50th EPRA meeting
Athens, 23-25 October 2019
Working Group I: Media Literacy
Summary of the session and debate
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The Working Group on Media Literacy had a large attendance in Athens, indicating the growing importance of this subject for regulators. The session, chaired by Mari Velsand (EPRA Vice-Chairperson), was split into two parts: the first on media literacy initiatives conducted by NRAs, and the second, a presentation and Q&A session with guests from Facebook and Google.

1. Media Literacy Initiatives – Showcase from Norway and Catalonia

The first half of the session showcased some media literacy initiatives designed to promote skills relating to the use of social media/platforms conducted by the Norwegian and Catalan regulatory authorities. This focus on presenting and discussing initiatives conducted by NRAs is an important part of the function of the Working Group, and consistently enables cross-fertilisation, sharing of experience and expertise, innovation and motivation between NRAs. There were two separate examples of media literacy initiatives conducted by NRAs on the day:

A. The Norwegian Media Authority (NMA) undertook a significant mapping exercise of the media literacy skills of the Norwegian population. NMA's Director Mari Velsand presented the study, conducted in partnership with the University of Bergen and Kantar Media. The study had a broad focus and aimed to assess the levels of critical thinking displayed by the study sample in areas such as critical analysis and fake news, understanding the difference between an editorial opinion and a commercial pitch, issues of copyright, knowledge of media ownership and finance, understanding of regulatory issues and others. The study had a particular focus on the over-55 age group.

The methodology required the sample study group to answer questions and solve tasks. Analysis of the results were mapped onto a spectrum with low and high levels of media literacy on one axis, and analogue vs digital skills on the other. The study showed that 43% of the population sampled had high levels of media literacy skills. The study also revealed an age barrier for high levels of media literacy, and was able to show that 60% of 60+ years have low level of digital ML (which could be described as fewer skills, lower levels of use of digital technology, etc.)

Furthermore, the Norwegian NRA informed the Working Group that the Norwegian government has put in place an action plan to strengthen the defences of its population against disinformation ahead of local elections. This approach resulted in a campaign sponsored by Facebook and in cooperation with the local press. This interactive campaign used real 'fake' stories (which had been checked, debunked and had gone viral) as well as various videos, and online quiz. The campaign was a significant success and reached more than a million people in Norway (population: 5 million). 30,000 people took the quiz and 65% of people taking the quiz reported having learned something from it. Additionally, there were also record levels of visits to the NMA's website and a broad public engagement on Facebook (debating in comments).

B. Roger Loppacher, President of the Catalan Audiovisual Council, then presented the most recent initiative in media literacy. The CAC has been actively engaged in media literacy for a number of years, with a particular focus on the development and circulation of educational resources for young people and for teachers. The CAC has set up the eduCAC project, which is a collaboration between the CAC and the Catalan Department of Education. This project has been ongoing for a number of years and has delivered significant media literacy resources for teachers and young people.

In 2019, the CAC ran a media literacy awareness campaign called "*#they don't fool me*". The campaign primarily targeted young people and aimed to build media awareness and critical thinking in this population. The campaign comprised TV and radio ads and a significant social media aspect, taking into account young people's specific media habits and preferences. The aim of the campaign was to explain to the public what media literacy is. To fit with the general remit of the campaign, a number of influencers, Youtubers, gamers and actors took part in the campaign to reach young people with these messages. A video of the campaign was presented to the Working Group. The campaign has been widely successful and shows how including young people in media messages aimed at them is a strong way of both increasing media literacy levels for these young people, and also building awareness for the future.

2. **Presentations and Q&A session with Facebook and Google**

The second half of the session had a different format. It focussed on presentations from Thomas Myrup Kristensen from Facebook and Milan Zubíček from Google, followed by a Q&A. Both had been invited to meet and talk to regulators about the media literacy initiatives their companies have put in place to counteract issues of mis- and disinformation, as well as measures aimed at protecting users (e.g. privacy). The session started with a short outline by both companies of the type of work they conduct in the media literacy sphere. It was followed by an extensive Q&A session, involving regulators from the floor. The session was moderated by Ľuboš Kukliš (Director, CBR – SK and ERGA Chair).

A. Presentations

Facebook communicated that it has a strong commitment to fight disinformation and that Facebook is working on developing tools and processes that will provide users with added transparency. For example, users will be informed about the credibility of a website or why they are seeing a particular piece of information. Additional tools being promoted/developed by Facebook to fight disinformation are the delisting of a fake news item: a news item that is evidently fake but not strictly harmful (e.g. posts arguing that Earth is flat) will be delisted, in a bid to reduce its spread and reach. Facebook argued that this approach is respectful of free speech but prevents disinformation/misinformation on non-harmful content to have a wide reach. Facebook also asserted their willingness to work with regulators to share information and expertise on how social media works.

Google talked about the approach the organisation has taken to fighting disinformation with a primary focus on improving the algorithms. Milan also presented a number of specialised tools and approaches recently developed. These included tools specifically designed for fact checkers and tools to assess breaking news items. Google emphasised its policy of working in

partnerships with NGOs, regulators, researchers and various experts with a view to better understand the issues at hand, and find sustainable ways of addressing them. For example, Google is working very closely with the news industry on initiatives such as trust indicators, pointers and also developing fact-checkers' networks around the world. Additional initiatives include training (especially for young people, and mostly through partnerships with local actors), and philanthropy.

Google stated that they wanted to work more closely with regulators (something previously mentioned by Facebook). They stated that NRAs have a great understanding of media – something that is of value to the platforms and they want to increase partnership opportunities.

B. These presentations were then followed by questions and comments from the floor. There was extensive focus on how Facebook and Google can de-prioritise (or delist) problematic content (by preventing the spread of content flagged on Facebook or by prioritizing official websites in the results list on Google). However, Facebook reminded that intermediaries are not entitled to analyse content.

Regarding Media Literacy, Facebook argued that it is challenging to know when people are open to receiving information from the platform itself. In nudging people to make better and giving more informed choices about the media messages they share, it is important to pick the right time and package so that it can have a positive impact on users. Facebook explained that they had tried this approach: for example, privacy settings can be overly complex and not something that people will readily engage with. Facebook now nudges people to review their privacy settings on a regular basis, and also when someone is changing something on their profile. They find this nudging approach works quite well for them.

Google explained they use a similar approach and provide information to users on how search actually works. This is part of their media literacy work.

Another question focused on the messages from Facebook and Google that they are keen to **partner with multiple agents including regulators**. However, it is noted that experience of engagement of the platforms in such multi-stakeholder partnerships varies greatly from country to country. The platforms were therefore asked about their efforts to embed partnership and indeed multi-stakeholder partnerships into their approaches.

-       For Google, there is a distinct focus on informal partnership: they suggested that potential partners should get in touch with projects and work at a local level. They indicated they offer funding and it is through funding applications that they identify potential partners. They also discussed their partnership criteria: sustainability of the approach, generating change within 1-2 years (so a focus on behaviours), track record of the potential partner in this sphere, apolitical nature of the partner, online aspect of the proposed initiative (using modern technology as part of the solution).

-       For Facebook, they reiterated their commitment to partnerships and said that there also was an informal, ad-hoc approach. Their approach focuses on building up a network that is in touch with

local communities. Facebook further argued that there had been a significant shift within the organisation. In the past, it was said, Facebook used to identify problems and solve them by themselves. In more recent times, there is an active engagement with other actors and opportunities for various groups to input into Facebook's content policy, something which they argue provides a high level of transparency. There were also mentions of the Oversight Board which Facebook is currently developing, and which will be a global board of independent experts, tasked with reviewing content decisions made by Facebook.

Following on from the morning session, some questions from the floor concerned issues of **Data Protection and minors**:

- Google explained that on Youtube, provided that uploaders flag the content intended for children, then default higher privacy settings automatically come into play.

- Another question concerned whether either Google or Facebook run *data literacy campaigns*. Facebook made clear that their platform is unsuitable for under-13 years and said they work to keep young people 13 and under off the platform altogether. They also mention that it is a challenging thing to do and acknowledged they may not always be successful in doing so. As underlined by *Prof. Eva Lievens (Ghent University)*, consenting to the creation of a profile on social network is not the same that consenting to the processing of personal data and there should be no confusion.

- Another question concerned *how information about privacy and data is made available to users*, including young people. Facebook answered that this is something they are working on. They mentioned that they have set up a Parents' Guide on what children can be exposed to on line and how to talk to them about it. They are also looking at creating image-led algorithms (for example a blue dinosaur) that would pop up on the screen when it looks like a minor is sharing something he shouldn't. There were some additional questions about how to evaluate the success of such approaches.

Some important comments made from the floor reflected the **need for regulatory independence** and the central value NRAs attach to that principle. It was stated that collaboration with Facebook and Google may have a negative impact on the independence of regulators, and it is up to regulators to compile the areas of concern which platforms should focus on and prioritise.