one thing any reader will notice is the breadth of the problem: no less than 39 questions have been asked to a team of rapporteurs led by Robin Mansell, Professor Emeritus at the London School of Economics (LSE).

It took the gathering of more than 3,000 entries, their mapping and a thorough analysis to finalize the nine chapters of the first report of the Observatory: Information Ecosystems and Troubled Democracy.

And amongst the many doors one can open to enter into the study of information ecosystems, the steering committee of the Observatory decided to open three: data governance, AI and the media. Mis- and disinformation have been treated as a transversal theme throughout the research cycle. The report highlights the interconnectivity of the fields leading to insights on how to strengthen the governance of information ecosystems, provides high-level policy priorities and suggests some priorities to fill gaps in the research.

As we pull the threads of this massive report, highlighting how some conclusions are particularly relevant to different contexts or policy debates, a key notion often comes back: over the last three months since the publication of the report, and taking advantage of a series of events hosted by research centers around the world, the report's focus on power asymmetries in the information space has certainly been the most debated.

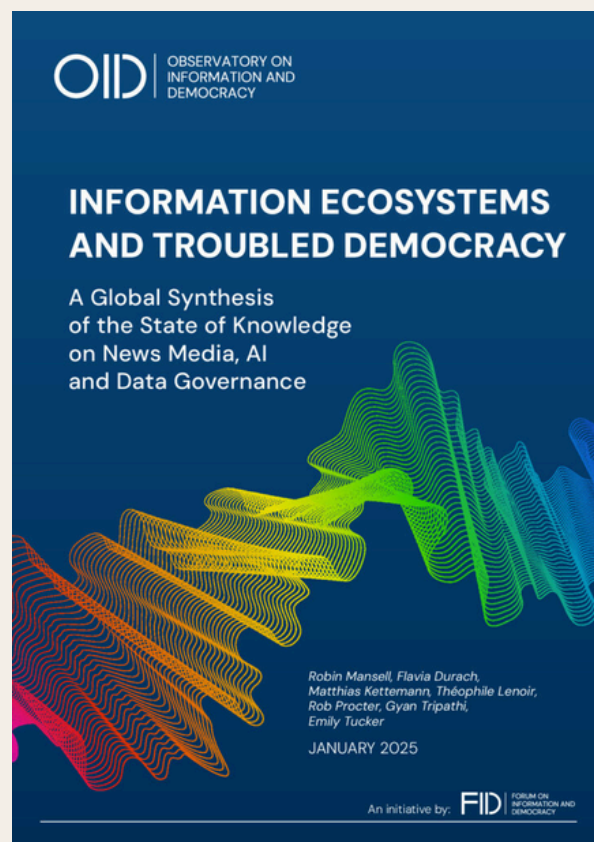
Analysing the power dynamics, dependencies and how they impact the news landscape are critical to evaluate what is at play in the current media industry in Europe. For instance the recent 'experiment' of Google to divest from news is a clear example that an arbitrary decision can not only prevent media from reaching their audience but also audiences from having access to reliable information.

Through search or social networks, the oligopoly of the tech industry has concentrated the power of news distribution in private hands as never seen before. It has become urgent for the future of democracy to counterbalance this power, even more so as the concentration is now extending to the production of content itself with generative AI.

As presented above, the wealth of the report resides in its ability to cover and connect different fields, topics and approaches. While a full chapter is dedicated to News media, information integrity and public sphere, also covering issues related to trust, news avoidance and polarization, other chapters bring important insights on how news media interact with AI or how datafication is also impacting the information landscape.

It also shows the current limits of research including its Western bias and the lack of data due to the opacity of tech companies and highlights some key priority for future research, notably the central question about the structural inequalities, political alignments and social transformations [which] prevent news media independence and stand in the way of treating news media as a 'public good'.

Further research, based on more data, is undoubtedly needed to complement our understanding of information ecosystems. But this first attempt to synthesize the state of the knowledge provides a clear snapshot of the issues, forces and dynamics at play. It can represent the evidence basis of future policy interventions and will hopefully feed into the work of groups claiming functioning information ecosystems and an enabling environment for free independent and pluralistic media.



**Information Ecosystems and Troubled Democracy:
A Global Synthesis of the State of Knowledge on
News Media, AI, and Data Governance**

This inaugural and comprehensive report from the Observatory on Information and Democracy provides the first global synthesis of how information ecosystems – shaped by news media, artificial intelligence (AI), and data governance – affect the future of democracy. Drawing on more than 1,600 sources and contributions from more than 60 researchers, the report provides an interdisciplinary, evidence-based understanding of the intersection of technology, information, and democratic processes.

Journalism as a public good



RENATE SCHROEDER
Director
European Federation of Journalists

Europe's information ecosystem is at a crossroads. Disinformation and filter bubbles, oligarchic media capture and attacks on public-service media, unprecedented attacks on journalists amid their subjection to precarious working conditions—all are leading to a brain drain from the industry and an increasingly toxic information system. The digital transition has disrupted the traditional business model based on advertising revenues, threatening the survival of journalism and editorial media, especially local ones. Given the increasingly hostile attitude by many politicians, especially in the United States, towards “legacy media” and journalists, and the spreading news avoidance and/or unwillingness to pay for news, it is high time to stand up for journalism as a public good.

Why do we need independent journalism

Many international human rights bodies, including the Council of Europe, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), are concerned that the erosion of protections for freedom of expression and media freedom is a key factor in the wider democratic backsliding that Europe has witnessed in recent years. The OSCE Media Freedom Representative has been reiterating that there can be no security without media freedom and the recently published research report “Media Freedom, Democracy, and Security” concludes: “To ensure international and domestic security, it is essential to protect and promote independent and pluralistic media”. The latest report “Europe Press Freedom Report: Confronting Political Pressure, Disinformation, and the Erosion of Media Independence”,

the annual assessment of press freedom in Europe by the partner organisations of the Council of Europe Platform for the Safety of Journalists, confirms the worsening situation of journalists and independent media. Technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence, have introduced new risks to press freedom. AI-generated disinformation campaigns, deepfake videos, and automated harassment are increasingly being used to discredit journalists and erode public trust in media. Besides the great opportunities of AI, 2024 highlighted the first documented cases of AI-generated disinformation campaigns targeting journalists directly. As these technologies become more sophisticated and easily accessible, the role of journalism in combating disinformation and verifying facts becomes even more crucial. Policymakers will have to include AI governance in broader media protection strategies.

Foreign interference, disinformation, and numerous attacks on and threats against democracy are expected to continue in ever-greater numbers and more sophisticated ways. The European Federation of Journalists along with media freedom and media literacy and civil society groups, believe that journalism as a public good must be included in any security, resilience and democracy approach. Journalists are trained fact-checkers and, if enabled and given the needed resources, they do explain, analyse, connect, engage and yes fact-check with ever more divergent audiences. Despite its shortcomings, journalism, at its best, has much to offer to the public, especially at the local level, where news deserts become almost a norm in many regions of Europe.

Viability

Ensuring the sustainability of journalism is crucial for the health of democracy. Although subscriptions can be considered a desirable business model, getting users to pay for news has proved to be challenging and, ultimately, insufficient. Advertising, on the other hand, faces the fierce competition with digital platforms, and the related dependence in terms of obtaining visibility, representing, thus, a structural limitation of this model. While membership, crowdfunding, donations and grants offer a great potential to support the development of local journalism, these, however, cannot work alone but only in combination with other revenue streams. Amongst new policy approaches to enhance sustainability of the media, there is room for taxation measures, notably tax-incentives to enable more news media organisations to assume non-profit status, and, conversely, taxing digital services to funnel new funds to support public interest journalism.

But when Generative AI uses journalistic and editorial materials notably to produce, without permission or remuneration, parasitic press-like content at minimal cost and without editorial oversight, the future of journalism is at stake. Further research is clearly needed to solidify our understanding of the challenges and opportunities surrounding media's economic sustainability (see also <https://cmpf.eui.eu/emerging-business-models-for-local-media/>)

The way forward

We need a broad alliance of civil society—readers and listeners, journalists' organisations, media and digital literacy groups, AI experts, and academics—to sustain journalism and convince the public, policy-makers and politicians that, just as environmental protection is urgent to counter the climate crisis, protection of journalists and journalism is essential to resolve the information crisis. Without citizens enjoying the right to know, without accountability and transparency—without ethical journalism, in other words—there is no democracy.

The EU has done more than ever before to create a more safe and sustainable space for journalism, not least by pursuing the European Media Freedom Act. It has supported many projects linked to press freedom and journalistic self-regulation, media deserts, the safety of journalists, cross-border investigative journalism and freelancers, as well as social dialogue, skills and training. Altogether, around €50 million per year has gone to media organisations under these rubrics.

This is however not enough. Independent professional journalism, the best antidote to disinformation, is expensive. Due prominence, audience engagement, new journalistic formats, support for media literacy and the right use of AI are crucial to remake journalism as a tool for citizens to connect, debate, learn and engage in public discourse in today's polarised societies. This requires sustainable business models, which guarantee decent working conditions and fair remuneration.



European
Federation of
Journalists

There is no preparedness without a stable and solidly funded multi-layered infrastructure



PAULA GORI

Secretary General of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)
European University Institute

Sometimes to one problem there corresponds one solution. At other times the issue includes too much complexity, and the solution is rather a set of different solutions. You need them all. Reducing that complexity would inevitably impact the effectiveness of the response and probably create harm. This is even more key when fundamental rights such as, but not limited to, freedom of expression and information are at stake. And this is why the response to disinformation is a multifaceted and multilayered one. And this is also why we need an infrastructure to implement it.

A lot has been written and said about the various stakeholders involved in such a response and the need for full commitment on all sides to ensure the effectiveness of the solutions package. Lots of evidence, especially in the last years, also clearly shows that disinformation is an issue which does not impact elections only. A lot has also been shared on the speed at which the different disinformation techniques evolve as well as on the changes in the media diet of society. What makes the whole exercise even more complex is that disinformation is not only about the content and the techniques, but also about the actors behind it. As such, it is a matter of impact on citizens' rights and, depending on the actor, it can also become an issue of security.

Before diving into the multilayered approach, it is worth recalling that the disinformation phenomenon is supported by a number of variables, which are not limited to the information ecosystem, and have an impact on societal resilience.

Disinformation is indeed the symptom of a wider societal historical moment where low economic security, reduction of social rights, loneliness, inequalities, distrust in institutions and societal frustration do play a role in the way we look for and digest information as well as in how much we value facts. Consequently, the multi-stakeholder process to tackle disinformation should be inserted into a wider multi-sector-policy approach, with the goal of strengthening the wellbeing of citizens.

The multi-stakeholder and multilayered approach is somehow the DNA which is included in the different policy approaches to strengthen the information ecosystem. Just to mention a few examples, the Code of Practice (now Code of Conduct under the DSA) on Disinformation is a self-regulatory tool signed by online platforms and search engines, advertisers, civil society organisations and fact-checkers. Its taskforce also includes the European Commission, ERGA, the EEAS and EDMO. The DSA is an EU regulation which sees the involvement among others of national regulatory authorities (called Digital Services Coordinators), auditing organisations, independent experts and researchers, as well as of course the online operators as regulated parties and the European Commission as enforcer.

Tackling disinformation also means supporting and strengthening media pluralism and transparency, which is the aim of the European Media Freedom Act, as well as supporting quality journalism, both in absolute terms and in its independent role in tackling disinformation (as for example the EuropeanNewsroom – ENR initiative).

While the EU has no competence in education, it is supporting initiatives related to media literacy. A matter of example is the creation of an expert group which published Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training. Support to independent fact-checking is also key and initiatives like EDMO and the EFCSN go in this direction.

As EDMO has already been mentioned a couple of times, it may be worth focusing on it. To navigate and steer this complex ocean, it is key to have an infrastructure which can collect, analyse, compare, produce, provide independent evidence and tools.

Such an infrastructure shall be able to act as the overall European umbrella while at the same time understanding the local peculiarities. While it is true that disinformation has no borders, it is also true that disinformation and its impact are very much rooted in the culture, language, history, socio-political and economic situation of a given country. The level of local specificity goes even beyond, if we think for example of the differences between rural and urban areas. It is, however, key to also compare those local peculiarities, to identify differences but also common trends, to share best practices and learn from each other. Collaboration and coordination, especially in cases such as pandemics, natural disasters, and geopolitical and security dynamics is key.

To do that, a multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary community is needed. We need many different kinds of expertise and we need them all. We need researchers in different fields to understand the phenomenon, examine its process, evaluate its impact and test solutions (simplified). We need them to be given access to online platforms and search engines' data and also to be properly equipped to carry out their research and handle the data. We need independent fact-checkers who provide additional context to citizens and evidence for researchers and policy-makers. We need civil society organisations to carry out open-source intelligence investigations and to challenge stakeholders in the interest of citizens' human and civil rights. We need media literacy experts who work on sound guidelines, who design and implement courses and campaigns, who bring research and fact-checking evidence into skills and knowledge for societal resilience. And we need this to be a lifelong learning process. We need media transparency and pluralism as well as journalists following ethical codes. We need independent policy analysis to understand the developments in the information ecosystem and evaluate the impact of policy frameworks.

This is why EDMO and its 14 hubs are such an important pillar of the EU policy to counter disinformation, as they are tasked to be exactly that framework.

Funding such an independent infrastructure should be a concern for both public and private actors, who do have a responsibility here. It is key that EDMO and its hubs can count on sufficient, stable and secure financing. Independent experts and actors can provide solid evidence only if they are properly funded, and if they can count on stable contracts. Funding, both public and private, shall work on a long-term basis. Short-term and sometimes scattered funding are sources of instability that directly impact the work of the stakeholders and consequently the possibility of this policy pillar to perform in the interest of society and its resilience and security. As dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence, the same does disinformation. It is one drop after the other which erodes the health of the information ecosystem and trust and rights of citizens. There is no preparedness without a stable and solidly funded infrastructure, as it is not sufficient to act here and there on a few drops to avoid the dripping water hollowing out the stone.



Fact-checkers' role in the defense of information integrity



SAMANTHA LEE
Communications manager
European Fact-Checking
Standards Network, EFCSN



STEPHAN MÜNDGES
Coordinator
European Fact-Checking
Standards Network, EFCSN

In an algorithmically driven information space that rewards virality over accuracy, misinformation spreads rapidly across borders—and fact-checking has become one of our first lines of defense for fact-based debate. Yet even as the role of fact-checkers grows more vital, their support systems are shrinking. Fact-checkers must not only adapt to this evolving landscape, but also work to ensure the sustainability of those on the frontlines defending information integrity.

As more people turn to social media and other non-traditional sources for news, misinformation has taken on new forms—spreading faster than ever through algorithms that amplify based on virality, not what's accurate, and reaching farther as digital borders erode. The rise of AI compounds the challenge, placing cheap yet convincing tools in anyone's hands: deepfakes, synthetic voices, and autogenerated falsehoods.

The current global political climate has also created fertile ground for disinformation. Platforms have pulled back from fighting misinformation and show little incentive to reform the algorithms that fuel the spread. Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) remains a serious threat—but so does the homegrown variety.

Fact-Checkers on the Frontline

In this environment, the role of fact-checking has come into sharper focus. Fact-checkers do far more than verify claims. They carry out deep investigative work, promote media literacy, “prebunk” misinformation before it spreads, provide data on disinformation trends, develop tools to counter it at scale, monitoring information spaces, providing insights and data for other stakeholders. When the fight against misinformation demands a 360-degree approach, fact-checkers are already doing the work.

Importantly, fact-checking adds context to the conversation. By providing citizens with reliable, verified, and timely information, fact-checking empowers users in the digital world to come to their own conclusions about important issues. This is critical around key moments like elections, but it's essential year-round, as users are constantly bombarded with content.

Fewer Resources, Greater Risk

Despite the clear and growing need for fact-checkers, the field is facing a funding crisis. Not because fact-checking doesn't work—but because the sources that have sustained this essential work are drying up, especially in regions most vulnerable to disinformation. Organisations that have relied on U.S.-based support, such as funding from USAID, are facing significant challenges. These difficulties are compounded by the withdrawal of support from digital platforms. Meta has operated a successful fact-checking programme, yet it now seems possible that this too will be phased out—removing yet another pillar of support for fact-checkers.

This funding crisis runs parallel to a broader crisis facing the media as a whole. With trust in traditional media eroding, and alternative voices drawing more attention in an increasingly fragmented landscape, the work of fact-checkers has become harder than ever.

Fact-Checkers Working Together

European fact-checkers have recognised that they stand stronger together. In 2023, several fact-checking organisations came together to form the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN).

Today, the EFCSN represents more than 60 fact-checking organisations across Europe, all committed to the principles of independence, transparency, and journalistic quality outlined in the European Code of Standards for Independent Fact-Checking Organisations.

To become a member of the EFCSN, fact-checking organisations and fact-checking units within larger media organisations undergo a rigorous evaluation process. As part of this process, fact-checking organisations are evaluated by two independent assessors. Based on their reviews, the EFCSN Governance Body decides whether an applicant organisation is approved as a member or not. To ensure that high standards are upheld over time, fact-checking organisations have to reapply and must undergo the same rigorous assessment process as outlined above every two years.

Beyond upholding these rigorous standards, the EFCSN strengthens and unites the fact-checking community. By working on joint projects to scale solutions for emerging technological challenges—such as by leveraging collective data—the EFCSN amplifies the community’s impact. It also serves as a nexus for sharing best practices and coordinating responses to misinformation that crosses borders within the continent.

Investing in Facts, Investing in Democracy

Greater support is needed for the fact-checking organisations doing this work on the ground. They require diverse and stable funding sources that safeguard their independence. Bodies like the European Union must also use the policy tools available—such as the Digital Services Act and the Code of Conduct on Disinformation—to pressure platforms to re-engage with fact-checkers. With key opportunities on the horizon, such as the European Democracy Shield, now is the time to invest in fact-checking’s ability to support resilient democratic societies.

For example, the EFCSN has proposed the Independent Information Integrity Fund (IIEF) as a permanent, reliable and comprehensive funding mechanism, which could combine initial funding from the EU with contributions from member states and open access for private sector funders to contribute as well. Such a mechanism would allow for strong governance safeguards and streamlined, coordinated funding.



**European Fact-Checking
Standards Network**

Fact-checking to counter information disorder



OLAV ØSTREM
News editor
Faktisk.no

Since the launch in 2017, Faktisk.no has been Norway's only dedicated fact-checking organization with a statutory purpose to be a non-profit organization and an independent editorial office for fact-checking of public debate and public discourse in Norway.

Established and owned by six of the nation's biggest media corporations, Faktisk.no aims to contribute to an open, inclusive, and fact-based public conversation. By reviewing the basis of current claims that affect our perception of reality, we work towards a fact-based discourse and a constructive public debate. Faktisk.no also aims to uncover and prevent the spread of fabricated messages that purport to be real news.

Through knowledge-building and competence exchange, Faktisk.no wishes to be a laboratory for open journalism, source awareness and critical media use in Norway. As the country's only editorial office devoted to fact-checking, source awareness, and critical media use, we are at the forefront of developing this important journalistic genre in Norway.

Agenda setter in Norway

In just a few years, Faktisk.no became an agenda setter in the conversation about the Norwegian public sphere. We have gained this position through prolonged and systematic work to map misinformation, alternative media, and conspiracy theories online.

When Faktisk.no was launched nearly eight years ago, leading players in the Norwegian media industry predicted our imminent demise. Others could not understand the point of the fact-checking genre. Surely fake news and disinformation weren't a problem in Norway?

With seven employees, four of whom were on loan, we started from scratch on July 5, 2017. Nearly eight years later, including four years with President Trump, three years with the pandemic, four years with the aftermath of the storming of the congress, three years with war in Europe, and one and a half years with the war in the Middle East, the world has forcefully shown how disinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories threaten our society and democracy.

This has also shaped our work and our efforts. At the start of 2025, Faktisk.no had become a small media house with 16 employees, four departments, and several side projects – among them, a large verification project on behalf of the entire Norwegian media.

Faktisk Verify (Faktisk Verifiserbar)

And the latter, *Faktisk Verify*, is perhaps the best example of how much can be achieved while bringing media rivals together in the search of new methods and tools for the sake of enlightening the public and strengthening the dissemination of facts and truthful information.

Already established and funded by the big media in Norway, Faktisk.no has pushed the concept of collaboration several steps further while verifying photos and videos from the war in Ukraine as well as the Middle East.

The initiative *Faktisk Verifiserbar* addresses the need of the Norwegian public to discern the credibility of images and videos from conflict zones. It originated in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the spread of propaganda during that time. Faced with a lack of expertise in verifying content, Norwegian media collectively established *Faktisk Verifiserbar*.



Faktisk.no facilitated and managed the project, where journalists from competing newsrooms collaborated to provide a media bank with verified content from the war. Using satellite imagery and other tools, the team put together a huge spreadsheet of verified imagery and video from Telegram, Twitter, and other sources. This content, distributed through the national news agency NTB, was made freely available to all Norwegian media outlets. The methods employed were groundbreaking, leading to increased industry competence.

Although the project was temporarily suspended after its first year, it resumed following Hamas' attack on Israel in October 2023. Once again, administered by Faktisk.no and staffed by journalists from competing newsrooms, its mandate remained to verify content from conflict zones, this time in the Middle East. The challenge now was dealing with even more material, including stronger imagery.

The future is now

In a time of heightened geopolitical tensions and rapid advances in AI technology, navigating an increasingly fragmented information landscape has become a real challenge. Here in Norway, the intelligence and security services (EOS) have warned in their threat assessments about potential influence operations that could target society — whether through fake news, cloned news websites, or cyberattacks on businesses and media outlets.

Internationally, we've already seen new technology being used as a tool for illegitimate influence in the build-up to elections. In this context, civil preparedness against misinformation must also take on a central role — something that requires a well-functioning, critical public sphere and a diverse landscape of editor-led media. To help better equip the public to resist unwanted influence, make informed choices, and engage actively with the media, Faktisk.no will keep on focusing on disinformation, illegitimate influence, and, for good or bad, developments in AI.

Faktisk.

Crime and corruption do not stop at borders. Neither does OCCRP



DREW SULLIVAN,
Co-Founder and Publisher
Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)

False identities. Forged paperwork. Fake celebrity endorsements. Millions stolen from devastated victims. Last month, OCCRP and 30 media partners published the “[Scam Empire](#)” project, an unprecedented look into the inner workings of the international investment-scam industry, where ruthless call center agents make millions while destroying lives around the world.

Based on leaked data obtained by SVT (Swedish Television), reporters from multiple countries collaborated for months to piece together a fuller picture of the methods used by scammers at these professionally-run call centers, who convinced at least 32,000 people across the world to make “investments” totalling at least \$275 million.

Journalists did what law enforcement could not — work together across borders to lift the lid off the industry, find the real identities of some of the scammers, and map out the advertising firms, banks, and other enablers that help these industries to function at scale. The impact of this project was immediate and resulted in criminal investigations and frozen assets.

The last five decades have seen the dramatic globalization of organized crime and corruption, now totaling trillions of dollars every year. With the help of a “criminal services industry” — complicit banks, law firms, registration agents, and lobbyists — criminal networks have steadily grown their markets, and the world’s most corrupt officials and tycoons easily loot, launder, and hide stolen money for future use.

The result is an extraordinary transfer of wealth and an international web of high-level corruption and organized crime that has fueled global inequality, the rise of extremist groups, and the decline of democratic institutions all over the world.

To fight crime and corruption worldwide, fellow investigative reporter Paul Radu and I founded [OCCRP](#) in 2007 and together we have pushed hard to grow cross-border, collaborative investigative journalism in service of the public.

In 2003, Paul and I started working on a project together about human trafficking and we interviewed a trafficker together outside of Sarajevo. The trafficker told us how much he collaborated with other criminals, and it was striking to us how resourceful they were. We thought that if you really wanted to report on a network, we needed to be a network.

After we recruited colleagues from Bulgaria, Albania, Romania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and pooled our resources to report on shady energy companies, it was clear we could do more together than separately. If regional cooperation could yield more thorough reporting, what would be the result if we scaled this model to a global level?

Now based in Amsterdam with staff and partners across six continents, OCCRP has built a collaborative space where journalists produce impactful stories but also get training, equipment, expertise, and resources. In the face of [rising costs](#) and growing threats, we provide our [worldwide network](#) of 70+ media member centers with critical tools, like data, research, security, and editorial and legal support.

Crime and corruption do not stop at borders. By partnering locally and working globally, we build a better understanding of how regional actors and syndicates fit into the larger maze of international illicit activity. The symbiotic relationship with our member centers and partners on the ground brings more data and insight, and in turn, builds the network's unique understanding of how transnational crime and corruption operate.

OCCRP only works because there are individual reporters and organizations in many countries that have the local expertise, good investigative skills, and can do the reporting that's necessary for all of us to piece together this larger problem.

Collaborative investigative journalism continues to deliver for the public in ways few other services can, including protecting democracy and information integrity. Investigative groups in the EU and its neighborhood serve as bulwarks of democracy, often reporting on kleptocracy, authoritarian influence, and organized crime at close proximity. For example, OCCRP partners uncovered the illegal operations of websites in Romania promoting the presidential candidate Călin Georgescu, and exposed his real estate deals with convicted criminals. These investigations contributed to Georgescu's election ban and criminal prosecutions were opened against his backers. The OCCRP network also investigated Russian interference in Moldova's EU referendum and election rigging by the ruling party in Georgia.

With our partners, we've helped track and expose over 1,000 cases of high-level crime and corruption, prompting hundreds of arrests, policy reforms, and civil society actions. Investigative journalism yields an extraordinarily efficient return on investment and OCCRP's reporting alone has helped bring about more than €10 billion in financial returns, with €5 billion collected by EU governments in the form of fines, seized assets, and other gains.

For example, OCCRP's several large "Laundromat" investigations revealed massive financial vehicles for moving money across borders and helped prompt more than €1 billion in fines, several arrests, and reforms to EU anti-money laundering controls.

When Daraj editor in chief Alia Ibrahim and her team were investigating Lebanon's former Central Bank governor, she said that the story had reached a dead end inside Lebanon and so she brought it to us. Together, we worked with the network to show how the governor embezzled a fortune and stashed it across Europe. €120 million of his assets were then frozen, and five European countries pursued criminal investigations.

Independent investigative journalism delivers large financial and democratic returns, but is fighting for its life in the face of new threats, including lack of funding and accelerated attacks from enemies of the free press. If investigative journalism is allowed to die out, propaganda and conspiracies will occupy the space left behind, leading to more extremism, less security, and weaker democracies. When adequately supported, investigative journalists are extremely efficient in exposing the most pressing threats of our time, including kleptocracy, illicit financial flows, malign foreign influence, and organized crime.

We've spent the last two decades building up the global investigative journalism ecosphere because we've seen the unparalleled power and impact of reporters when they trust each other and work together around the world. Despite the challenges, we are up for the fight — we'll continue to expose the truth, fend off threats, and deliver for the public.



Building democracy with local investigative journalism



KRISTINE HOLMELID

Director

Center for Investigative Journalism Norway (SUJO)

Local newspapers play an important role in informing the public about important issues in their local area. Local newspapers also have the role of being critical towards local government and can contribute to uncovering power abuse, corruption and hidden ties in local communities. It is vital for building democracy that local newspapers can fulfil their societal mission. However, in many parts of the world today, local newspapers are struggling.

In the U.S., large areas currently lack access to local, editor-led press. Since 2005, the U.S. has lost almost a third of its local newspapers, with an average of more than two closings each week, according to research from [Northwestern University](#).

This decline has led to many communities, particularly in economically struggling regions, experiencing reduced access to local news and information. Two out of three journalists have lost their jobs, and reliable information is not reaching the public. In recent decades, local media have also disappeared rapidly in other countries, leaving entire news deserts in their wake.

This is not the case in Norway. Due to our heavily government-subsidized media system, Norway is in a very special position with a rich variety of local newspapers. Currently, we have about 200 local newspapers in a country of only 5.5 million inhabitants. Local newspapers play an important role in Norwegian cities and rural areas. [Readership surveys show](#) that local newspapers are significant and enjoy high trust among the population.

Preserving and strengthening investigative journalism in Norway is the core mission of The Norwegian Center for Investigative Journalism (SUJO). SUJO was established in 2018 as the first center for investigative journalism in the Nordic countries. Today, seven years later, our mission feels more important than ever.

SUJO has a particular responsibility towards small and local media outlets which do not have the same financial resources and technological expertise as the largest legacy newsrooms. Many of the local newspapers we aim to help have one editor and only between four and ten employees. These newsrooms have little time, less money, and less knowledge than the larger media organizations. Consequently, they argue that they neither have the time nor the resources to do investigative journalism. SUJO's counterargument is that they cannot afford *not* to.

More than 1.500 journalists from over 250 media outlets have been assisted by SUJO since 2018. SUJO's focus is on providing concrete help in their everyday journalistic life. We teach journalists and editors in small newsrooms to employ tools to work more systematically, to develop their repertoire of methods, to work better with ethics and bullet-proofing their stories before publication. We also provide training in data journalism and collaborate with resources within our university to develop AI tools that can assist in journalism.

Collaboration has become a key factor for investigative journalism in Norway. SUJO serves as a bridge between academia and the media industry.

Our centre is located at the *University of Bergen*, in Media City Bergen – a cluster for media, technology, education, and innovation. We are co-funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and the five largest Norwegian media groups; *Amedia*, *NRK*, *Polaris*, *Schibsted* and *TV 2/Egmont*. They all take a joint, significant and collective responsibility for strengthening investigative journalism in the smallest media outlets.

Collaboration on funding is key, and so is collaboration in the actual reporting. In Norway, we have managed to create a climate across media groups for collaboration, where we cooperate on what we can and compete on what we must. We believe SUJO's entrance as a neutral actor has contributed to a climate where all can work together. We are supported by all media groups but remain on the outside of all of them. Our center has a knowledge- and research-based foundation at the University of Bergen and is independent, maintaining "an arm's length distance" from the government.

Our latest journalistic collaboration and innovation involves the public broadcaster NRK, SUJO and The Association of Norwegian local newspapers (LLA). In that project, we have devised a small desk called *Samarbeidsdesken* (The Collaboration Desk) that provides new and exclusive data on subjects important for local newspapers. In workshops we teach a systematic approach to investigative work, we discuss methods and ethical dilemmas and collaborate in developing stories based on data. So far more than 120 small news outlets have collaborated and produced important stories for their local communities.

Our experience is that in collaborating, smaller media outlets get the tools and the strength to uncover corruption in local communities, misuse of municipal funds, and inadequate conditions in schools or child welfare. Smaller media produce journalism that is important for the residents of local communities and brings forth information that is vital for democracy. SUJO plays an important role in helping small media to function in this way as a democracy shield.

SUJO CENTRE FOR
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM NORWAY

Project Reynir: A concrete weapon against disinformation



HELGE O. SVELA,
CEO
Media Cluster Norway

The journalistic institution must rethink how it develops and applies technology if society is to stand a chance against the deluge of fake images and video from generative AI.

Never before in human history has it been easier to produce realistic, but fake, images and video, and spread them around the world. The rapid technological development of generative artificial intelligence has turbocharged the engines of disinformation, and caught both society and journalism off-guard. Never have we been more vulnerable.

Disinformation is destabilising our democracies, and spreading erroneous information. This potentially has severe consequences for both democratic processes and for the public in the face of natural disasters and other crises. The first round of the Romanian elections in 2024 was annulled due to what was dubbed an "algorithmic invasion" of social media disinformation. In the aftermath of the earthquake in Myanmar in March AI-generated videos of the devastating destruction shared by so called "engagement farmers", likely with financial motives, got millions of views on social media.

Generative AI has given humanity the ability to create realistic videos and images simply by typing a few words into a website. However, these tools also quickly became a part of the arsenal for enemies of democracy. As a result, disinformation is becoming more prevalent, appearing more professional and costing almost nothing to produce. Generative AI is an industrial revolution also for the troll factories in Russia and others who seek to manipulate our perception of the world and sow doubt about what is true.

This is not a media problem. It a democratic problem, and a dangerous one at that. Disinformation created by troll factories and generative artificial intelligence and spread by bots pose an immediate threat to our democracies.

We might end up doubting absolutely everything. When anyone can claim anything is generated and fake, the liars come out on top. This could destroy the foundation of our democracies: trust in each other and in our institutions.

One thing is current news, another is history. Imagine a dictator using fake historical footage of a hunger catastrophe in order to justify an ethnic cleansing of a minority. An internet flooded with claims and visual "proof" of what happened in the past, all of which looks authentic.

As a result of generative AI this is no longer just a dystopian science fiction scenario. It is a real possibility.

Never before have we needed editorial media more. However, the signal strength of editorial media risks being drowned out by an ever growing cacophony of junk content and disinformation.

Project Reynir is our response to the threat Generative AI poses. Because Generative AI makes it so easy to fake both content and sender, editorial media are under threat on two fronts. In Project Reynir, we aim to solve this problem using technical solutions.



The goal is to create something that makes it easier for ordinary people to distinguish between what is fake and what is real. By using cryptographically secured images and video, based on the open [C2PA](#) standard, it is possible for both newsrooms and regular media users to be confident that the images we are seeing have not been tampered with on their journey from the photographer's lens to the mobile screen.

Moreover, using the same technology, authenticity markers can be added to the images and videos from news publishers when they post stories on social media and other third party platforms. Thus guaranteeing that what appears to be the BBC and AFP actually are from these news organisations and not someone impersonating them.

If we succeed, we will be a significant step closer to solving the problem of artificially created noise for our present moment. Project Reynir unites newsrooms, media technology companies and academic researchers in the fight against disinformation. Our goal is an 80 percent adoption in the Norwegian news ecosystem, and to serve as a beacon of best practices for the rest of the world of news.

We believe that time is critical, and that all good forces now must unite. The technological development has moved rapidly in the last few years, and the adoption of technology has sometimes been irresponsible. If our democracies are to stand firm in the face of the disinformation tsunami we are facing, quality journalism must be empowered. Only then can we enable citizens to make informed choices free of manipulation and interference, in an environment where facts can be easily distinguished from lies. We call for the democratic governments of the world to invest in innovation in the news media space. The time for responsible tech innovation, made with resilient democracies in mind, is now.



Media Cluster
Norway

Strengthening journalism through AI: Lessons from the JournalismAI project



CHARLIE BECKETT
Professor and Director
LSE JournalismAI

The LSE's [JournalismAI project](#) shows that collaboration between universities, technology companies and the news media is not just possible but essential. At a time when journalism is in crisis and under attack around the world, we need much more support for citizen-centred news media and collaboration between newsrooms. Artificial Intelligence is not the solution to journalism's challenges. But news organisations must at least investigate its potential, or they are in danger of missing out on a vital gain in efficiency, effectiveness and engagement.

The addition in 2024 of our \$4 million Innovation Challenge grants programme means that we can now rightly claim to be helping journalists with all stages of the adoption of AI. To be informed and to build their capacity to use AI - but also to deliver on tangible editorial and revenue outcomes. The people who pass through our programmes tell us that they and their organisations benefit directly from the experience. But the most rewarding part is hearing how they catalyse others.

JournalismAI is a global initiative that empowers news organisations to use artificial intelligence responsibly. It is a project of [Polis](#) - the journalism think-tank at the [London School of Economics and Political Science](#) - and it is supported by the [Google News Initiative](#).

Media professionals, individual journalists, and news organisations, worldwide, tap into our training, resources, and community to explore how the responsible use of AI can contribute to building more sustainable, inclusive, and independent journalism in all parts of the world. Our work mainly focuses on the editorial side of journalism, and this is reflected in all our activities.

Here are our main programmes. They are all free to participate in and are targeted at smaller newsrooms, especially in the Global South. We have run programmes and published materials in English, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese:

The [JournalismAI Discovery](#) is a free interactive self-guided course that will help you understand what AI technologies can do to improve your journalism. We run this at set times in different languages with a Slack channel for participants to share ideas and feedback.

The [JournalismAI Academy](#) for Small Newsrooms is a free online programme that offers a deep dive into the potential of artificial intelligence to journalists and media professionals from small newsrooms. We run this in different global regions, including a Spanish version in Latin America.

The [JournalismAI Fellowship Programme](#) is a free online initiative that brings together journalists and technologists from media organisations worldwide to explore innovative solutions to improve journalism via the use of AI technologies.

[JournalismAI Connect](#) is a space to exchange ideas, ask for help, share achievements, and support each other as we make sense of, and use, AI in journalism. We have around 15,000 in our various networks.

We continue to [research](#) specific issues related to journalism and AI and have created a knowledge hub of case studies, analysis, and research. We conducted global surveys of AI use in newsrooms in 2018 and 2023.

Our newest programme is the \$4 million **JournalismAI Innovation Challenge**, enabling small and medium-sized publishers to experiment, implement and share best practices of AI technologies.

The project has grown organically since the initial LSE survey in 2018 that set out the support needs of news organisations seeking to use AI responsibly. The main practical work has been building capacity and creating useful models and strategies for AI adoption. But the project has also been a forum for discussing the wider ethical, political and inequalities issues around AI and journalism.

With relatively modest funding the project is now run by six full-time officers. It has been run as a consultancy under the aegis of the LSE Consulting division. It is led by LSE professor Charlie Beckett who is part of the faculty of the Media and Communications Department. It has created partnerships, especially with North-Western University but also on specific projects with organisations such as ARIJ (Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism). We have an extensive network of mentors and trainers who help implement our programmes.

Key to the success of this project has been its collaborative approach. The LSE provides academic authority and research capability. In return the LSE benefits from its positioning as having an impact on a vital sector. And this form of multi-modal participant research provides an unprecedented amount of data, insights and access for the LSE as it seeks to position itself in relation to this vitally important technology.

The journalism participants have benefitted as individuals. These programmes are a form of professional education and development. They tell us that they can then act as ambassadors or pioneer innovators in their own organisations. Also, they learn the value of collaboration with people in other organisations. They have access to a remarkable network of people around the world that they can share their experience and learn from others.

We also believe that the project is a useful bridge between a major technology company and the news industry. It allows the journalism sector to give direct feedback around the technology itself, but more generally to keep communications alive between Google and the news sector.

The JournalismAI project does not expect to scale its activities. We prefer to act as a nimble and adaptable network that delivers valuable services as a catalyst and model. We would argue that it would be much more efficient and effective to have more diversity in the development of this technology for newsrooms. We have sought to regionalise our work, but it would be better to have more autonomous centres and networks.

AI is already a major factor for news organisations. AI is certainly not going to solve journalism's problems. Those are frequently financial, political, legal and cultural. But AI can help across a range of organisations to make them more efficient, effective and engaging. Our project brings together people from large global organisations as well as small, niche enterprises. Each one is different, but AI is now an incredibly diverse tool and it can be of benefit to all types of newsroom. The key factor that we bring is to help them to understand, access and then implement AI tools in alignment with their editorial mission and business model. We bring a mixture of journalistic, academic, technological and development skills. We have nothing to sell and no agenda to set, apart from the idea of 'responsible' journalism supported by AI.





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