

HUMAN RIGHTS,
DEMOCRACY
AND THE RULE OF LAW

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

DROITS DE L'HOMME,
DÉMOCRATIE
ET ÉTAT DE DROIT

Renew Europe
Webinar

Presentation
4 June 2020

Panel: “Has COVID19 also brought an
infodemic crisis”

Disinformation in COVID-19 time

Patrick Penninckx
Head of the Information Society Department

Disinformation pandemic?

For the first time, Twitter tagged two of President Donald Trump's tweets with a fact-checking note indicating that his statements were misleading.

Trump inaccurately claimed mail-in ballots are "fraudulent" & argued that mailboxes would be "robbed"

Twitter hides Trump tweet for 'glorifying violence'

🕒 29 May 2020

     Share



Source: [BBC](#)

PASTE
COPY
PASTE
COPY
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PASTE

TOP 5 RECURRING DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES ABOUT COVID-19



- 1 US CREATED IT
- 2 EU FAILS TO RESPOND
- 3 THE CORONAVIRUS IS NOT SERIOUS
- 4 IT'S A SECRET PLAN OF THE GLOBAL ELITES
- 5 THE CORONAVIRUS WAS PROBABLY MADE BY NATO

Disinformation pandemic?

'5G spreads coronavirus'

'Skin colour protects from Covid-19'

'Steam inhalation cures Covid-19'

'Vaccines are already available'



Lijian Zhao, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson: **“The virus did not originate in China.”**



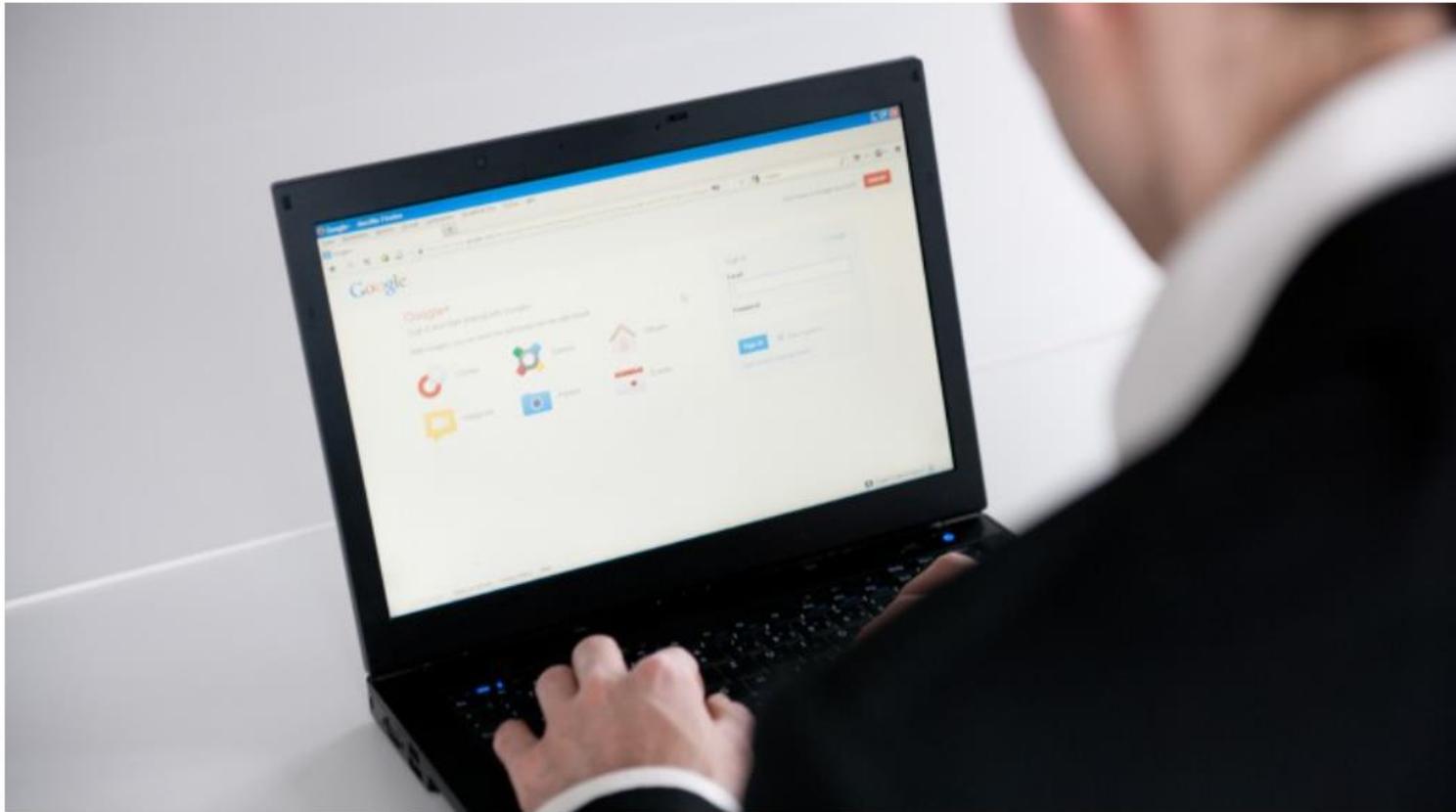
Matteo Salvini, Italian politician: **“China created the Coronavirus in a laboratory.”**



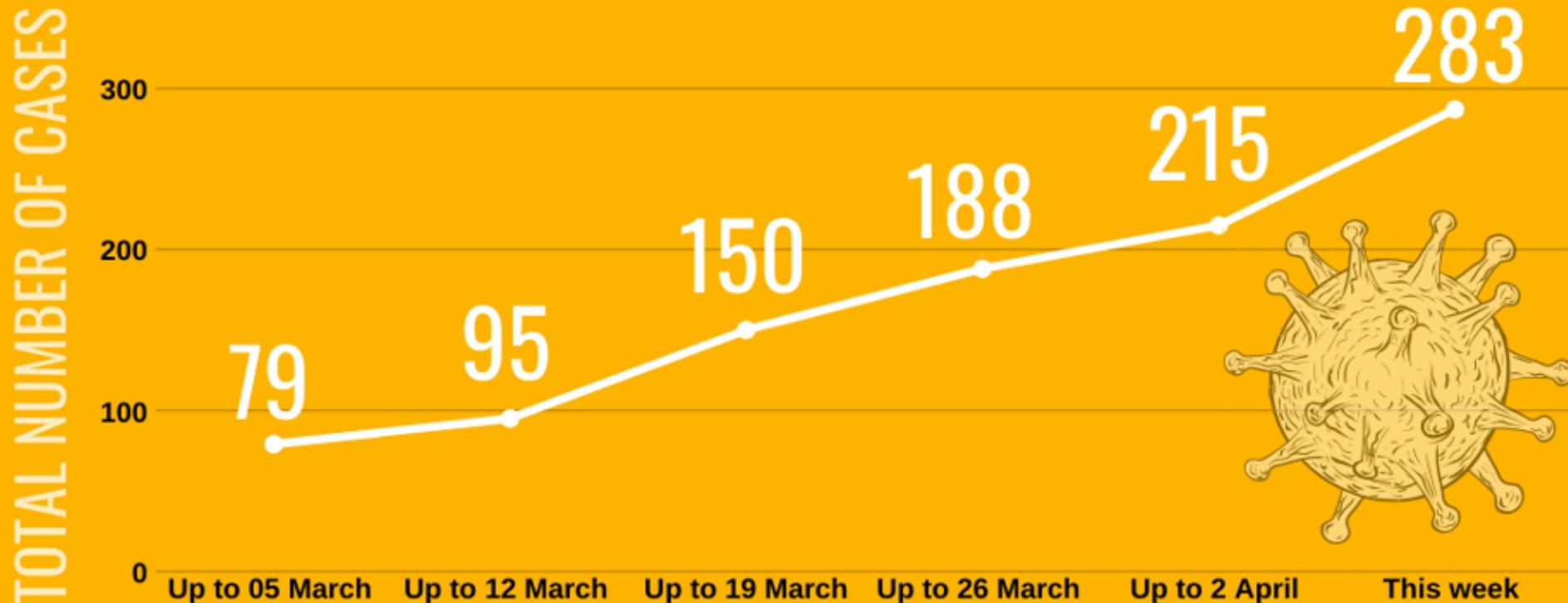
Jair Bolsonaro, Brazilian president: **“The anti-malaria drug Hydroxychloroquine is totally effective against Coronavirus.”**

Nearly half of the population has read fake news about the Coronavirus

TOPICS: Coronavirus In Norway COVID-19 Fake News About The Coronavirus



DISINFORMATION CASES ABOUT COVID-19



494 CORONAVIRUS-RELATED
CASES ON **EUVSDISINFO**
DATABASE RECEIVED

1,152,270

LIKES, SHARES & COMMENTS
ON SOCIAL MEDIA

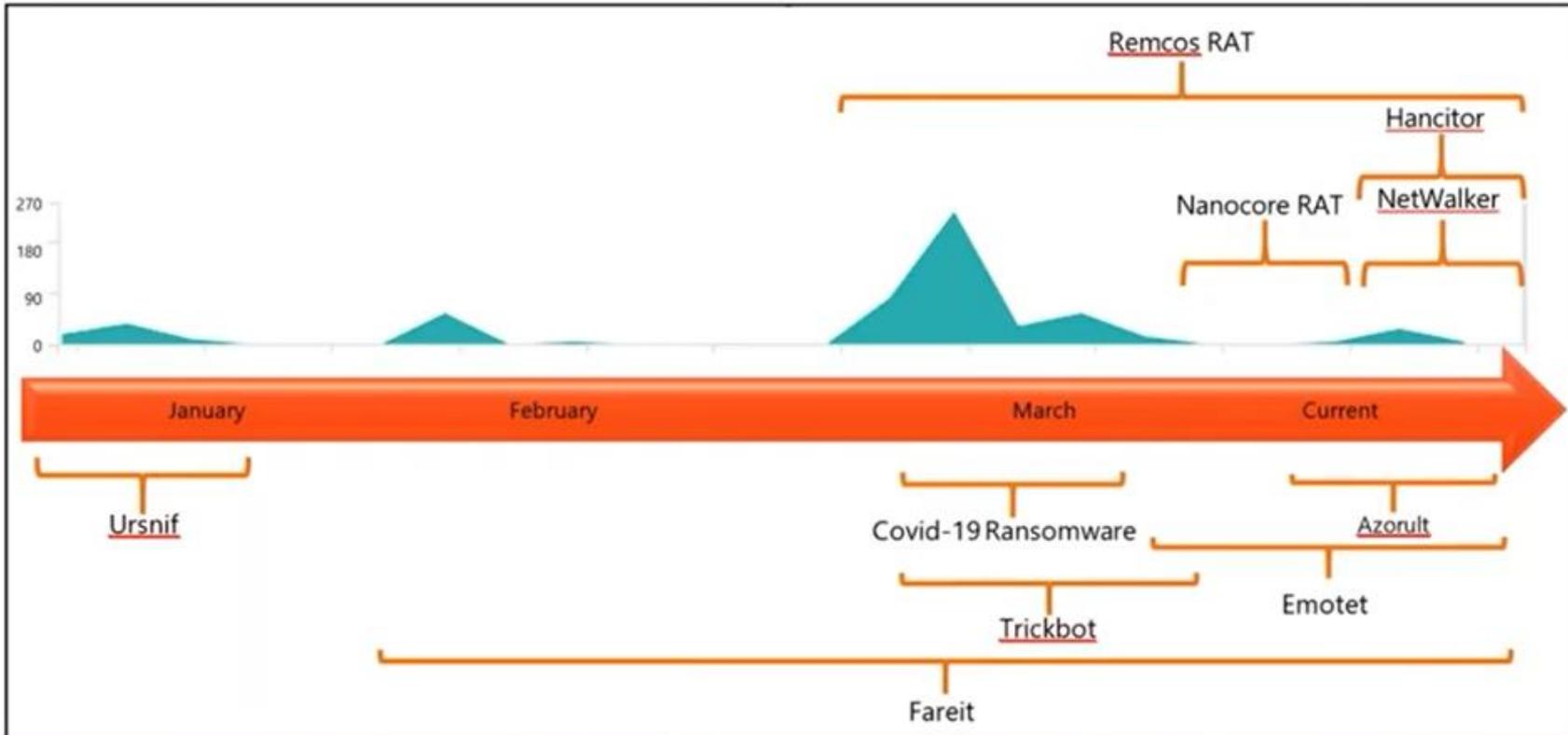


As of 19 May, The EUvsDisinfo database has a total of 8508 disinformation cases, of which 494 are related to conspiracies and false information on the coronavirus.

Source: euvsdisinfo.eu

Disinformation pandemic?

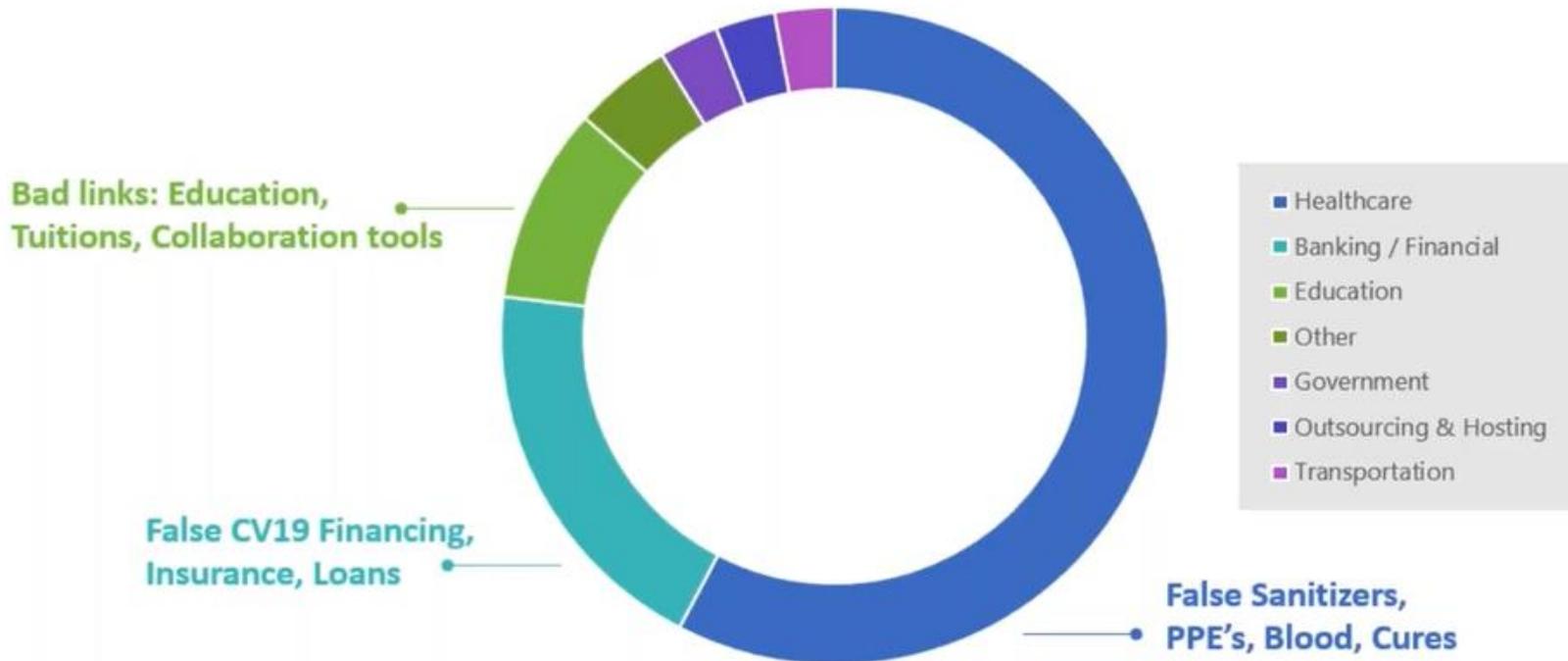
500% increase in COVID related SPAM mails in March



These COVID related SPAM emails are further used to spread prevalent malware like Fareit, Trickbot and COVID ransomware.

Sectors Targeted

The volume of threats related to Covid-19 has been significant, with lures used in all manner of attacks. Tracking these campaigns reveals the most targeted sector is healthcare, followed by finance, and then education.



COVID-19 DISINFORMATION
EEAS SPECIAL REPORT

UPDATE: 23 APRIL - 18 MAY 2020

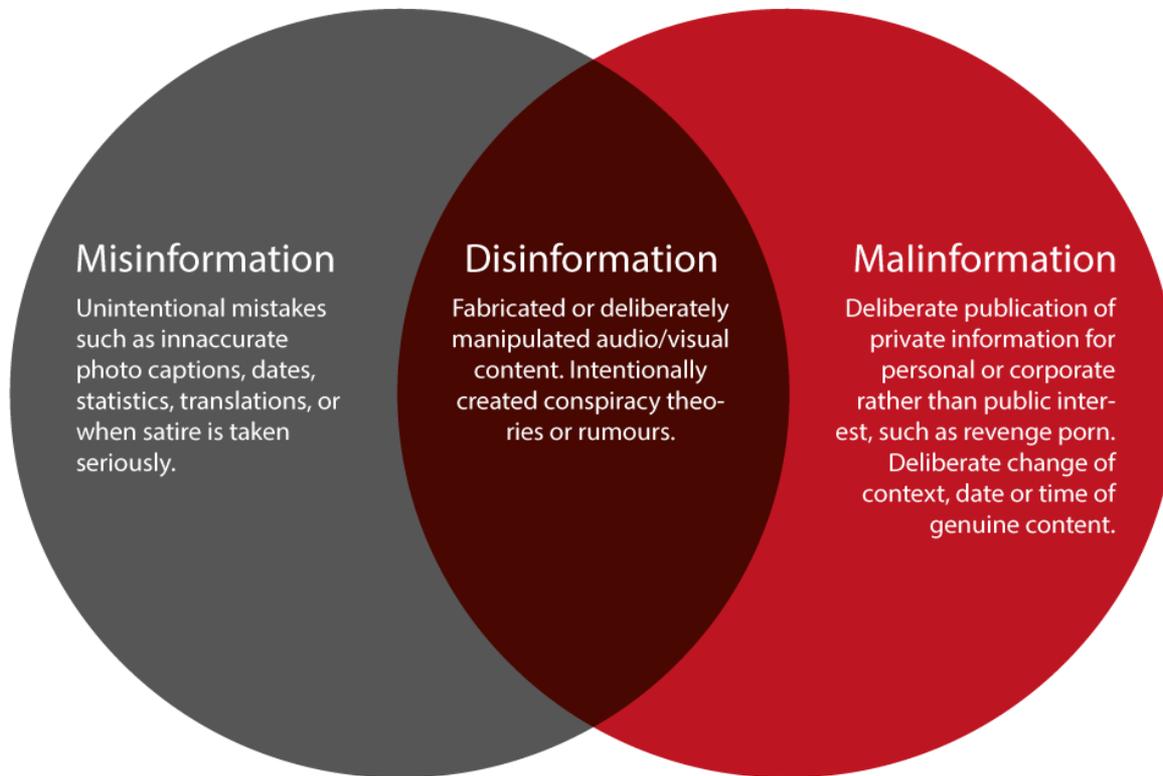
SHORT ASSESSMENT OF NARRATIVES AND DISINFORMATION AROUND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- There is a crystallising and **clustering around specific topics and narratives**: 5G networks; global domination of secretive elites; and attacks on individuals engaged in the development of vaccines, especially Bill Gates.
- External actors, notably pro-Kremlin sources, are still involved in spreading disinformation, including by **amplifying existing conspiracy theories**.
- The **efforts of state actors like China to deflect blame**, to use the pandemic to promote their own governmental system and enhance their image abroad continue.
- The spread of false information pertaining to the 5G network has also led to **multiple arson attacks** on telecommunication infrastructure across Europe.
- In some regions and countries, the **COVID-19 pandemic is used to restrict freedom of speech** and freedom of the media.
- Continued **threats and harassment against fact-checkers** and fact-checking organisations are being observed.

TYPES OF INFORMATION DISORDER

FALSENESS

INTENT TO HARM



Why is disinformation a problem

The right to free
and fair elections

➤ **Incorrect information** may influence the way that individuals vote.

The right to
non-discrimination

➤ **Disinformation is often targeting specific individuals** and their reputation.

The right to health

➤ **Disinformation sometimes focuses on particular groups in society**, especially refugees and migrants, or ethnic minorities; intentionally or involuntarily inciting violence, discrimination or hostility.

The right to freedom
of expression

➤ **False information about health** and disease prevention can lead to serious risks for people.

➤ **Inappropriate, rash or too restrictive responses** to disinformation pose risks to freedom of expression and media freedom.

What facilitates disinformation?

Advances in technology make it easy to create fake images and videos.

New gatekeepers of information - search and social media platforms - exert a strong influence on how individuals are informed and form their opinions.

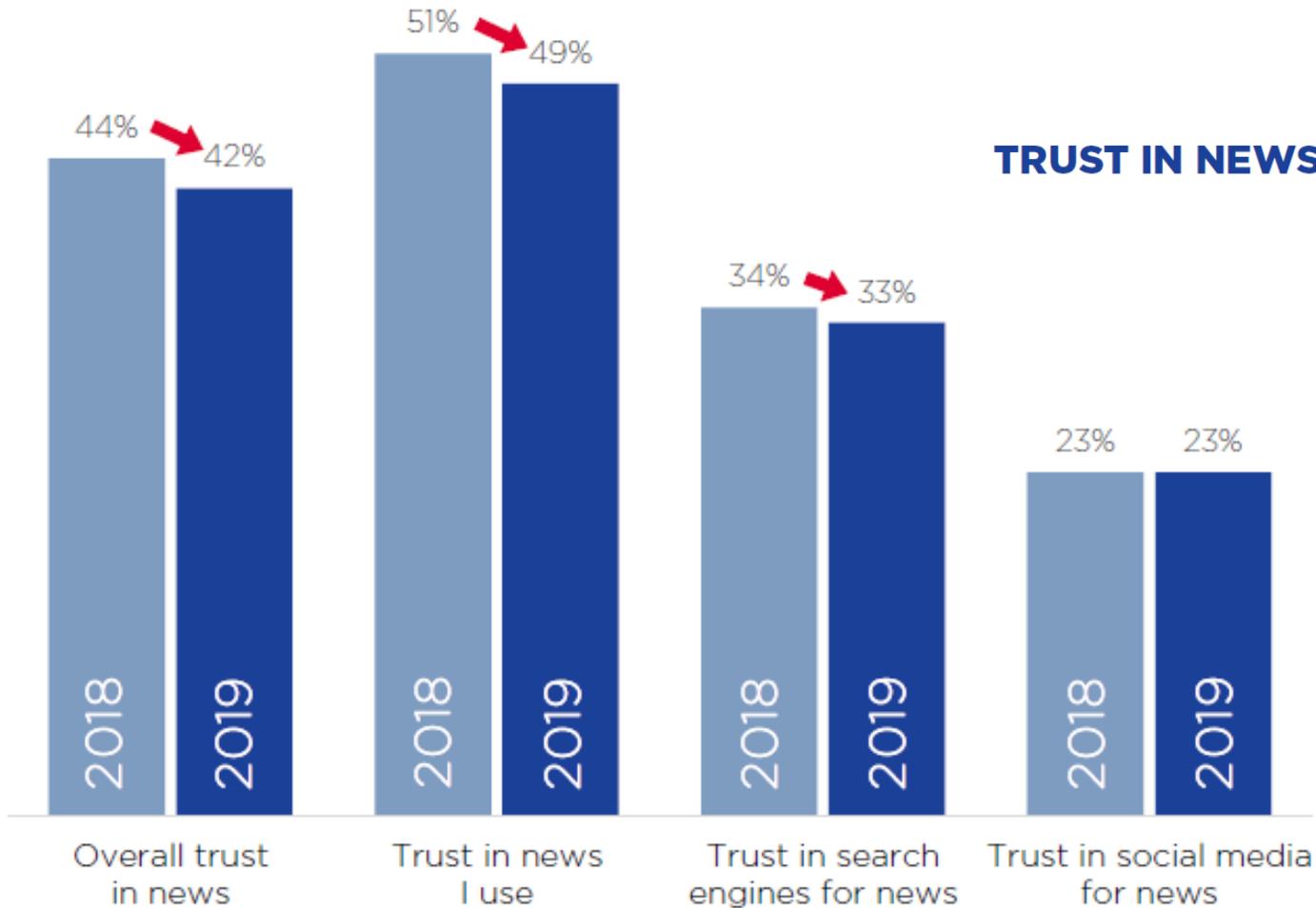
The shift of communication and information to the internet has caused a shift of audiences away from the mainstream media to social media.

Fewer media manage public debate and influence public opinion, as the success of the platforms translated into a loss of ad revenue for the media.

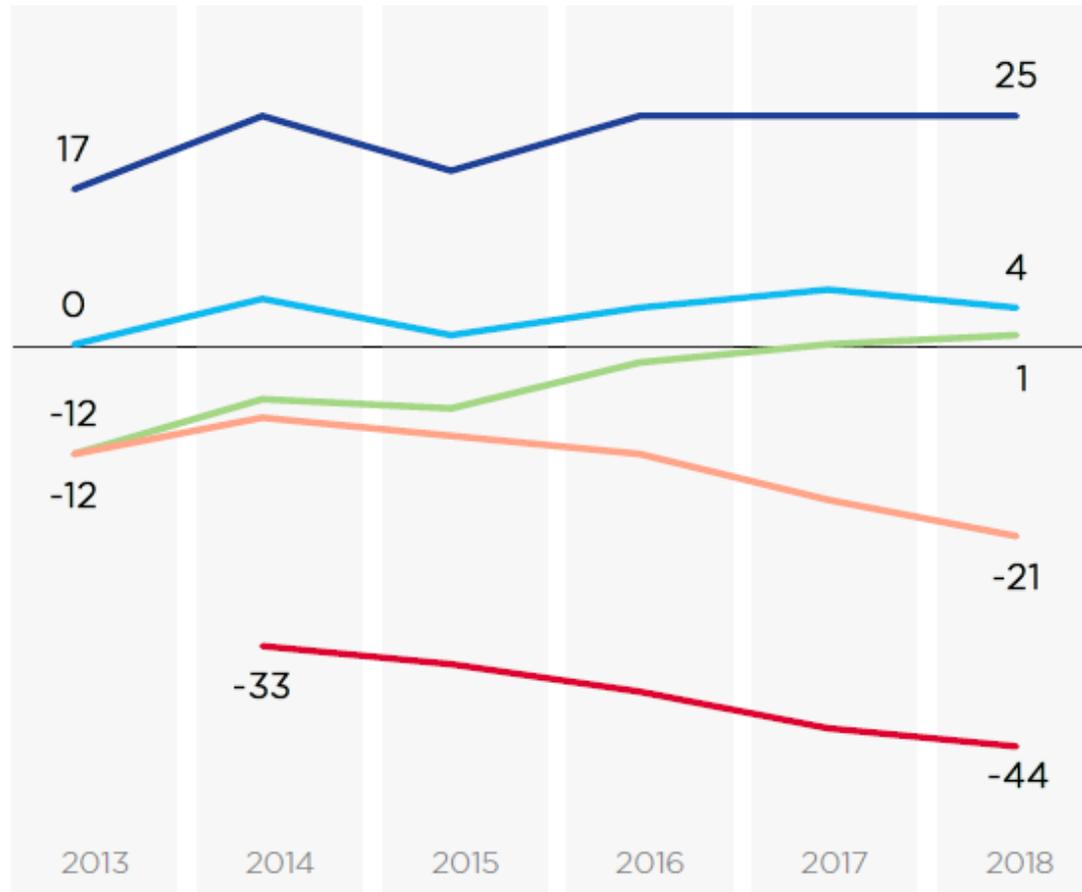


Result: Decline of trust in information and media as people consume both established and unreliable news sources without distinction, and become confused what is true and whom to believe.

Erosion of trust in news



EVOLUTION OF THE NET TRUST INDEX IN THE EU (2013-2018)



WORRY ABOUT QUALITY INFORMATION

Percent who agree

The media I use are **contaminated**
with **untrustworthy information**

⊥
57%

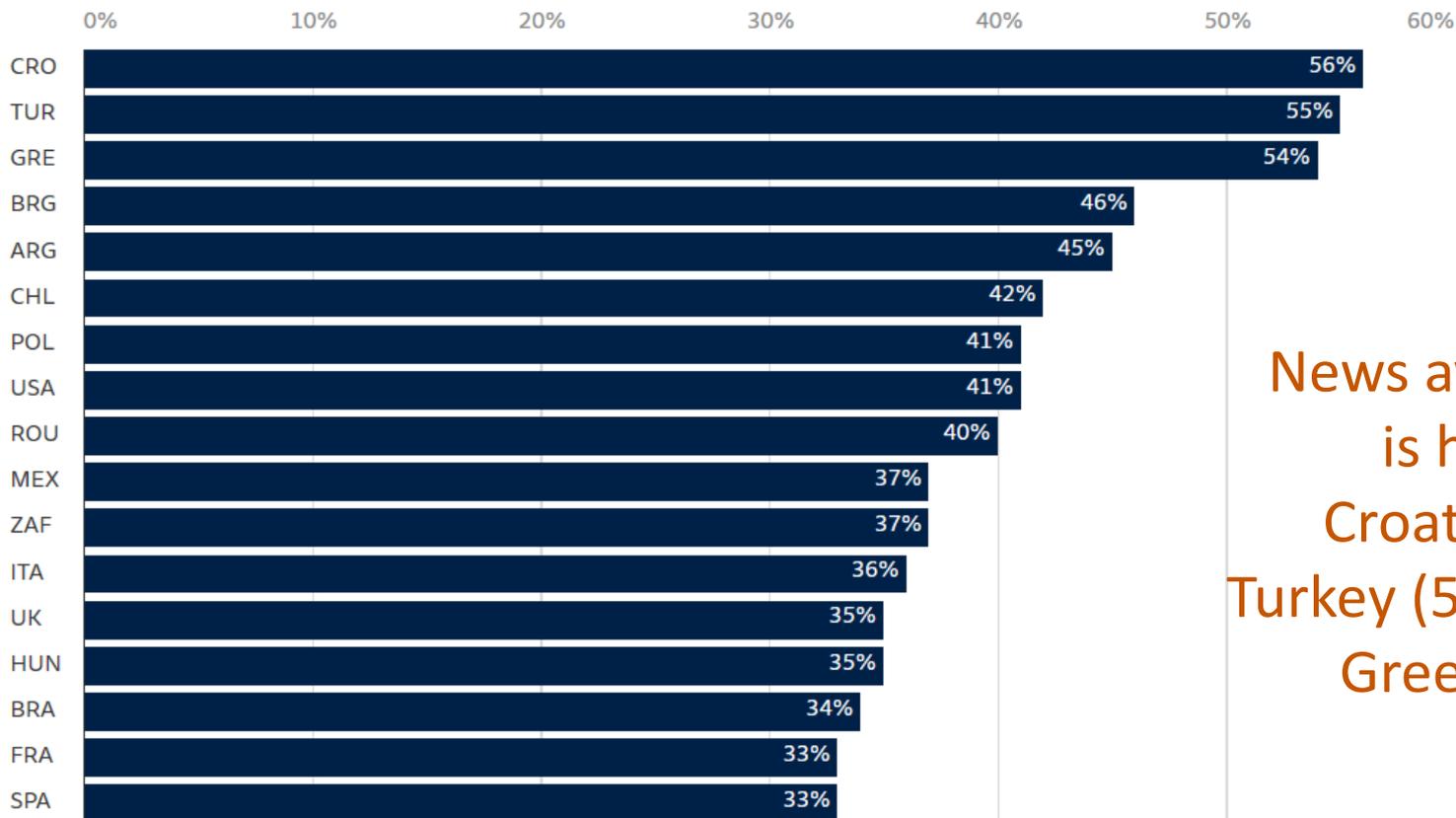
I worry about false information or **fake**
news being used as a weapon

⊥
76%

+6
pts
Change,
2018 to 2020

PROPORTION THAT OFTEN OR SOMETIMES ACTIVELY AVOIDS THE NEWS

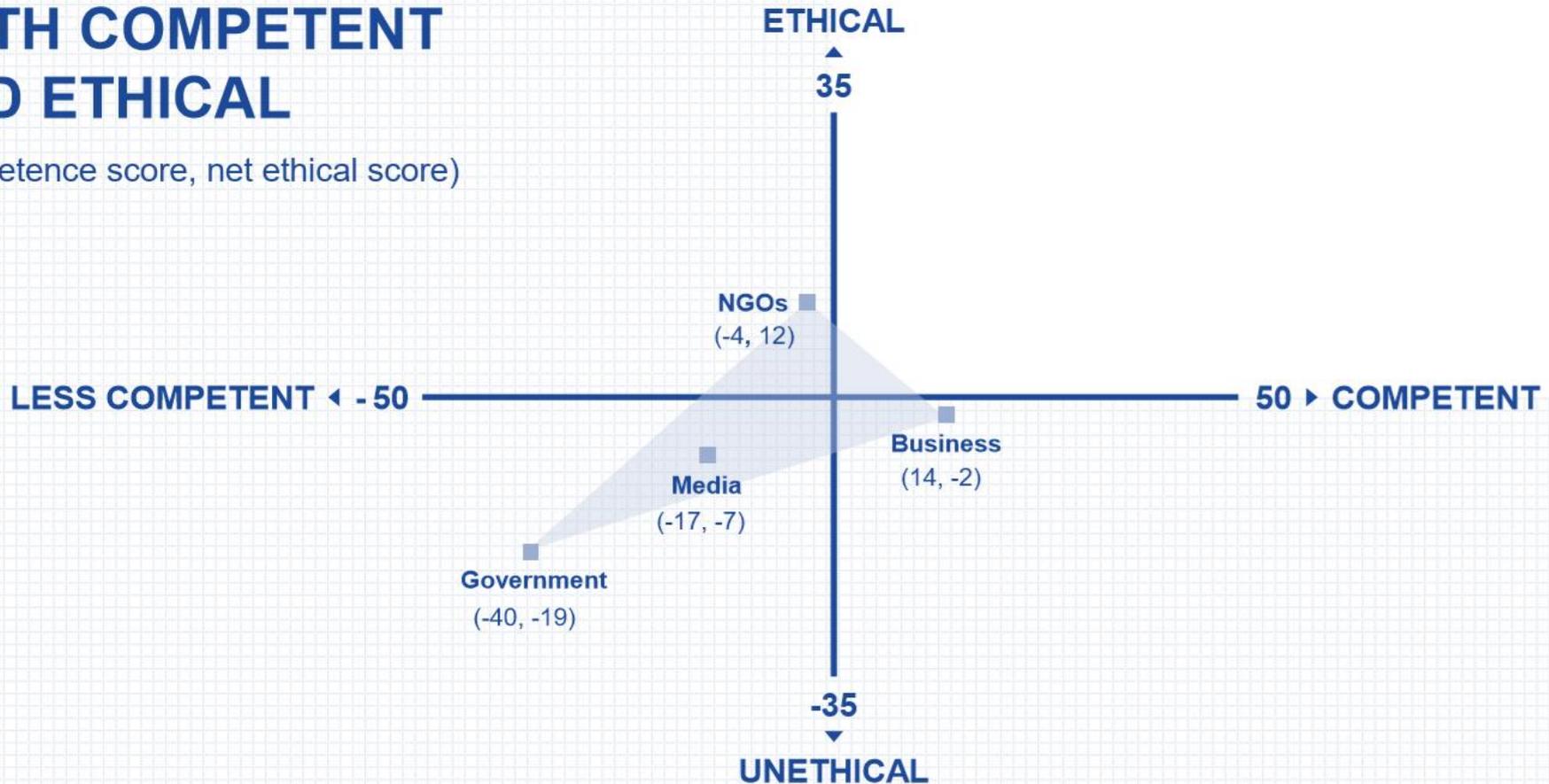
All markets



News avoidance is highest in Croatia (56%), Turkey (55%), and Greece (54%)

NO INSTITUTION SEEN AS BOTH COMPETENT AND ETHICAL

(Competence score, net ethical score)





WEAPONS OF MASS DISTRACTION

Most disinformation is created, launched and spread with either political or economic objectives by:

- ✓ A range of antidemocratic movements
- ✓ Partisan political actors
- ✓ Powerful economic forces
- ✓ Foreign states can benefit from deploying disinformation campaigns
- ✓ Various individuals using online infrastructure to earn money

STATES

- **Often entrust the important task** of deliberating “what is true and what false”, together with the liability, to search and social media platforms
- **Some states have enacted legislation** for specific cases of disinformation

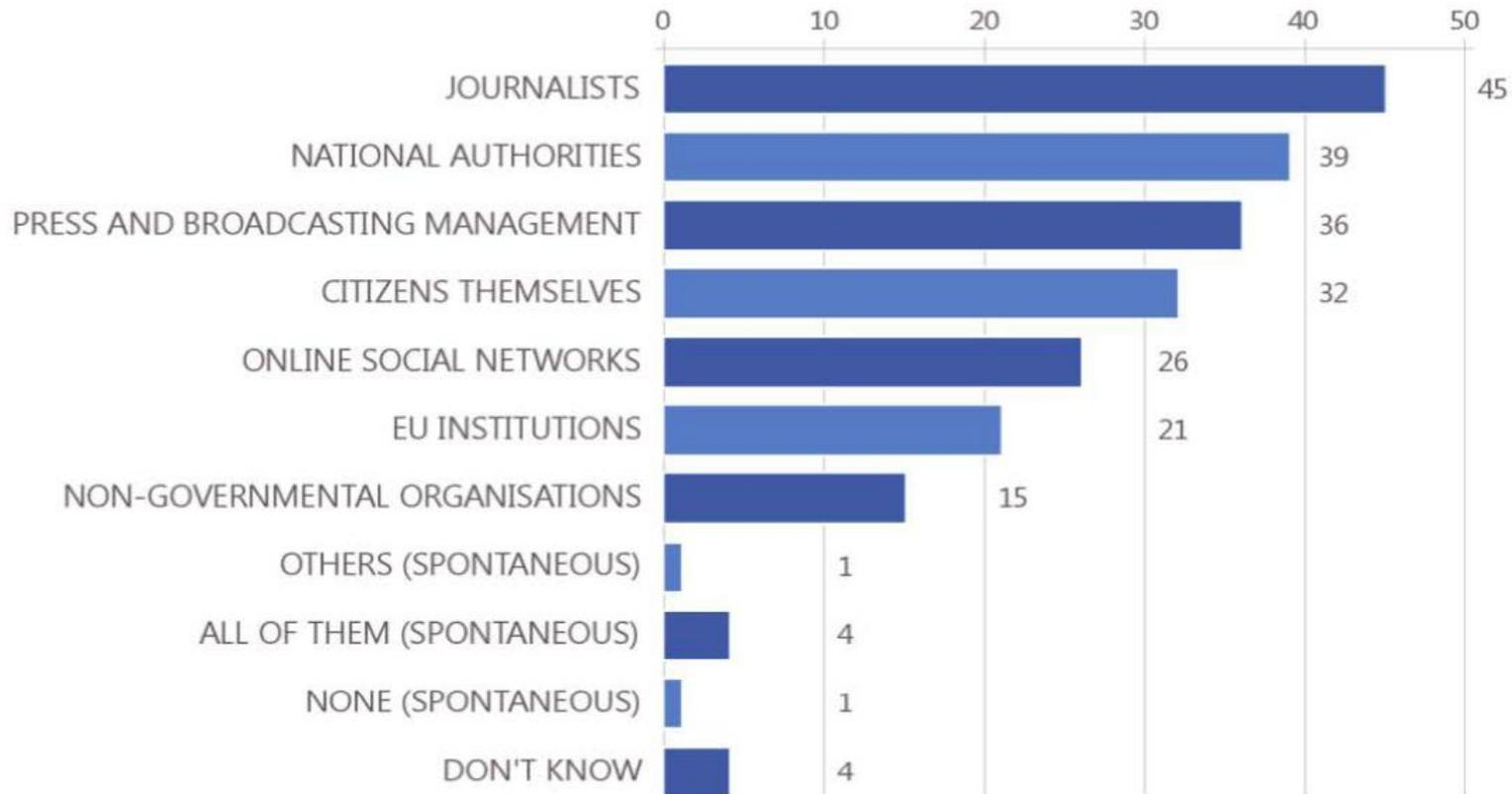


PLATFORMS

- **Routinely remove or block content** without explaining why, based on “community standards” rules
- **There is no independent oversight** of their takedown practices

Who should act?

Which of the following institutions and media actors should act to stop the spread of “fake news” ?



Eurobarometer 2018

Study: [Automated tackling of disinformation](#)

EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

83% OF EUROPEANS THINK FAKE NEWS IS A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY *

73% OF INTERNET USERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT DISINFORMATION ONLINE IN THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD *



#EUvsDisinfo

ACTION PLAN AGAINST DISINFORMATION

October 2018 – Adoption of the [Code of Practice on disinformation](#)

October 2019 - [annual self-assessments](#) by the Code signatories (Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and Mozilla)

May 2020 - [monitoring report](#) on the Effectiveness of the Code

June 2020 - [European Digital Media Observatory](#) in Florence

The human rights approach

Empowerment of quality journalism

- **Recommendation on promoting a favourable environment** for quality journalism in the digital age

Empowerment of media and information literacy skills

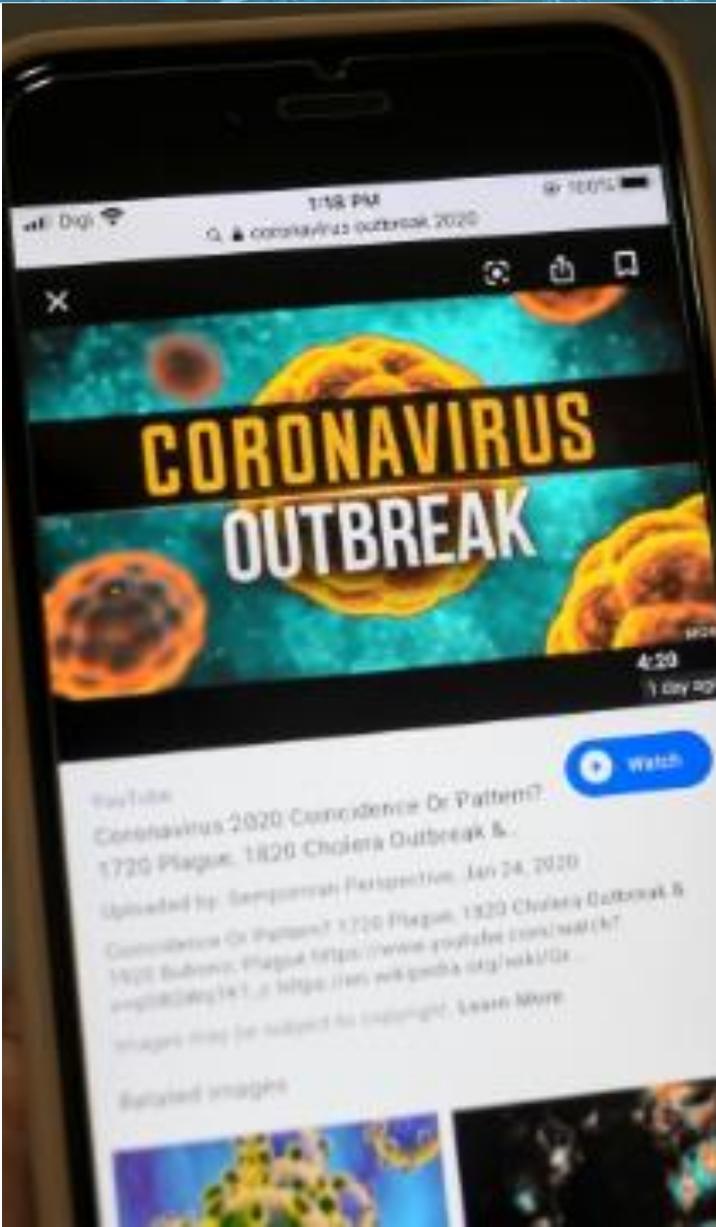
- **Study on supporting quality journalism** through media and information literacy

Ensuring compliance of online platforms

- **Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)2** on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries

Awareness of artificial intelligence systems manipulative capabilities

- **Declaration on the manipulative capabilities** of algorithmic processes
- **Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)1** on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems



Serious impact of disinformation on individuals' right to health is a real threat.

Exceptional circumstances justify exceptional measures including some restrictions on freedom of expression.

Malicious spreading of disinformation may be tackled with ex-post targeted sanctions.

Media play a key role in this crisis and also has an increased responsibility to provide accurate, reliable information to the public.

Some governments are using the crisis as a pretext to introduce disproportionate restrictions to media freedom.



How people consume COVID-19 news:

- ✓ **People consume more news** than usually, with a staggering 99% accessing COVID-19 news at least once a day.
- ✓ **People use more traditional media**, especially public broadcasters, to get their COVID-19 news.
- ✓ **Official sources are not only used but also trusted**, while the social media have taken a back seat.
- ✓ **Disinformation and confusion about COVID-19 are present** but people are more aware and some check other sources.

Source: Ofcom [weekly research](#)

More regulation is needed



Image: The Economist

Mark Zuckerberg said he believed **new regulation was needed in four areas:**

- **Harmful content**
- **Election integrity**
- **Privacy**
- **Data portability**

([The Guardian](#),
30 March 2019)

Thanks for your
attention !



further resources:

www.coe.int/freedomofexpression

www.coe.int/dataprotection

www.coe.int/cybercrime

www.coe.int/AI

Facebook Page

Information Society Group

