


How is Portugal addressing disinformation? Results of a mapping of initiatives (2010-2023)

Como é que Portugal está a lidar com a desinformação? Resultados de um mapeamento de iniciativas (2010-2023)

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Abstract

The brisk transformation of the internet and the rise of digital technologies have been causing a deep impact on the media and in the ways audiences access, consume and participate. Although in this era information is closer and more available to citizens, concerns have been raised regarding 1) the quality of the information disseminated by digital platforms, 2) the impacts it may have on democracies and 3) the urgency of promoting citizens' MIL competencies. Disseminating unverified content can pose threats towards the status of the Internet as a space for free and informative debate, and as a tool for social inclusion. Portugal is pointed out as the second European country where citizens are most concerned about authenticity and validity of information (Newman et al., 2020). However data also shows that mechanisms of disinformation are quite participated by them. In this way, it becomes relevant to understand how the various sectors of society have been promoting the empowerment of citizens, and their resilience and competence toward information disorder.

Within the scope of the project Read Twice, the team carried out a mapping of initiatives focused on tackling disinformation. The aim was to identify good practices and outline Portugal's experience concerning this issue. After an initial listing of activities (N=20) promoted over the last 13 years, the team identified 3 Top Initiatives and eleven Best Practices. Overall results suggest that media literacy has been in the spotlight in the Portuguese context since the 1980s. There is also a tendency for media literacy initiatives to engage target audiences through active, participatory and creative approaches. However, and although the longest-running activity dates from the late 1980s, the initiatives identified are limited to a specific timeframe, suggesting that there is a lack of continuity repeatedly emphasised in the research (Jorge et al., 2014; Brites et al., 2017).

Keywords: information disorder; disinformation; Portugal; media and information literacy; fake news.

Introduction

In the contemporary era, the accelerated evolution of the internet and digital technologies has led to a widespread and expeditious dissemination of information, regardless of its veracity and accuracy. The prevailing term "fake news" often employed to characterise this issue — although capturing an essential aspect — represents merely a fraction of its complexity. In scholarly discourse, the broader and more nuanced concept of information disorder as outlined by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), encapsulates the multifaceted nature of the problem. It encompasses three interrelated but distinct facets, delineated by their

intent and ramifications, namely the deliberate dissemination of falsehoods and the purposeful infliction of harm on information recipients. According to the authors,

Dis-information - Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country; Mis-information - Information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm; and Mal-information - Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 20)

The challenge of disinformation encompasses the creation and dissemination of falsified, unverified information that lacks transparency, aiming to deceive, confuse, and alienate citizens from factual reality, thereby exerting several impacts on democracy, media credibility and undermining human rights (Colomina et al., 2021). Accordingly, this issue has received considerable attention from global institutions due to its pervasive nature. At the European Union level, concerted efforts have been undertaken to address this phenomenon, encompassing awareness-raising campaigns, strategic initiatives, monitoring programs, workshops and collaborations with observatories.

When it comes to Portugal the country ranks second among European countries where citizens most express concern regarding the authenticity and validity of information (Newman et al., 2020). In 2023, the Reuters Digital News Report indicates that 58% of Portuguese citizens trust in news overall and that 7 in 10 show concern with the veracity of information found online (Pinto-Martinho et al., 2023). Even though a decrease in trust was noted, Portugal still ranks among the countries where people most trust in news (Pinto-Martinho et al., 2023). At the same time empirical data also reveals significant participation of Portuguese citizens in perpetuating mechanisms of disinformation - namely in social media channels, an aspect emphasised by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis (Cardoso et al., 2020).

Theoretical background

Disinformation and mistrust at the European level

Information disorder (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) represents a complex challenge within the European context. They involve the deliberate creation and dissemination of false, misleading or harmful information aimed at deceiving and manipulating citizens. This issue holds far-reaching implications for democratic processes, media credibility, and societal cohesion. As Divina Frau-Meigs (2019) recalls, information disorders — and particularly disinformation — are the ground for radicalisation, polarisation and disbelief in democratic institutions.

The current global context has been transversally and deeply marked by: i) the Covid-19 pandemic; ii) the infodemic (Guarino et al., 2021, n/a); iii) the rise of polarising political views (Jungkunz, 2021); iv) and by the technological evolutions that affect the digital landscape. Therefore, the impact of disinformation has become a growing concern for policymakers, media institutions, and civil society across Europe. According to the Media Literacy Index — an instrument that ranks European societies according to their potential for resilience towards post-truth, disinformation and misinformation attending to indicators such as media freedom, education, and trust — the disparities in media literacy across European countries are notable. The 2021 edition called attention to the existence of 5 different clusters highlighting geographical differences — Northwestern countries performed better, while Southeastern countries rated lower. Furthermore, the report illustrated a decrease in media literacy levels when comparing the results to data collected in 2019, revealing

that higher media literacy scores correspond to lower levels of distrust in scientists and journalists. The 2023 edition reinforces these results and the East-West and North-South divide, warning that countries close to the war in Ukraine remain among the most vulnerable to disinformation. As for Portugal, it ranks 12th out of 41 countries, having moved up two places comparatively to the 2022 report, ahead of Spain and France. Finland leads the ranking.

Results of recent Eurobarometer surveys point towards a similar direction. The Standard Eurobarometer 94 (2021a) shows that two out of three Europeans (65%) say they easily identify news or information that they believe misrepresents reality; though only 18% “totally agree” that they can easily identify fake news; 24% are “not very confident” and 6% are “not at all confident” in their competencies to do so. The same survey (European Commission, 2021a) concluded that trust in media is in decline in various countries — in nine Member States, respondents with “low or no trust” in the media represent the largest share, including Croatia (48%), Bulgaria (43%) and Romania (7%). As for Germany and Portugal, only 28% and 25% of respondents say they have low or no trust in the media, respectively. The Special Eurobarometer 507 on Democracy in the EU (2021b) revealed that the Internet had overtaken television as the main source of information about the European Union. In addition, the Media Pluralism Monitor 2022 (European University Institute et al., 2022) showed that when it comes to media literacy, 14 countries scored a medium risk (Portugal among them), 10 a high risk (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania among them) and eight countries registered a low risk (Germany included).

How are European institutions tackling disinformation?

To confront the escalating threat of disinformation, the European Union has been promoting an array of different activities. Awareness-raising campaigns, policies, fact-checking initiatives, and collaboration with technological platforms are initiatives currently underway to tackle dissemination. Recent examples are the EUvsDisinfo platform, the High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation, and the Action Plan against Disinformation.

The EUvsDisinfo’s database was established in 2015 by the East StratCom Task Force. Its main goal was to address the Russian Federation’s disinformation campaigns affecting the European Union, its Member States, and border countries. The platform serves as an active monitor and debunker of disinformation narratives targeting the EU and its member states. In turn, the High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation was established in 2018 to contribute to the development of an EU-level strategy on how to tackle the spreading of disinformation. The group engaged with key stakeholders to develop comprehensive recommendations and guidelines for effective disinformation countermeasures. The final report was published in march 2018 and presented a common reflection on the phenomenon of disinformation and a set of recommendations providing short-term actions to address urgent challenges, as well as longer-term strategies aimed at bolstering societal resilience against disinformation (European Commission, 2018a). Also in 2018, the European Commission (EC) published the Action Plan Against Disinformation. In this document, which builds upon earlier initiatives to address the challenges arising from disinformation campaigns, the EC established four priority areas: a) improving the capabilities of EU institutions to detect, analyse, and expose disinformation; b) strengthening coordinated and joint responses to disinformation; c) mobilising the private sector to tackle disinformation; and d) raising awareness and improving societal resilience (European Commission, 2018b). At a country level, various context-specific initiatives to fight and understand the

context and the extent of disinformation have been taking place. Media literacy programs to empower citizens, Academic research on disinformation and citizenship-related issues, national fact-checking initiatives and projects have been conducted to promote media literacy competencies, trust in news and information, and responsibility toward informed consumption and sharing of information.

Additionally, the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) has become a highly relevant hub to tackle disinformation. One of the observatory's main goals is to support and promote the monitoring and modernisation of public policies currently in force in the field of disinformation. Furthermore, by promoting contact and collaboration between fact-checkers, media literacy experts, academics and researchers as well as other stakeholders, EDMO has been analysing the disinformation that spreads through online media, in line with the European Commission's action plan against disinformation, published in December 2018.

The Portuguese context

In recent years, following the European context, Portugal has witnessed significant developments in the media literacy landscape, once diverse initiatives and organisations have actively focused on promoting media and digital literacy within society. One of the main driving forces in shaping the media literacy landscape has been the Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media (ERC). In addition to enforcing press and television laws and overseeing media registration and content, ERC has compiled a report on disinformation within the national context for parliamentary deliberation. The findings of this report have been disseminated through a subsequent publication titled "A desinformação - Contexto Europeu e Nacional" [Disinformation - European and National context] (ERC, 2022) which presents a reflection on the dimension, scope and problematics surrounding the proliferation of disinformation and false narratives online, within the European and national legal framework. Other examples of the country's commitment to addressing disinformation are exemplified by the approval of the "Carta Portuguesa de Direitos Humanos na Era Digital" [Portuguese Charter on Human Rights in the Digital Age] by the Portuguese parliament. This legislative charter is geared towards ensuring effective implementation of the European Action Plan against Disinformation, fostering a collective response, and promoting cooperation among member states to tackle the issue.

On the overall, the growing recognition of digital literacy's significance in navigating the complex information environment is evident in Portugal's media literacy landscape, where joint efforts from multiple stakeholders are empowering the population to become more discerning consumers and creators of media content. Following this, in the framework of the European project Read Twice, the team conducted a mapping of activities (public and private) in Portugal and in Germany, with the aim of identifying best practices for addressing fake news and promoting media literacy at a national level. Although other examples of mappings can be found in the literature produced in Portugal in the last 3 years, none can be found specifically related to the promotion of competences in the face of disinformation. This article highlights the results obtained in the mapping carried out in Portugal, and the main conclusions and learnings from it.

Methodology

Read Twice: becoming an agent against disinformation

The Read Twice project (ID101081326) stems from the urgency highlighted by the EC regarding the fight against misinformation and the concentration of efforts to prevent its spread by empowering citizens at large. The consortium strives to enhance citizens' capacity for discernment — particularly young media professionals. By bolstering media literacy competences, Read Twice intends to equip individuals with the competencies to critically assess information, identify malicious or harmful media content, and differentiate between factual information and opinions. For this reason, the project's motto emphasises the importance of relying on the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and the transfer of expertise to strengthen efforts in this domain.

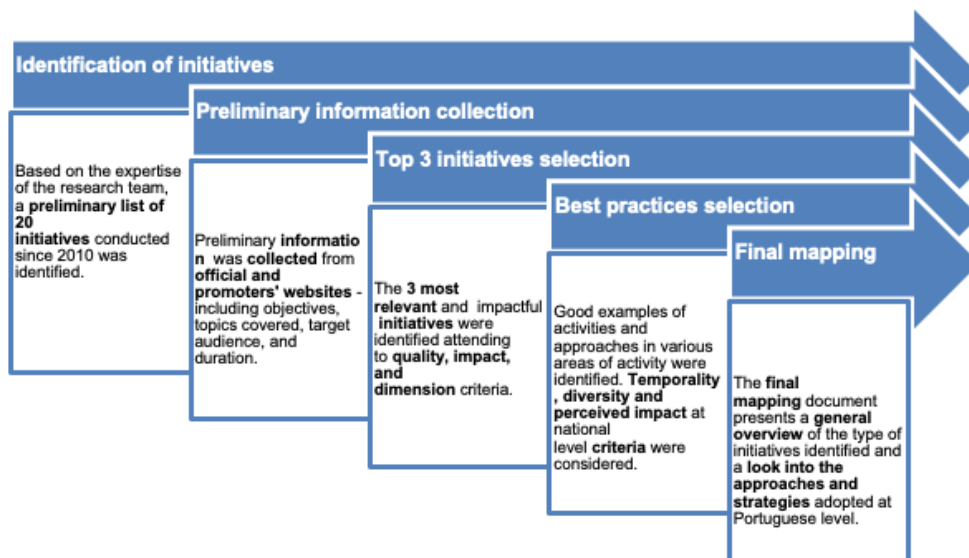
To identify positive outcomes in addressing disinformation and promoting media literacy, a mapping of best practices was conducted in Portugal and Germany, countries falling under cluster 2 in the Media Literacy Index 2021. This mapping aimed to underline successful approaches in mitigating disinformation challenges. The results were presented and deliberated upon during two capacity-building trainings, conducted either in Germany (February 2023) and in Portugal (March 2023). For this particular article, the team also benefited from discussions and some inputs from the YouNDigital project - Young People, News and Digital Citizenship (DOI 10.54499/PTDC/COM-OUT/0243/2021).

The mapping

Disinformation is a complex phenomenon, with a conceptual framework that is still being stabilised and without a universal definition. The aim of this mapping is to provide a more complete overview of the projects conducted in Portugal to combat disinformation, based on the theoretical framework outlined above. This is an inductive exploratory approach which, according to Stebbins (2001), takes place when a set of activities and initiatives has not been systematically analysed.

Figure 1 represents the mapping process. The primary aim was to compile a comprehensive and insightful account of initiatives undertaken by both public and private entities to address disinformation and media literacy-related concerns. Drawing upon the expertise of the research team — which has been focusing on media literacy, media education, and audience studies —, an initial list of 20 initiatives was curated, spanning a 13-year timeframe from 2010 with particular emphasis on the last 6 years. Subsequently, a detailed content analysis of the initiatives' websites was conducted. This task was based on a set of guiding questions, namely: what their objectives and subject matter were; and what their target audience and duration was. Besides this, the impact of the initiatives was also taken into account – specifically the types of audiences involved, longevity and territorial scope. This resulted in a matrix table that aggregated all the information collected and gave an overview of all the initiatives identified.

Figure 1: Visual representation of the mapping process conducted by the Portuguese team



Source: Own elaboration.

Upon scrutinising the gathered information, the team's analysis allowed them to identify three initiatives as the Top Selection. These were distinguished for their exceptional quality, far-reaching impact, and extensive scope. Aspects such as longevity, methodologies employed and type were considered in this selection. Besides these, a set of Best Practices were identified, exemplifying commendable activities and approaches spanning diverse domains. The criteria for selection included not only temporal aspects (e.g., length), the diversity of target groups and sectors, as well as the perceived national-level impact. The final dataset was subjected to qualitative and thematic analysis, in order to discern commonalities and identify distinctive features among the several initiatives.

The mapping results provide a comprehensive overview of relevant and impactful national initiatives related to the project's core subjects, explore the sources of funding that sustain them, and discern the most prominent sectors driving their promotion.

Results/ Results discussion

Overview of the national results/ key findings

The comprehensive research and analysis of the listed initiatives in this mapping offer an insightful overview of Portugal's endeavours in fighting information disorder and building resilience against disinformation. It sheds light on the efforts made by diverse sectors of society to devise strategies aimed at promoting media and information literacy and empowering citizens for early recognition of disinformation. Some of the general and preliminary conclusions that arise from the mapping point out that the initiatives's goals are common and in line with the European guidelines and strategies for empowering citizens, promoting media literacy and tackling the spread of misinformation. Besides this, it is clear that most initiatives are focused on school-age groups or broad audiences. A reduced number of initiatives specifically focused on intergenerational perspectives or older age groups was identified.

In the following sections, we detail and reflect on the most relevant findings of this mapping, namely the Top initiatives, the Best Practices, and the sectors that promote the most initiatives targeting these issues and the type of approaches mostly employed.

Top 3 initiatives

The top 3 initiatives, as table 1 displays, stand out for their exceptional quality in terms of approaches, tools and materials, significant impact, history, and reach of broad audiences. Their relevance in terms of capacity building of diverse audiences and areas of activity were also considered, in an attempt to find a selection that would characterise the broad spectrum of national action. Their promoters come from a variety of business sectors, something that points to the relevance of the themes in Portuguese society. Although the initiatives are distinct in terms of approaches and duration — only one of them is identified as being of long term — their notoriety, contribution to the promotion of critical thinking of wider audiences and disruptive strategies were valued.

Público na Escola, promoted by the national reference newspaper Público, even with some interruptions, has been in operation since 1989, with the first bulletin published in March 1990. This was the only long-term initiative identified during the mapping process. Primarily targeting school-age children and teachers, the initiative recognizes the significance of media literacy as an essential skill for citizens to engage in informed analysis of the world and actively participate as critical, attentive, and committed individuals. Bearing this in mind, Público na Escola plays a pivotal role in shaping the reading and information-seeking habits of the youngest generations, establishing a stronger connection between the current media landscape and schools, and fostering an enlightened and diverse society. To achieve this goal, the project not only equips teachers with new tools and strategies to approach media education in formal educational contexts, but also offers students — from different age groups — a new range of opportunities for self-expression, engaging them in journalistic practices. Its overarching objectives include decoding the language employed by the press and the media, fostering critical thinking, strengthening the relationship between the media and educational institutions, promoting the establishment of school newspapers, amplifying student voices and empowering teachers with effective tools to promote media literacy within the educational context. It is understood that the activities conducted by the project are aligned with the principles and competencies outlined in Perfil dos Alunos à Saída do Ensino Secundário (Students Profile by the End of Compulsory Education) (d'Oliveira Martins, G. et al., 2017), a document that emphasises essential skills and provides a foundation for defining strategies and pedagogical approaches in teaching practice in Portugal. By anchoring its activities in these skills, Público na Escola has been ensuring a close alignment with educational goals and reinforcing the relevance of media literacy in preparing students for their future roles as informed and engaged citizens for over 30 years.

The second initiative listed in the Top 3 was Polígrafo, an online journalistic project created in 2018 which has as its motto investigating truth in the public sphere. It is a member of the International Fact-Checking Network, which means it complies with its codes of principles. Polígrafo was the only Portuguese independent and fully fact-checking focussed initiative identified during the mapping process. Its central objective is to promote critical literacy and citizenship skills among citizens through the practice of fact-checking. To this end, Polígrafo engages in daily scrutiny of information disseminated by various entities, including traditional and digital media, politicians, commentators, influencers, and artists. One of the most

noteworthy aspects of this project is that it opens the door to readers' questions and concerns, addressing proposals and requests for information for verification. Another relevant aspect is that following the lead of international fact-checking references such as Agência Lupa (Brazil) and maldita.es (Spain), Polígrafo employs a 7-level ranking evaluation scale to assess the veracity of each news item. The scale developed by the Polígrafo team aims to categorise the degree of veracity of a piece of information. Taking responsibility for education and transparency towards the public, Polígrafo provides a detailed description for each level of the scale, using simple and accessible language. Transparency and proximity are therefore core principles for Polígrafo. The project explicitly and objectively describes all the steps involved in the verification process for each piece of information. Through this approach, it aims to empower readers about the aspects they should consider in their daily media consumption. It should also be noted that the fact that it has an exclusive weekly slot on national television in open signal — on SIC, a prominent private national television channel —, Polígrafo promotes a space of non-formal education where news pieces are thoroughly scrutinised, including the information sources, authors, and fact-checking process, culminating in the assignment of a ranking based on its veracity. The online presence — which includes activity in a variety of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) — combined with its straightforward language and visibility on national television helps Polígrafo reach a wide audience and penetrate the households of a significant portion of the Portuguese population, from all age groups and socio-economic strata.

The last initiative listed in the Top 3 is the short-duration course Cidadão Ciberinformado. This self-paced, e-learning course is an open-source resource that addresses issues about misinformation and falsified information. It is offered by the National Cybersecurity Center (CNCS) and was developed together with LUSA, the national news agency. The course aims to provide knowledge and guidance to individuals — from any age — who engage with online information, use digital devices, and have an interest in issues related to the internet and online information. One of the main intents of the training is to raise awareness about the perils associated with uncritical consumption of information while imparting knowledge on the verification of online content. Spanning approximately three hours in total, Cidadão Ciberinformado addresses varied issues making use of texts, videos, exercises and other supplementary materials. Upon completion, participants have the option to download a Certificate of Completion. By accomplishing the course, participants are expected to grasp the concept of fake news, comprehend their origins and dissemination methods, recognize the significance of combating fake news, acquire skills for verifying the accuracy of news and information online, and appreciate the importance of placing trust in journalism and continuing to engage with information online.

Table 1: Details of the Top 3 national initiatives identified during the mapping process

Name	Type	of Sector	Promoter	Years
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	Iniciative			
Público na Escola	Project	Media/ Education	Público	1989-
Polígrafo	Fact-checking initiative	Media	Polígrafo with the support of SIC	2018-
Cidadão Ciberinformado	Training	Social Innovation/ Media	National Cybersecurity Center (CNCS) with the support of Lusa	2020-

Source: Own elaboration.

With markedly different didactic approaches, these initiatives are characterised by their focus on empowering citizens for informed media consumption and production and on promoting a critical look at the images and stories disseminated by the media. These initiatives also emphasise the importance of the media as promoters of media literacy, transparency in journalistic praxis and trust in the news. Given the events of recent history — disinformation arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia war — these initiatives play a major role in tackling disinformation, reducing the spread of propaganda, and promoting digital literacy skills to better navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

10+1 Best Practices

The selection of best practices aimed to underline initiatives that stood out in the national context due to their methods, techniques, and processes, and that are widely recognized as effective, efficient and with a broader reach. These practices are also characterised by their potential for replicability, having mostly resulted in materials suitable for wider audiences, adaptable to formal and non-formal educational contexts, or even suited for learning in personal contexts.

When analysing the period between 2010 and 2023 — with a special focus on the last 6 years — the diversity of initiatives promoted by various sectors became apparent, as Table 2 exhibits. From the Education to the Media and Social Innovation sector, the team identified social action projects carried out in partnership with media outlets, educational projects focused on different age groups and even initiatives exclusively focused on the development of educational materials — from games to manuals. This diversity suggests not only a growing focus on issues related to media education and the promotion of competences to face a multimedia context increasingly marked by information disorder, but also a deep focus on innovation and social innovation.

Table 2: Details of the 10+1 national Best Practices identified during the mapping process.

Name	Type	of	Sector	Promoter	Years
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	Iniciative			
Academia Media Veritas	Project	Media/ Social Innovation	Associação Portuguesa de Imprensa [Portuguese Press Association] with the support of Google.org	2019-2022
Desinformação em contexto de Guerra	Campaign/ Information materials	Educational	Direção-Geral da Educação [Directorate-General for Education] with Centro de Sensibilização SeguraNet [SeguraNet Awareness Centre]	2022-2023
Hora da Verdade	Fact- checking initiative	Media	TVI with the support of Observador	2020-2021
EDMO-Iberifier	Project/ Observatory	Higher Education/ Research	<p>University of Navarra (Coordinator)</p> <p>Spanish partners: Asociación Maldita contra la desinformación: periodismo, educación, investigación y datos en nuevos formatos, Universidad Carlos III, Universidad de Granada, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Universitat Politècnica de València, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Universidad Miguel Hernandez, Associació Verificat, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Fundacion Universitaria San Pablo, Agencia EFE, Fundación Española Para La Ciencia Y La Tecnología (FECYT), Universitat de València, Real Instituto Elcano, Barcelona Supercomputing Center</p> <p>Portuguese partners: ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Polígrafo, Centro Protocolar de Formação Profissional para Jornalistas (CENJOR), Universidade de Aveiro, Observatório da Comunicação (OberCom), Agência Lusa, Associação Literacia Para os Media e Jornalismo</p>	2021-

Media Trust.Lab	Project	Higher Education/ Research	LabCom – Communication and Arts and University of Beira Interior and University of Coimbra	2021-
Prova dos Factos	Fact-checking initiative	Media	Público	2016-
Público ou Inimigo Público	Game	Media	Público	2018-
SMaRT-EU	Project	Higher Education/ Research	Lusófona University, CICANT (coordinator) (Portugal) Partners: Pontydysgu SL (Wales/Spain), Društvo za komunikacijsku i medijsku kulturu - DKMK (Croatia), Mediawijs (Belgium), University of Tartu (Estonia), ERYICA (Luxembourg)	2020-2021
Tiras BD SeguraNet	Campaign/ Information materials	Educational	Centro de Sensibilização SeguraNet [SeguraNet Awareness Centre]	2010-2020
Verdade ou Mentira	Game	Educational	Direção-geral da Educação [Directorate-General for Education]	2020
Vozes de Gaia	Project	Media/ Social Innovation	Público newspaper & INATEL Foundation (promoters) with the support of the Municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia	2021-2022

Source: Own elaboration

Education, media and higher education/research: the main promoters of resilience against disinformation

Looking at the results of the mapping, it is visible that three sectors of activity stand out in terms of the development of initiatives related to the promotion of media literacy and empowerment in the face of disinformation. Regarding the initiatives developed in the Education sector, it is clear that they have a strong focus on the development and provision of training materials, sometimes adaptable to various educational contexts (formal and non-formal), and sometimes focused on specific audiences. Of the initiatives listed, we mention, for example, the Fake News and Disinformation training, promoted by the Protocol Centre for Professional Training for Journalists (CENJOR) and specifically focused on professionals working in the media, especially in the digital environment — not only journalists, but also others. Another example is the

initiative Tiras BD SeguraNet, a set of didactic resources aimed at promoting Digital Citizenship and Media Education in schools created by Centro de Sensibilização SeguraNet [SeguraNet Awareness Centre]. The comic strips use an appealing visual language for younger audiences and are created to be used as an educational resource — in any educational context. Among the various themes addressed are the veracity of the information circulating on the internet and the dangers of perpetuating false information.

Looking at the media sector, the initiatives and projects identified are highly focused on unveiling journalistic practices, the construction of its discourse, languages and narratives, with the ultimate aim of bringing audiences closer to the media and promoting critical readings of the world transmitted by the media. The initiatives Academia Media Veritas and Vozes de Gaia stand out in this regard.

Academia Media Veritas was a social innovation initiative conducted between 2019 and 2022 with a primary focus on combating media illiteracy and addressing concerns related to journalistic manipulation and misinformation. The initiative strategically targeted senior communities from the Vila Nova de Gaia municipality (Porto). Concurrently, specific activities were also tailored to engage younger age groups. The overarching goal of this initiative was to empower both cohorts with the necessary skills and knowledge to proficiently navigate, assess, critically evaluate, produce, and respond to media messages effectively.

To achieve these objectives, Academia Media Veritas organised a series of training sessions and workshops that promoted participants' media literacy, raised awareness concerning disinformation, and fostered an understanding of the fundamental principles underpinning journalistic practices. In addition, the initiative culminated in the development of several instrumental resources — an instructive manual thoughtfully designed for older people, with guidance on how to identify clearly false information, which emerged as a fundamental asset; and a quiz particularly aimed at young people (aged between 14 and 25 years), to gauge their knowledge and aptitude concerning the identification and detection of false and deceptive information. The initiative Vozes de Gaia shared similar goals. Collaborative activity undertaken by Público newspaper and the INATEL Foundation with the partnership of the Municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia, the project sought to emulate the dynamic environment of a newsroom and newspaper editorial team. It bore two fundamental objectives: to promote media literacy and foster media education among older citizens aged 55 years and above. Essentially structured in distinct sessions, each spanning three months, the project convened participating groups for weekly training sessions of six hours' duration. These immersive sessions were tailored to encompass diverse aspects of journalistic practice, such as writing journalistic features, engaging in field reporting and conducting interviews. By design, these activities sought to deconstruct the intricate tapestry of journalistic endeavours, while empowering senior citizens to grasp the essence of news reporting, discern the potential perils associated with disinformation and misinformation, and discern the social constructions arising from media narratives.

These two initiatives are an example of the commitment that media institutions are making in promoting media education, educating more informed audiences and improving transparency in journalistic practice.

As for the higher education/research sector, there are initiatives in the development of training practices and materials and citizen empowerment, highly based on contextualised research. In doing so, these projects are marked by the importance of advancing knowledge produced in various fields of study (particularly in Media Studies) and at the same time promoting the dissemination and exploitation of results, positively impacting the practices and learning of society at large. Examples of this are the MediaTrust.Lab and SMART-EU projects.

MediaTrust.Lab – Local Media Lab for Civic Trust and Literacy is a national research project centred around the pressing issue of disinformation within proximity contexts in Portugal. This project emerges in response to the noticeable dearth of attention given to disinformation and fake news within smaller territories and local media outlets. These regional media platforms contend with frequent financial constraints and a dependence on State support, further exacerbated by the presence of local news deserts, predominantly affecting remote and less accessible regions. MediaTrust.Lab intends to identify and analyse fact-checking strategies and practices employed by local journalists. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of collaborating with local media audiences in this investigative process, the project undertakes training actions designed for local journalists and audiences; in the near future, and based on the knowledge acquired through the contact with target audiences and their practices, MediaTrust.Lab will be developing a digital tool and a mobile app to facilitate the fact-checking process, as well as policy-oriented documents — based on identified practices and urgencies.

A similar approach was adopted by the project SMaRT-EU - Social Media Resilience Toolkit. This initiative aimed specifically at providing tools, suggestions, and resources to train young people, older adults and educators to be more resilient to misinformation and fake news. It particularly focused on the various forms that false information can take on social media and on fake news phenomena. By adopting a participatory action research methodology the project — which had an intergenerational focus — developed and made available a repository of materials targeted at each end-user group and related to three main themes (Media Literacy keys concepts; Online Civic Engagement and Resilience to Disinformation and Fake news), and co-created materials (e.g., booklets, training materials) to provide useful and easily usable content for citizens in diverse educational contexts. Furthermore, and as a result of the workshop conducted with diverse audiences, a set of recommendations to tackle fake news was made available.

Learning by doing and producing

A general look at the pedagogical approaches identified in the various projects and initiatives shows that those that aim to reach audiences directly tend to focus on "learning by doing" (Dewey, 1971, pp.14), emphasising the value of learning experiences that favour creation and production. Learning-by-doing provides opportunities for learners to acquire skills in managing the inherent complexities of real-world domains, such as experiencing and engaging in critical reflections regarding the implications of media content and misinformation. Workshops, training, and co-creation of materials are among the various approaches identified, accentuating that optimal learning occurs when individuals actively engage with their surroundings and with the subjects under focus. This has been pointed out by previous research as a crucial aspect in the digital age — that the learning culture is highly characterised by experimentation, sharing and participation (Lankshear & Knobel, 2010, 2003; Brown, 2005). Público na Escola, Vozes de Gaia and SMaRT-EU are some of the initiatives based on this approach, emphasising that hands-on experiences, problem-solving, and the practical application of knowledge are more effective pedagogical methods to promote media competencies comparatively to passive listening, memorization or note taking. Thus, it motivates participation, and engagement in the process of critical thinking, while it promotes agency. In this set of initiatives practical approaches, especially learning-by-doing, emerge as a favourable practice within media education, suitable for both formal and non-formal settings and effective in engaging diverse sociodemographic and economic groups.

Lessons learned

The search and analysis of the initiatives compiled in this mapping offer a comprehensive overview of the efforts carried out in Portugal to address information disorder, specifically focusing on disinformation, and the significant attention given by various segments of society to formulate strategies to empower citizens with competencies for early detection of information disorder. This study reveals several key insights. Firstly, the majority of identified initiatives appear to be fragmented and characterised by limited duration, which may impact their long-term effectiveness. Secondly, the education, the media, and higher education/research sectors emerge as the primary driving forces behind initiatives aimed at combatting disinformation and empowering citizens with the necessary tools to navigate the digital landscape. From a historical perspective, it is revealed that most of the recognized initiatives originated approximately four years ago, with one notably enduring initiative established as far back as 1989, indicating sustained efforts in this domain. These aspects have been highlighted by other research conducted within the Media Studies field (Jorge et al., 2014; Brites, 2017).

Moreover, the identified initiatives share common objectives, aligning with European guidelines and strategies aimed at empowering citizens, fostering media literacy, and combating the dissemination of misinformation. Additionally, many initiatives have sought to engage citizens through the generation of original content and the introduction of accessible tools, such as games or playful materials, to stimulate critical thinking about information disorders. Media-driven initiatives have especially emphasised journalistic content, recognizing journalism's pivotal role in upholding democratic values.

Despite the diversity of initiatives targeting school-age and broad audiences, few have specifically addressed intergenerational perspectives or catered to older age groups, signalling potential areas for further development. Furthermore, several initiatives have prioritised active learning and collaborative knowledge co-creation activities, fostering engagement and participation among target groups. However, a notable gap lies in the lack of initiatives dedicated to the domain of advertising, which merits further attention and exploration.

These findings illuminate the current landscape of efforts undertaken in Portugal to tackle information disorder. They underscore the importance of sustainable and coordinated initiatives across various sectors in fostering media literacy, promoting critical thinking, and empowering citizens to navigate the challenges of the digital age successfully.

Looking ahead: the future of media education in Portugal

Media literacy and media education have become increasingly important concerns in the Portuguese context since the 1980s. Several initiatives have been developed, both in formal and informal settings, with the objective of not only establishing the foundations of media competencies but also providing comprehensive knowledge on current global issues that generate international concern, such as information disorders. The extensive number of initiatives identified in the presented mapping reflects Portugal's commitment to equipping its citizens with the necessary skills to navigate through new information landscapes and effectively address the challenges and risks that arise from them.

Moreover, an examination of the initiatives listed in the mapping reveals a clear emphasis on empowering individuals across different age groups, from the youngest to the oldest, and from educational contexts to media professionals. The overarching goal is to cultivate critical citizenship and promote enlightened media consumption and creation habits among all those who access, consume, and produce media. This concern is evident not only in the nature of the initiatives and their contents but also in the identified set of promoters actively engaged in these endeavours.

While this mapping underscores the importance of continued efforts, emphasising that initiatives should not be confined to a specific period or limited to younger age groups, the Portuguese example and experience can serve as a valuable model for countries with lower rankings in the Media Literacy Index. The highlighted best practices indicate that civil society in Portugal has been responsive to the challenges posed by the digital age, aligning itself with the policies and strategies developed at the European level. These experiences offer valuable insights that can be replicated in other European and international contexts.

Furthermore, the identified initiatives align with the strong Portuguese tradition of developing media-focused school activities or involving the media itself, such as the establishment of school newspapers or the integration of the newspaper "Público" in educational settings. They also dialogue with the recognition of journalism's pivotal role in combating disinformation, particularly through fact-checking initiatives, which have garnered significant visibility and appreciation.

Lastly, it is crucial to recall that several constraints were faced during the mapping process. There were two main issues concerning the relevance of the subject and the availability of information regarding the projects. Initially, it was difficult to identify projects and initiatives conducted on a national scale during the first half of the decade. Furthermore, only a handful of projects, particularly in the field of education, exclusively focused on disinformation and fake news. Moreover, there was no known centralised database containing information about projects and initiatives related to disinformation and fake news at the national level. Consequently, it was paramount to conduct a thorough search on the websites of the identified promoters to gather more comprehensive information. Looking ahead, we consider that the research could be enriched by collecting testimonies from the teams involved in the promotion of the identified initiatives and by analysing the long-term impact of the initiatives on the lives, experiences and knowledge of the target audiences.

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