



BUILDING MEDIA RESILIENCE AGAINST DISINFORMATION IN ALBANIA

**BUILDING MEDIA
RESILIENCE AGAINST
DISINFORMATION IN ALBANIA**

**Policy Recommendations
for Sustainable Reform**

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Introduction and Background

Countering disinformation in Albania is essential to protecting public trust, informed decision-making, and democratic institutions. In a context where media literacy is not included in education and trust in institutions is fragile, disinformation can easily mislead citizens, distort public debates, and polarize communities. Addressing this challenge helps safeguard the right to accurate information and strengthens social cohesion, especially in critical moments such as elections, public health emergencies, or major policy reforms.

Online media—especially social platforms—amplify this risk due to their speed, reach, and lack of rigorous content moderation. In Albania, where there are over 800 online news portals that constitute a major source of information, unverified content spreads rapidly, making it harder to distinguish facts from falsehoods. This makes it crucial to promote media literacy, responsible journalism, and fact-checking efforts to build resilience against disinformation.

While the parliament has taken a step forward by forming a parliamentary commission to counter disinformation, aiming to foresee institutional activity in fighting against disinformation and other forms of foreign interference in democratic processes, and identifying legal changes needed to support this, until now nothing concrete has been achieved, making it even more important for journalists to be trained and equipped to spot and counter disinformation.

Policy Context

“A healthy public sphere is essential for democracy and must be inclusive, representative, and characterized by respect for rational argument.” - Jürgen Habermas

One major challenge to a shared public sphere is our tendency to establish and continue relationships with people with similar views to ours. On one hand, we are programmed to enjoy these echo chambers, and on the other, as research shows¹ we are more likely to trust information from someone we know, even if we suspect it to be false.

Disinformation thrives in these spaces, spreading rapidly through peer-to-peer networks where credibility is assumed, not questioned. Combined with weak information integrity in the media, the disorder multiplies. Agents who create disinformation know this.

The phenomenon is deeply linked to the state of quality journalism and the level of digital and media literacy among users. Efforts to combat disinformation must therefore address these root causes—supporting credible journalism and improving the public's critical engagement with information.

While fact-checking is essential for information integrity, disinformation isn't only about incorrect facts—it's about power.

Traditional media shapes public discourse, while online media influences users who rely heavily on social platforms. Studies² show that preemptively informing and inoculating audiences against falsehoods is far more effective than correcting misinformation after it spreads. Prevention, not just reaction, is key.

Journalists in Albania are increasingly becoming unintentional amplifiers of disinformation due to insufficient understanding of the phenomenon, inadequate fact-checking practices, and overwhelming production pressures. These challenges are amplified by structural issues such as media ownership concentration and intertwined interests of politics, business, and the media, problems confirmed also in the last Media Freedom Index of 2025³.

Addressing these problems is critical for preserving the integrity of the media and protecting democratic processes.

¹ Metzger et al. (2010) Social and Heuristic Approaches to Credibility Evaluation Online, Journal of Communication, 60 (3):413-439

² Paul and Matthews, (2016) p.9

³ <https://rsf.org/en/index>

Executive Summary

Faktoje conducted six two-day trainings for over 60 journalists across Tirana, Elbasan, and Durrës, accompanied by pre- and post-training questionnaires to measure knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding disinformation. Insights were analyzed in relation to EU reports on Albania's media landscape as well as scholarly discussions and studies on information disorder and disinformation resilience.

Understanding the environment in which Albanian journalists work and the extent to which their knowledge of disinformation reaches is a focal starting point to further address the information disorder.

This is precisely what Faktoje did through its series of trainings and discussions with journalists and participants from both local and national media. We were able to identify key challenges driving the spread of disinformation in Albania by analyzing the information gathered during these sessions and through structured questionnaires.

Results show that three main reasons lead journalists to unintentionally spread disinformation.

Conceptual confusion: Journalists conflate disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation.

Operational pressure: Journalists prioritize speed over accuracy due to unrealistic productivity demands.

Systemic vulnerabilities: Ownership concentration and political interference exacerbate disinformation spread.

No major systemic interventions currently address these interlinked issues at the national education, media policy, or journalism training levels.

Findings reveal a lack of conceptual clarity around disinformation, poor fact-checking habits, vulnerability to political narratives, and systemic barriers to quality journalism.

Based on these findings, four strategic recommendations are proposed:

1. Introduce Media Literacy at all education levels.
2. Reform online media production standards to prioritize quality over quantity.
3. Foster collaborations between media and fact-checking organizations.
4. Integrate Disinformation Studies into social sciences and communication curricula.

Without decisive action, Albania risks further erosion of media trust and democratic accountability.

Implementing these recommendations would equip journalists with essential tools for a complex information environment, bolster resilience to disinformation, and create long-term societal benefits.

Methodology

Training Implementation: Six two-day trainings conducted in Tirana, Elbasan, and Durrës with 60+ participants.

Assessment Tools: Pre- and post-training questionnaires with 40+ journalists measuring knowledge on disinformation, fact-checking habits, source reliability, and attitudes toward verification.

Qualitative Insights: Group discussions and scenario analyses during training sessions.

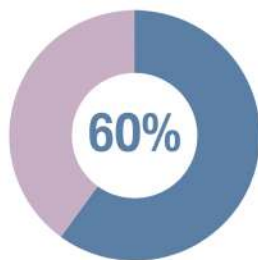
External Data Reference: Cross-reference with EU Commission reports and academic literature on disinformation resilience. Detailed survey instruments and full data are available in the Appendix.

Analysis of Findings

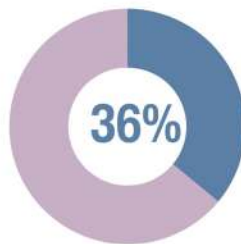
Key Findings:

Knowledge Gaps

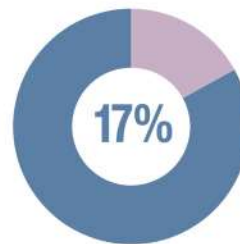
- 60% of journalists could not accurately define disinformation.
- 36% did not recognize key types of disinformation.
- 17% identified institutional trust erosion as a consequence of disinformation.



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Fact-Checking and Responsibility

- 100% of online journalists admitted to publishing without verification due to production pressure.



of online journalists admitted to publishing without
verification due to production pressure



- Journalists demonstrated a passive approach to verifying political statements.
- 30% of journalists started using digital verification tools post-training.

Systemic and Institutional Barriers

- Unrealistic news quotas shift focus from quality to quantity.
- Editorial policies in most online outlets prioritize speed, not accuracy.
- Social Sciences lack specific curricula addressing disinformation detection and resilience.



**Unrealistic news quotas
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**Social Sciences lack
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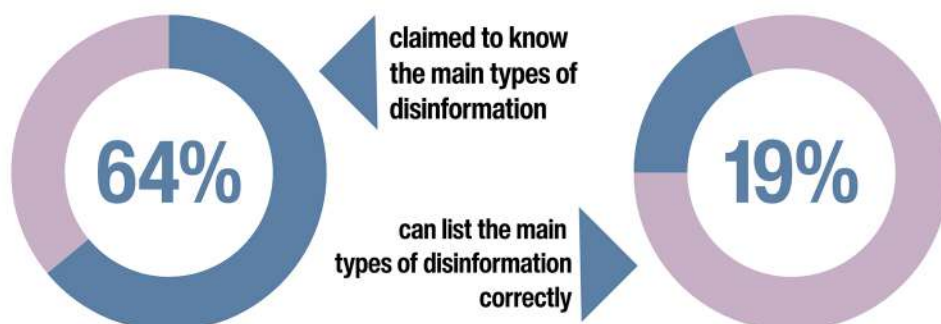
Extended Analysis

Definition Accuracy:

All 42 journalists surveyed said they know what disinformation is, but 60% gave inaccurate definitions, confusing it with misinformation and malinformation and failing to recognize the role of intent in disinformation.

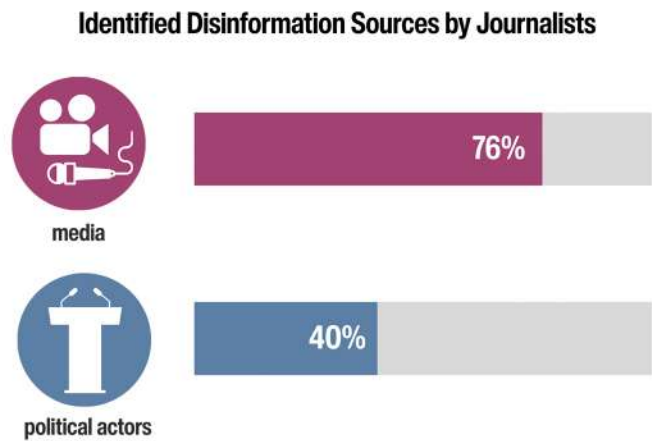
Awareness of Forms and Sources

While 64% claimed to know the main types of disinformation, only 19% could list them correctly.



Many confused disinformation topics with types of disinformation. Furthermore, 76% mistakenly identified propaganda as malinformation, and 67% were unfamiliar with the concept of disinformation narratives.

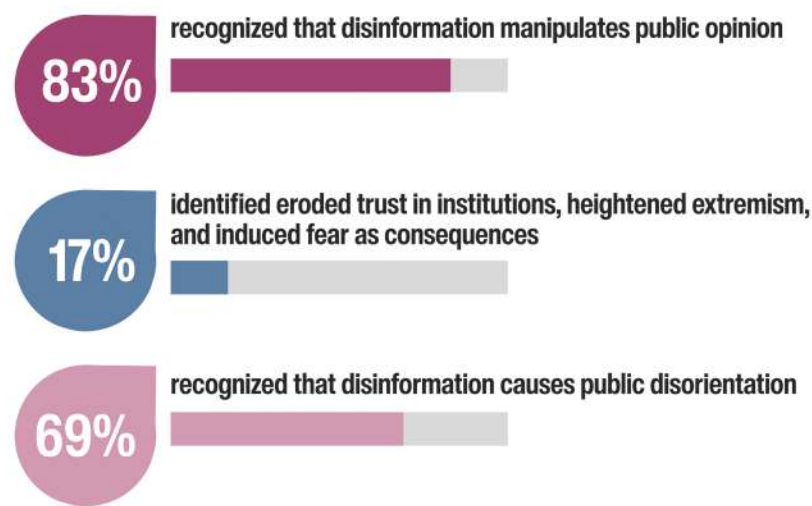
When asked about disinformation sources, 76% cited the media, and 40% named political parties/figures.



Some journalists do not fully understand the difference between claims and facts. When facing a claim made by an institution or a high-ranking official, they often tend to report it as fact, even if the claim is not supported by proof.

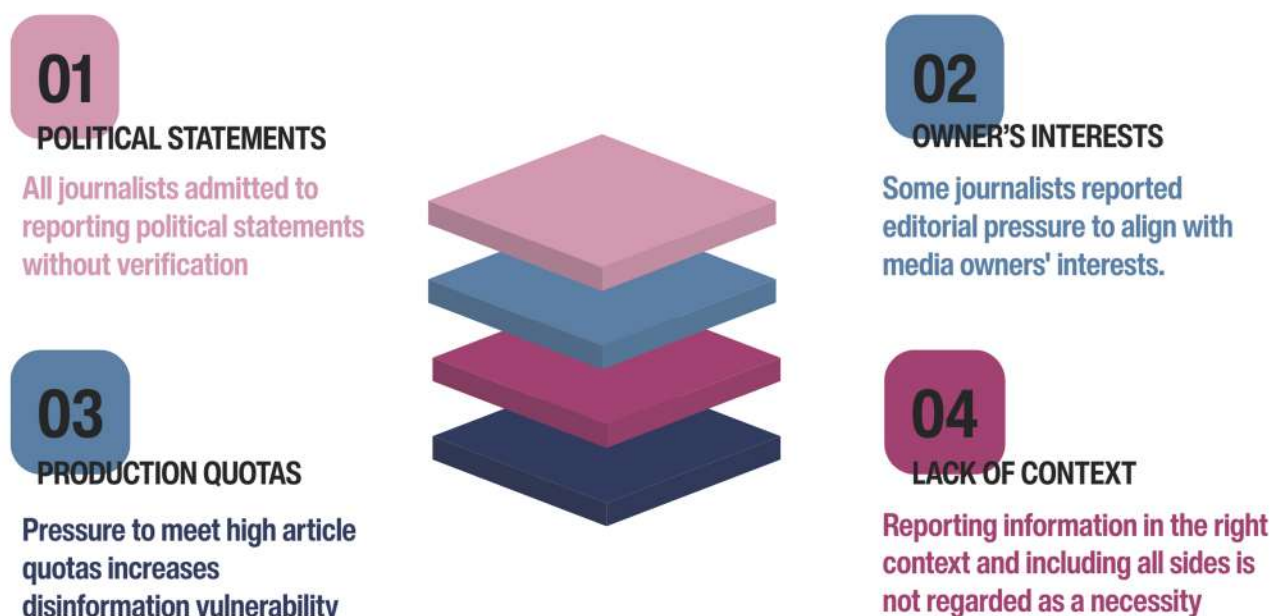
Understanding of Impact

While 83% of surveyed journalists recognized that disinformation manipulates public opinion, only 24% could name specific goals of disinformation. 17% accurately identified consequences such as eroded trust in institutions, heightened extremism, and induced fear, although 69% recognized that disinformation causes public disorientation. Most failed to link this confusion to the deeper loss of trust in institutions and media.



Resilience to Disinformation

All journalists admitted to reporting political statements without verification, considering citation alone as sufficient. This practice, driven by newsroom pressures to meet high article quotas, reduces their focus on factual reporting and heightens their vulnerability to disinformation. Media ownership structures in Albania, where political and business interests intersect, further constrain journalistic independence, as noted also by the European Commission. Some journalists reported editorial pressure to align with media owners' interests.



In reporting on conflicts like the Ukraine war, most journalists reported facing significant challenges in identifying disinformation. Reporting information while putting it in the right context and providing complete information from both sides is not regarded as a necessity by all journalists. Most journalists missed identifying misinformation from all sides. Only 12% acknowledged that even "good" actors spread disinformation. Few (9.5%) included Ukrainian-originated falsehoods when listing examples of war-related disinformation.

Source Reliability and Use of Verification Tools

Journalists tend to cross-check reports from various outlets, aware of Albania's overcrowded online media scene. However, they rarely verify information from official sources, automatically trusting politicians and officials. 30% reported using digital verification tools, and 50% of the post-training survey respondents cited learning about such tools as the most valuable takeaway.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Introduce Media Literacy at All Levels of Education

Problem: Lack of media literacy leaves citizens without the critical skills needed to assess information credibility, making them more vulnerable to spreading disinformation.

Action: Integrate media literacy into national education curricula from primary to university levels.

Outcome: Cultivates critical thinking and evaluation skills across society, building a long-term societal immunity to disinformation.

Recommendation 2: Time and Production Reform in Online Media

Problem: High-volume production quotas prevent adequate fact-checking.

Action: Adopting the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) to introduce obligations for digital platforms and online media. Encourage the support of independent media that emphasize quality journalism over sheer output.

Outcome: Structural incentives align with journalistic integrity, reducing the systemic spread of misinformation. Secure transparency in content moderation, algorithmic accountability, and the mitigation of systemic risks like disinformation.

Recommendation 3: Encourage Collaborations with Fact-Checking Organizations

Action: Facilitate partnerships between news outlets and professional fact-checking organizations for pre- and post-publication verification.

Outcome: Professionalizes verification practices, normalizes skepticism toward sources, and increases public trust in media outputs.

Recommendation 4: Integrate Disinformation Studies in Social Sciences and Communication Faculties

Problem: New journalists lack training in dealing with disinformation.

Action: Incorporate mandatory modules on disinformation detection, critical source evaluation, and fact-checking tools in social sciences and communication faculties.

Outcome: Future generations will enter the workforce equipped to uphold high standards of verification.

Theory of Change

If media literacy is integrated across all educational levels, journalists are trained systematically, newsroom production incentives are adjusted, editorial policies enforce verification, structural pressures are addressed, and aligning Albania's regulatory framework with the DSA, then the spread of disinformation through Albanian will significantly decrease, leading to more resilient public discourse and stronger democratic institutions.

Implementation and Next Steps

Short-Term: Pilot media literacy programs in selected schools; launch grant calls for independent media prioritizing quality journalism; promote transparency of editorial and newsroom staff; pilot a verification partnership program with 3-5 media partners; initiate a comprehensive legal review to align Albania's digital and media legislation with the core principles of the EU Digital Services Act.

Medium-Term: Negotiate MoUs between social sciences faculties and fact-checking organizations; adapt social sciences curricula to include disinformation studies; develop and promote a verification certification badge for media partners meeting the baseline information integrity protocols; pilot oversight procedures and platform obligations on a few major online platforms operating in Albania to test risk assessment and reporting procedures in collaboration with independent watchdogs and fact-checkers

Long-Term: Institutionalize media literacy in all levels of education; create a sustainable funding mechanism supporting independent, quality-driven media; implement DSA-aligned rules across all relevant digital services and platforms in Albania.

Addressing Counterarguments

Counterargument: "We cannot verify everything under tight deadlines."

Response: Protocols can require a minimal fact-checking step without halting breaking news; attribution language ("X claims...") protects journalistic integrity even under time pressure.

Counterargument: "Journalists have no power under owners' political pressure."

Response: Strengthening journalist unions and ensuring access to anonymous whistleblower protections can gradually shift power dynamics.

Alternative Interpretation: "Interest in training doesn't guarantee behavior change."

Response: Combining training with newsroom protocol changes and individual certification links learning directly to professional practice.

Reservation: "Small outlets cannot afford fact-checkers."

Response: Centralized fact-checking hubs can serve multiple small outlets, reducing individual burden.

Conclusion

The unchecked spread of disinformation threatens Albania's democratic processes, societal cohesion, and public trust in institutions. Without change, journalists will continue to serve, albeit unintentionally, as vectors for disinformation. By introducing media literacy at all education levels, reforming online media production standards, fostering collaborations with fact-checkers, and adapting to DSA provisions, Albania can proactively strengthen its resilience to disinformation. The urgency is clear: sustained inaction risks irreparable damage. Decisive, systemic action now will safeguard democratic integrity for generations to come.

Appendices

I. Literature Review

Wardle & Derakhshan - INFORMATION DISORDER: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making, 2017

Bjarte Rød, Christer Pursiainen, Niklas Eklund - Combatting Disinformation – How Do We Create Resilient Societies? Literature Review and Analytical Framework, 2024

The Debunking Handbook 2020

European Commission Reports on Albania, 2022–2024

II. Criteria for evaluating data

Questionnaire responses are analyzed based on:

Knowledge of Disinformation

Assessing their understanding of the concept, types, and channels of disinformation.

Definition accuracy: Can the journalist correctly define disinformation and distinguish it from misinformation or satire?

Awareness of forms: Does the journalist recognize various forms of disinformation (manipulated content, deepfakes, false context, etc.)?

Understanding of impact: Do they grasp the consequences of disinformation on society, journalism, and democracy?

Resilience to Disinformation

Measuring their ability to recognize, resist, and not amplify disinformation.

Fact-checking habits: How often and how thoroughly do they fact-check information before publishing?

Source reliability assessment: Do they apply criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of a source?

Use of tools: Are they familiar with and do they use digital tools to verify images, videos, and sources?

Perception and Attitudes

Understanding how seriously they take the issue and how motivated they are to address it.

Perceived threat: How serious do they believe disinformation is for their work and society?

Sense of responsibility: Do they see themselves as having a role in fighting disinformation?

Training interest: Are they interested in further training or capacity-building?

