

# General Assembly 4

## Combating misinformation in media in democracies

<b>Forum:</b>	General Assembly 4 <sup>th</sup> Committee
<b>Issue:</b>	Combating misinformation in media in democracies
<b>Student Officer:</b>	Troy Jones
<b>Position:</b>	Deputy Chair of General Assembly 4 <sup>th</sup> Committee

---

## Introduction

The media is a cornerstone of healthy democracies. The media helps share political agendas and shape public opinion. Through multiple media platforms, from hardcopy and online newspapers to television critical analysis shows and satirical cartoons, the media informs and entertains the public, supports transparency, and encourages public dialogue. Media that is independent and plural, providing space for many different views to be heard is a core feature of democracy; however, this also poses a challenge to combating the spread of misinformation through the media, especially in an increasingly hyper and digitally interconnected world and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Misinformation is pervasive and undermines democracy. It is false, partially true, or unclear information that is shared by different media sources every day. An example is a 'Breaking News' type media story which is shared before sufficient fact and source checking has been conducted to determine its veracity or to give it necessary perspective. Misinformation is not intentionally designed to mislead or cause harm. It is unlike disinformation which is intentionally created to misinform and cause harm through the decisions and actions people make based on this information. However, the speed and widespread presence of media communication through the internet, television news and social media means that misinformation spreads quickly, rapidly shapes opinions, and can cause harm regardless of intent.

Whether the media is an impartial, independent mechanism for democracy in a hyperconnected world is under scrutiny. There are challenges posed by amplified and biased reporting whether intentional or not, as well as by the constant flow of large volumes of false information. Under these conditions, society can become more polarized, divided, overwhelmed, and/or disinterested. This fosters disagreement, misunderstanding, conflict, cynicism, and/or apathy, making it difficult to have constructive and inclusive public participation on political agendas that determine the social, economic, and environmental future of countries. Misinformation therefore undermines public trust in democracy and emphasizes the need to empower the public (civil society) with critical thinking skills to help them evaluate the credibility of the information shared.

This report presents the complexity of combatting misinformation in a media dense world as a critical requirement for healthy democracies. Key terms, stakeholders, and international endeavors connected to this issue are introduced, and possible solutions are suggested.

## **Key Terms**

### **Civil Society**

Most interpretations agree that this comprises the general public, including individuals, communities, and non-government organizations. Involvement of civil society in political agenda is a key component of a healthy democracy.

### **Democracy**

A form of governance of a country that is based on 'rule by the people.' A healthy democracy has open elections of government representatives, equitable constitution and legislation, respect for the rule of law and recognition of the importance of media and civil society participation.

### **Media**

Multiple forms of communication and communication groups or organizations e.g., internet, television, social media, magazines, radio which can focus on specific or many topics, and have a local reach and audience and/or nation-wide, regional, and global.

### **Misinformation**

Misinformation comprises information that is entirely or partially false, presented in a misleading way, and/or incomplete. False information that is shared accidentally and without the intention of causing harm. This includes the lack of intention to influence or bias public opinion and extends to users sharing information without intent to cause harm, on platforms filtered by social media algorithms.

## General Overview

Media is a key source of information to the public, otherwise referred to as civil society. An extensive amount of information is shared daily and often in a continuous, widely accessible stream through media channels like the internet, social media, and television news programmes. Distinguishing between the public and media is blurred with the promotion and access to non-verified, self-reporting on social media platforms like Twitter – X, apps like WhatsApp and citizen-eye witness television news reports. The media covers many topics about society, the economy, and environment which help inform civil society, supports transparency, and influences opinions and how people engage with government and non-government actors including on their governments and international political agendas. For these reasons and the unintended potential for harm in the present and future, for all or parts of society and/or the environment, resultant from decision-making and actions based on misinformation, in an hyper-connected and AI modern world it is essential to combat misinformation in media as a requirement for healthy democracies.

### Independent and pluralistic media

Healthy democracies include an independent, pluralistic media which operates without censorship and is free of bias towards any influencing agendas and where different views from different parts of society can be presented. Misinformation undermines the independence of media and the unbiased quality presentation of the views expressed by different parts of society.

### Public trust and participation

Fundamental to the institutional role of media in a healthy democracy is the veracity or trustworthiness of media in terms of facts shared, clarification of fact and fiction, information source and content quality checking, and unbiased use of multiple and diverse sources to support facts and viewpoints and how they are presented. Failure to achieve this erodes public trust in the media. Critically, this can result in misinformation in the media polarising and dividing nations and global societies on issues. Inclusive, equitable participation of civil society in democratic processes is also reduced by the volume and indiscernible mix of good and poor-quality information.

## **Major Parties Involved**

### **India**

India with the largest national population in the world and its extensive use of social media is the country with the highest risk to misinformation. In recent times, biased perceptions of voters in numerous elections have shown the extent to which social media misinformation influences public opinions and undermines the democratic election process.

### **United States of America (USA)**

The USA is one of the most vulnerable countries to misinformation and disinformation which has led to increased lack of trust by civil society in the healthy democratic relationships between media and government. Intentional harmful and false information (disinformation) has been found to be amplified by hidden algorithms in social media which bias selection of information, and the spread of misinformation like during the USA 2020 elections by Russia.

### **United Kingdom (UK)**

In the UK, many newspapers are owned by companies that are biased politically. These provide sources to others and shape public opinion through the unintentional amplification of this original bias on multiple other media platforms. An example is the misinformation communicated during BREXIT.

### **Brazil**

In Brazil, harm from the overlap between misinformation and disinformation is impacting public opinion and their quality of civil society engagement. Media platforms like Tik Tok have become popular and share information from entertainment to political agenda. During the 2022 democratic election campaign, posts on public health and military strategy were shared on multiple social media platforms.

### **African Union**

There are variable misinformation experiences in different African countries especially of low-income communities and women (gender) and a lack of comprehensive information about this phenomenon in Africa. Part of this is due to uneven access to digital technology like mobile phones, computers, and the internet. Variable literacy and widespread communication by word of mouth, in Africa, heightens the risk of miscommunication.

### **United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)**

Given the important role played by the media in sharing information and influencing civil society, UNDESA is a key stakeholder who can increase awareness and support the involvement of civil society in addressing misinformation.

### **World Health Organisation (WHO)**

Health is an important scientific, lifestyle, economic, and political agenda of relevance to everyone. People and governments are very interested in health. Together with climate, health is one of the most miscommunicated topics without malice but often due to lack of complete information, complexity of health, scientific character of health, and other challenges.

## Timeline of Key Events

<b>10 December 1948</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights. General Assembly resolution 217 A. Article 19
<b>16 December 1966</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 19.
<b>16 June 2011</b>	Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework
<b>24 December 2021</b>	Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedom. General Assembly Resolution 76/227.
<b>12 August 2022</b>	Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Report of the Secretary-General)
<b>June 2023</b>	Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8 Information Integrity on Digital Platforms
<b>24 June 2024</b>	United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity Recommendations for Multi-stakeholder Action



## UN Involvement and Other Treaties

Key UN events and resolutions are outlined in the previous section.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Following the end of World War II the UN and nations focused on peace, trade and the recognition and safeguarding of human rights including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (GA Resolution 217) where,

“ everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers’ (Article 19);

and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states,

” 1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) for respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) for the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals” (Article 19).

The present challenge is how best to manage the recognition of these human rights of free expression and constraints of these rights under certain conditions, the role of media in healthy democracies, and managing misinformation.

### **Attempt to solve the issue**

Misinformation in the media as a challenge to healthy democracy is a critical issue that has emerged especially since the 2000s as hyper interconnectivity between people and wider civil society within a country and across countries, globally, has rapidly increased. This is amplified by the development of AI and social media algorithms that support unintentional and intentional bias in what and 'how' 'facts' are shared and to whom, the role individuals and organizations can play in self-reporting media, and the relationship between misinformation and disinformation. These challenges are exacerbated by how closely facts and falsehoods can resemble each other, the technical and scientific nature of facts that make it hard for most people to assess their veracity, and the volume of information shared every day on many media platforms including social media and messaging platforms like Facebook, Tik Tok, WhatsApp and Twitter-X.

Solutions need to involve many actors from nation states, the UN, private sector, civil society, and individuals. Everyone needs to have a role and responsibility in combatting misinformation in the media and supporting healthy democracies. Since 2011, the UN has been putting in place guiding principles and strategies on how to 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' human rights, freedom, and information integrity. Multiple actors can provide solutions through targeted strategies and practices that avoid compromising human rights and freedom of expression, like investing in civil society literacy to read and critically assess information, promoting access to fact checking resources, clear legislation, ensuring that public officials share accurate information, having media enterprises including social media commit to transparency, respect for human rights and avoiding intentional harm, and review of all content, in all languages, worldwide where they are operational and/or accessed. At the same time, there is a need to target the address of the 'worst' kinds of information like hate speech that incites violence and/or a polarized, divided society.

## Possible Solutions

As solutions to misinformation (and disinformation) in the media have emerged in response to a rapidly evolving, hyper connected and AI, forms of information and types of sharing involving everyone in society the emphasis now is on supporting the implementation of these solutions. This includes the commitment and engagement of multiple actors, financing solutions like literacy and support to fact checking and sharing of verified facts, regular research to understand how public opinions are influenced by media and are shaping democracies and political agendas, learning lessons and adapting to refined solutions, and sensitivity to different countries democracy and media contexts.

## Bibliography

- “Algorithms Should Not Control What People See, UN Chief Says, Launching Global Principles for Information Integrity | UN News.” *News.un.org*, 24 June 2024, [news.un.org/en/story/2024/06/1151376](https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/06/1151376). Accessed 22 June 2025.
- Cambridge Dictionary. “MEDIA | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge.org*, 25 Sept. 2019, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/media](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/media). Accessed 22 June 2025.
- “Civil Society | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD).” *Un.org*, 2025, [social.desa.un.org/issues/civil-society](https://social.desa.un.org/issues/civil-society). Accessed 22 June 2025.
- Fleck, Anna. “Infographic: Where False Information Is Posing the Biggest Threat.” *Statista Daily Data*, 19 Jan. 2024, [www.statista.com/chart/31605/rank-of-misinformation-disinformation-among-selected-countries/](https://www.statista.com/chart/31605/rank-of-misinformation-disinformation-among-selected-countries/). Accessed 22 June 2025.
- Humphrecht, Edda, et al. “Advancing the Study of Political Misinformation across Countries and Platforms—Introduction to the Special Issue.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, SAGE Publishing, Mar. 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612251327530>.
- Kenny, Michael. “Civil Society | Social Science | Britannica.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, [www.britannica.com/topic/civil-society](https://www.britannica.com/topic/civil-society). Accessed 22 June 2025.
- Palfrey, John. “Misinformation and Disinformation | Overview, Differences, How It Is Spread, Free Expression, & AI | Britannica.” *Www.britannica.com*, 9 Feb. 2024, [www.britannica.com/topic/misinformation-and-disinformation](https://www.britannica.com/topic/misinformation-and-disinformation). Accessed 22 June 2025.
- Sanchez, Gabriel, and Keesha Middlemass. “Misinformation Is Eroding the Public’s Confidence in Democracy.” *Brookings*, The Brookings Institution, 26 July 2022, [www.brookings.edu/articles/misinformation-is-eroding-the-publics-confidence-in-democracy/](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/misinformation-is-eroding-the-publics-confidence-in-democracy/). Accessed 22 June 2025.

## Appendix

- Advancing the Study of Political Misinformation Across Countries and Platforms—Introduction to the Special Issue, [Advancing the Study of Political Misinformation Across Countries and Platforms—Introduction to the Special Issue - Edda Humprecht, Sebastián Valenzuela, Frank Esser, Edson Tandoc, 2025](#)
- Algorithms should not control what people see, UN chief says, launching Global Principles for Information Integrity | UN News, [Algorithms should not control what people see, UN chief says, launching Global Principles for Information Integrity | UN News](#)
- Countries Affected by Misinformation and Disinformation Globally - Infographic Website, [Countries Affected by Misinformation and Disinformation Globally - Infographic Website](#)
- Countering Disinformation, [Countering Disinformation | United Nations](#)
- Infographic: Where False Information Is Posing the Biggest Threat, [Chart: Where False Information Is Posing the Biggest Threat | Statista](#)
- Civil Society | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD), [Civil Society | Division for Inclusive Social Development \(DISD\)](#)
- How the public checks information it thinks might be wrong, [How the public checks information it thinks might be wrong | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#)
- Information Integrity Code of Conduct - EN, [Information Integrity | United Nations.](#)