



open scholarly communication in the european
research area for social sciences and humanities

Addressing disinformation challenges:

**a critical effort to support
freedom, democracies and
trust**

OPERAS Community: Policy Brief

March 2025



Executive summary

The rapid growth of digital content has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish credible information from incorrect information or even disinformation, posing a serious threat to democratic societies worldwide. Disinformation erodes trust in institutions, exacerbates polarisation, and undermines informed decision-making. While existing solutions often act reactively, the European Research Infrastructure [OPERAS](#) offers a proactive approach by promoting open access to high-quality, peer-reviewed academic content in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), with a focus on transparency, multilingualism, and global collaboration. Through initiatives such as the Information Quality Protocol (IQP) and multilingual dissemination of research, OPERAS is uniquely positioned to tackle disinformation at its root, addressing the challenges of credibility and inclusivity.

By ensuring that academic and scientific knowledge are available in multiple languages and integrated into search engines and digital platforms, OPERAS enhances access to reliable information across linguistic communities. Its efforts to foster transparency in the academic publication process and to support media literacy campaigns will contribute to empowering citizens to critically evaluate digital content, reducing the impact of disinformation and restoring trust in democratic processes. These initiatives contribute to a more informed, resilient society, reinforcing the integrity of public discourse and democratic participation in the face of growing disinformation challenges.





▶ 1. Context

The rapid growth of data and content on the internet has significantly transformed how information is produced and consumed. Amid this overwhelming volume of material, distinguishing high-quality, credible content from disinformation or low-quality sources has become increasingly difficult. The next phase of the internet must prioritise human-centred approaches to support critical evaluation, informed decision-making, and trust-building in digital spaces. In this context, institutions like OPERAS are particularly well positioned to contribute through their commitment to promoting transparency, quality, and multilingualism in science, especially in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), which deal directly with society's most pressing issues.

▶ 2. Analysis of the challenges and current solutions

Analysis of the issues

The proliferation of low-quality, misleading, and disinformative content (e.g., "fake news") poses a growing challenge for societies and democracies worldwide. Disinformation spreads quickly, and distinguishing between accurate information and falsehoods becomes increasingly difficult for content creators and consumers alike. Media outlets, corporations, and governments struggle to maintain credibility, while the rise of AI models trained on biased data further complicates the situation. Disinformation erodes trust in institutions and democratic processes.

An additional challenge arises from linguistic diversity. Disinformation often spreads unevenly across languages, with content in less widely spoken languages receiving less attention in terms of fact-checking and verification. This linguistic gap can leave certain populations more vulnerable to disinformation, further exacerbating societal divides. Here, OPERAS' commitment to multilingualism plays a key role, ensuring that academic knowledge and high-quality information are accessible in multiple languages, thus fostering inclusivity and more comprehensive efforts to counter disinformation.

The role of OPERAS in tackling disinformation

As a European Research Infrastructure dedicated to open scholarly communication in the SSH, OPERAS plays a critical role in fostering high-quality content that addresses the very issues influencing democratic societies. OPERAS is uniquely positioned to contribute to the fight against disinformation through the following key approaches:

- ▶ **Promoting open access to high-quality research:** By ensuring that rigorously peer-reviewed academic content is freely accessible, OPERAS helps disseminate reliable and credible information to a broader audience. Open access increases the visibility of research for everyone that can counter disinformation with accurate, scholarly knowledge.

- ▶ **Ensuring multilingual access to knowledge:** OPERAS actively supports the production and dissemination of academic research in multiple languages, thus helping to address the gap in fact-checking and quality control for non-English content. Multilingualism allows for diverse perspectives and local knowledge to enter the global discourse, ensuring that disinformation does not disproportionately affect certain linguistic communities.
- ▶ **Supporting transparency in the academic publication process:** Through open peer review and collaborative scholarly practices, OPERAS contributes to creating transparent knowledge-production processes. This level of transparency enhances public trust in academic content, making it a benchmark for reliable information.
- ▶ **Foster the discovery of an interdisciplinary knowledge base on societal issues with the GoTriple platform:** Given its focus on SSH, OPERAS facilitates research on critical issues affecting societies—such as democracy, media literacy, and social cohesion. The insights derived from SSH research contribute to understanding the root causes and effects of disinformation, thereby informing more effective countermeasures.

Existing solutions and their limitations

While several initiatives and regulations¹, particularly in Europe, have been developed to tackle disinformation—including fact-checking platforms, content moderation by social media companies, and digital literacy campaigns—two critical challenges remain. First, there is a lack of global coordination and policy alignment, leading to fragmented efforts that limit the effectiveness of these initiatives and regulative measures. Strong incentives and policies exist in some regions, such as the European Union, but these are not universally adopted or enforced, weakening their overall impact. Second, many current solutions act only after disinformation has already been disseminated, focusing on fact-checking or content removal after the damage is done. To effectively combat disinformation, more emphasis needs to be placed on proactive measures that ensure high-quality content is published in the first place, such as improving quality and reliability of AI training data and enhancing content verification processes before publication. Without addressing these gaps, the erosion of public trust in institutions and the threat to democratic processes will continue to escalate.

¹ Digital Services Act



▶ 3. Recommendations

The following recommendations draw from OPERAS' initiatives and the TrustOn2024 workshop that took place in Brussels in June 2024 - and gathered in a recently published report *Fostering Trust in the Digital Age*², which focused on restoring trust in information through high-quality, open, and multilingual scholarly communication.

- ▶ **1. Enhance global collaboration on disinformation:** OPERAS can facilitate stronger ties between researchers and policymakers worldwide to address disinformation holistically. By leveraging its existing networks in SSH and aligning with organisations like UNESCO and the UN, OPERAS can help build global, interdisciplinary research collaborations and living labs³ focused on countering disinformation. These collaborations should place particular emphasis on the multilingual dissemination of research findings to ensure that no community is left vulnerable to disinformation due to language barriers.
- ▶ **2. Promote open access to academic research as a tool for fighting disinformation:** The dissemination of reliable, peer-reviewed academic content — especially in fields related to media studies, political science, and social sciences—can directly counter misleading information. OPERAS should continue to advocate for open access to this research, ensuring that high-quality information is widely available and accessible. The value of multilingualism in this effort cannot be understated; by ensuring research is available in multiple languages, OPERAS broadens the reach and impact of trustworthy information.
- ▶ **3. Develop an Information Quality Protocol (IQP):** Building on open peer-review practices and OPERAS' commitment to research integrity, an Information Quality Protocol (IQP) should be developed to establish standards for high-quality content in the digital age. This protocol could set benchmarks for identifying trustworthy content and provide certification for websites or platforms that adhere to these standards. The protocol should be adaptable across languages to ensure that content in less widely spoken languages receives the same level of scrutiny and certification as content in more dominant languages.

² OPERAS AISBL, Dumouchel, S., Töpfer, M., Caliman Fontes, L., & Delmazo, C. (2025). *Fostering Trust in the Digital Age* Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14621383>.

³ "Living labs are open innovation ecosystems in real-life environments using iterative feedback processes throughout a lifecycle approach of an innovation to create sustainable impact. They focus on co-creation, rapid prototyping & testing and scaling-up innovations & businesses [...]. Living labs operate as intermediaries/orchestrators among citizens, research organisations, companies and government agencies/levels.", Wikipedia.

- ▶ **4. Integrate multilingual SSH research into digital literacy efforts:** OPERAS can provide valuable resources for media literacy campaigns by contributing evidence-based insights on how disinformation affects democratic processes and social dynamics, particularly across linguistic and cultural contexts. Integrating academic research into educational programs on critical thinking and media literacy can strengthen citizens' ability to evaluate online content, regardless of their language, and reduce the spread of disinformation.
- ▶ **5. Leverage OPERAS' expertise in content verification and multilingualism:** Given OPERAS' commitment to enhancing transparency, accountability, and multilingualism in academic publishing, its research outputs and verification protocols could be adapted to create tools and methodologies for improving content verification processes in other sectors, such as journalism and public communication. This would include verification processes in multiple languages, thus addressing the challenge of linguistic diversity in the fight against disinformation.

▶ 4. Concrete consequences of these recommendations

The implementation of these recommendations, in collaboration with OPERAS, would bring several concrete benefits:

- ▶ **Higher visibility and accessibility of credible research in multiple languages:** Open access to SSH research supported by OPERAS will increase the visibility of high-quality, verified content online, enabling users to make informed decisions and reduce the influence of disinformation. Multilingualism ensures that reliable information reaches broader, diverse audiences across linguistic barriers.
- ▶ **Strengthened global coordination and inclusivity:** By building global networks of researchers and policymakers focused on disinformation and supporting multilingual research dissemination, OPERAS can foster greater cross-border collaboration and ensure inclusivity in the fight against disinformation.
- ▶ **Restoration of trust in information through transparency and multilingual protocols:** The Information Quality Protocol (IQP) could serve as a standard for evaluating the reliability of online content in multiple languages, enhancing public trust in digital information globally.
- ▶ **Improved media literacy across languages:** OPERAS' research on media studies and critical information practices, combined with its emphasis on multilingualism, can inform robust digital literacy programs. These programs would empower citizens to critically evaluate information, regardless of their language, and defend against disinformation.

5. Conclusion

The fight against disinformation is critical to preserving the integrity of democratic societies. Disinformation threatens public trust in institutions, the media, and democratic processes, leading to increased polarisation and instability. However, through coordinated global efforts and innovative strategies, such as those outlined by OPERAS, we can address these challenges in a proactive, sustainable way.

By promoting open access to high-quality research and fostering transparency in scholarly communication, OPERAS can directly counteract the proliferation of disinformation with credible, peer-reviewed academic content. The multilingual dissemination of research is especially crucial, ensuring that diverse linguistic communities are not left vulnerable to disinformation due to language barriers. This inclusivity strengthens the overall information ecosystem, allowing citizens across linguistic and cultural divides to access reliable knowledge and make informed decisions.

The development of tools like the Information Quality Protocol (IQP) will further empower democratic societies by creating clear standards for online content. By integrating this protocol into search engines and content platforms, trustworthy information will become more visible and accessible, giving citizens the tools they need to navigate the digital landscape critically and effectively.

Furthermore, enhancing media literacy programs based on the interdisciplinary, multilingual research fostered by OPERAS will improve citizens' capacity to evaluate information, reducing the spread of disinformation and the polarisation of public discourse. These efforts, collectively, will help rebuild trust in digital content, support informed public debate, and ultimately strengthen democratic participation.

In essence, OPERAS' contributions will create a more resilient, informed society—one that is better equipped to defend against disinformation, foster constructive dialogue, and maintain the integrity of democratic institutions. Through these concrete measures, democratic societies will experience a revitalisation of trust, transparency, and inclusivity, reinforcing their stability and ensuring they remain vibrant and engaged in the digital age.

6. References

A. Publications

"Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training" (2018) [Full text here](#)

"Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation while Respecting Freedom of Expression" (2021) [Full text here](#)

OPERAS AISBL, Dumouchel, S., Töpfer, M., Caliman Fontes, L., & Delmazo, C. (2025). Fostering Trust in the Digital Age. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14621383>

"Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Educators and Learners" (2021) [Full text here](#)

"Verified" Campaign – Countering COVID-19 Misinformation (2020) [More about the initiative](#)

"The Global Impact of Disinformation" (UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, 2021) [Report available here](#)

"Action Plan Against Disinformation" (2018) [Full text here](#)

"Tackling COVID-19 Disinformation – Getting the Facts Right" (2020) [Full text here](#)

"European Democracy Action Plan" (2020) [Full text here](#)

"Digital Services Act (DSA)" (2022) [Full text here](#)

"UNESCO Policy Brief: Countering Disinformation – A Call to Action" (2020) [Full text here](#)

"EU Code of Practice on Disinformation" (2018, updated 2022) [More information here](#)

B. International Initiatives

International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN): A global network of fact-checkers hosted by the Poynter Institute. It promotes best practices in fact-checking and provides certification to fact-checking organizations worldwide. <https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/>

First Draft News: A nonprofit that provides resources and training for journalists to detect and fight misinformation. It offers research, tools, and workshops to counter disinformation. <https://firstdraftnews.org/>

Reporters Without Borders (RSF): RSF monitors and promotes press freedom and combats disinformation. Their "Information and Democracy Commission" works to ensure reliable information is accessible to the public. <https://rsf.org/>



EUvsDisinfo: An initiative of the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, aimed at identifying and exposing disinformation campaigns, particularly from Russia, and raising awareness of disinformation. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>

The Global Disinformation Index (GDI): A nonprofit focused on disrupting the business model behind disinformation by evaluating the risk of media sites spreading disinformation. <https://disinformationindex.org/>

The Trust Project: An international consortium of news organizations creating standards of transparency that help users differentiate between reliable and misleading news. <https://thetrustproject.org/>



C. National and Regional Initiatives

FactCheck.org (USA): A nonprofit organization that monitors the factual accuracy of political statements, advertisements, and media reports in the United States. <https://www.factcheck.org/>

Full Fact (UK): An independent fact-checking organization based in the UK that checks claims made by politicians, the media, and social networks. <https://fullfact.org/>

Africa Check: Africa's first independent fact-checking organization, verifying public statements and media reports across the African continent. <https://africacheck.org/>

BOOM (India): A fact-checking website that tackles fake news and disinformation in India, particularly around elections, public health, and politics. <https://www.boomlive.in/>

Chequeado (Latin America): A nonprofit fact-checking initiative based in Argentina, focusing on Latin American news and claims. <https://chequeado.com/>

RMIT ABC Fact Check (Australia): A partnership between the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that assesses the accuracy of public figures' statements. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/factcheck/>



D. Platforms and Tech Initiatives

Google's Fact Check Explorer: A tool that helps users search for fact checks globally. It collects results from various fact-checking organizations certified by the IFCN. <https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer>



E. Academic and Research Organisations

The Oxford Internet Institute's Computational Propaganda Project: This research project at the University of Oxford investigates how digital media is used to manipulate public opinion worldwide. <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/>

Media Literacy Now: An advocacy organisation promoting media literacy education in the United States to empower citizens with critical thinking skills to navigate misinformation. <https://medialiteracynow.org/>

The Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University: Focuses on studying how digital technologies impact democracy, with research into disinformation and its effects on society. <https://cyber.harvard.edu/>

MIT Media Lab – Initiative on Combatting Disinformation: Focuses on developing tools and strategies to detect and fight online disinformation. <https://www.media.mit.edu/>

F. Media Literacy and Public Education Initiatives

News Literacy Project (NLP): A US-based non-profit that teaches students, educators, and the general public how to recognize credible information and think critically about the media they consume. <https://newsilit.org/>

MediaWise (Poynter Institute): A digital literacy project designed to help people of all ages discern fact from fiction online. They focus on improving news literacy through fact-checking, particularly for young and senior audiences. <https://www.poynter.org/mediawise/>

G. Policy and Advocacy

"Commission endorses the integration of the voluntary Code of Practice on Disinformation into the Digital Services Act", press release, 13 Feb 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_505

The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO): An EU-funded project that supports collaboration between fact-checkers, researchers, and media literacy experts across Europe to fight disinformation. <https://edmo.eu/>

The Aspen Institute's Commission on Information Disorder: A U.S.-based initiative aimed at developing comprehensive solutions to the problem of disinformation and misinformation, including policy recommendations. [The Aspen Institute](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/)

The G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM): Launched by the G7 countries to identify and respond to foreign threats to democracy, including disinformation. <https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/rapid-response-mechanism-mecanisme-reponse-rapide/index.aspx?lang=eng>

7. Annex

The Information Quality Protocol:

Enhancing Web Content Quality and Strengthening Democracy

The Information Quality Protocol project derives its quality criteria from academic publishing practices, specifically following the standards of the Diamond Open Access model. These standards will be adapted to align with the needs of civil society and the market, aiming to enhance the quality of data and editorial content on the Internet. Establishment of Community Living Labs (CLLs) will be a crucial aspect, by shaping the Information Quality Protocol criteria and ensuring they are relevant across diverse geographical contexts and culturally sensitive.

The Information Quality Protocol stands on four main principles:

- ▶ **1. Community-led and multi-stakeholders approach (diversity and inclusivity)**
- ▶ **2. Trust and quality criteria at the core**
- ▶ **3. Inspired by information infrastructures and digital objects architecture (DOA).**
- ▶ **4. Based on academic community expertise, and especially supported by the social sciences and humanities regarding its values (equity, diversity, inclusivity).**

The IQP project takes place in a global ecosystem with several initiatives aiming at solving the quality issue on the Internet and the trust failure. Some are focused on fact-checking, some others on the scientific Journals but none of them addresses the quality before the writing process and in an inclusive way to onboard a large community in a trust and inclusive manner. This is mostly where the IQP makes the difference. The IQP is based on the [Diamond Open Access Standard \(DOAS\) and self-assessment tools](#), developed by the [DIAMAS project](#), which seeks to ensure the quality and transparency of governance, processes and workflows in institutional publishing.

Implementation:

This standard for scholarly publishers will be discussed in different Community Living Labs. Six are envisioned in various countries of the world (US, France, Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan for instance) and will gather different stakeholders (companies, journalists, policy-makers, citizens, etc.) with the support of a Diamond OA expert and a CLL manager.

Each CLL will have to (1) address quality and trust concepts; (2) translate them into technical and human criteria underpinning the IQP.

By doing so, global challenges will be addressed while taking local cultures into account.

The findings of the CLLs will be gathered to establish whether a single IQP can be made at a global scale or if there is a need to adapt it depending on the cultures. In a second step, the IQP should be tested by the CLLs before a concrete implementation.

OPERAS, the European Research Infrastructures that gathers +50 scientific organisations, is looking for inspired and supporting people and organisations to make this first step alive!

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