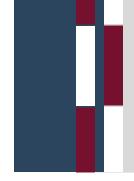
# **Hazardous Misinformation: Key Policy Levers**

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While misinformation has long been a <u>component</u> of traditional print and broadcast media, digital technology allows for the <u>frictionless</u> dissemination of false and manipulated content with, at times, acutely dangerous <u>consequences</u>. Misinformation pertaining to <u>COVID-19</u>, linked to worsened individual outcomes and community outbreaks, and to our <u>elections</u>, tied to instances of voter <u>intimidation</u>, suppression and <u>incitement</u>, have been of particular concern recently.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The following recommendations focus on promoting <u>transparency and accountability</u> to mitigate the spread of hazardous misinformation among the majority of Americans who now not only consume, but also create and propagate media. The proposals can be categorized into four threads: (1) **industry codesigned codes of practice**; (2) redress for digital practices to strengthen **legitimate news outlets**; (3) a safe harbor for **sharing data with misinformation researchers** to improve oversight; (4) broad implementation of interventions that boost **media literacy** and the capacity to discern misinformation.

# Codes of Practice with Public and/or Third-Party Oversight

- As a point of departure for crafting policy on this topic, multiple scholars call for a new locus of specialized, expert-led federal oversight for digital platforms, such as a Digital Platform Agency.
- While legislation would be necessary to create a distinct new regulatory agency, the White House might immediately convene an <u>inter-agency task force</u> engaging expertise within the executive branch, Congress, industry, civil society and academia to clarify and update digital platform policy.
  - A digital platform task force could lead efforts to develop an industry-wide code of practice which promotes transparency and accountability through commitments including: disclosing political funding in advertising, demonetizing purveyors of disinformation, closing fake and/or bot accounts, and addressing algorithmic biases that reward extremist and/or low-credibility content (EU Commission's Code of Practice on Disinformation could be used as a model.)
  - Such a code of practice can be held accountable through <u>independent</u>, <u>third-party</u> <u>oversight</u>.

## A Healthy Landscape for Legitimate Journalism

• Misinformation thrives when <u>legitimate journalism</u>, particularly local journalism, is on economically shaky ground. Consumers increasingly rely on social media for news, with revenues for digital platforms flourishing and the journalistic sources struggling to survive.

- Scholars have called for comprehensive <u>re-evaluation</u> of anti-competitive practices that interfere with a vibrant, reality-based information landscape.
- Policymakers might consider leveraging <u>antitrust</u> actions to ensure news sites are reimbursed for
  journalism posted on their sites. Further, the creation of a temporary <u>safe harbor</u> in antitrust laws
  would allow news publishers to <u>collectively negotiate</u> with platforms regarding the terms on
  which their content may appear.
- Additional proposals have included (1) levying a <u>digital services tax</u> on major news-sharing platforms in the interest of creating a vibrant <u>public funding model</u> to support local and public interest journalism, and (2) the use of <u>tax incentives</u> to encourage struggling news outlets to transition to a not-for-profit status.

## **Supporting Research/Mapping Misinformation**

- Just as academic researchers play a crucial independent role regarding other public health and safety issues, misinformation researchers need access to <u>data</u> that will bolster nuanced policies and best practices; yet researchers <u>warn</u> that digital platforms habitually restrict access to data that could inform oversight.
- Such <u>data</u> would allow researchers to better understand how misinformation spreads and <u>how disinformation campaigns operate</u>.
- Scholars suggest policy provisions that allow for a <u>safe harbor</u> for sharing aggregated, anonymized data with academic misinformation experts studying such questions.

### **Civics Education/Media Literacy**

- Research confirms that helping media consumers discern the types of dubious information they will encounter -- a practice called "prebunking" is far more effective than efforts to "debunk" false (yet often legitimate-looking) news stories following exposure. Prebunking exercises can be incorporated into media literacy and civics education curricula as in other countries.
- While in pockets of the country, <u>state and local policy makers</u> support media literacy as a critical component of civics education, federal policy makers have yet to ratify such efforts. The proposed federal *Digital Citizenship and Media Literacy Act* (<u>H.R. 4688</u> and <u>S.2240</u>) would create a Department of Education grant program to support K-12 digital citizenship and media literacy education.
- Critically, researchers note that <u>older adults</u> are particularly vulnerable to digital scams and misinformation. In order to address the <u>most vulnerable</u> media consumers, policy makers can leverage digital platform oversight to ensure that major media-sharing platforms implement validated prebunking exercises into their practices for both onboarding and ongoing users.

