M20 Policy Brief 1: Information Integrity is a vital public good – and it's at risk

Overview

Media and digital policy matters are recognised within the G20, providing an opportunity in 2025 to flag the core value-add coming from news media as a crucial contribution to what is increasingly called "information integrity". This matter impacts on journalism's contribution to "information as a public good", which is a foundational principle. Supporting independent journalism is not just about a sector's viability but about fulfilling a fundamental societal need crucial for informed decision-making, democratic participation, and human flourishing. Media engagement on the G20's interest in "information integrity" can make a difference as to whether journalism's strength and standing can make gains – or if current troubling media trends stay as they are, or go more horribly wrong.

Proposal to the G20

The G20 should recognise that the crisis of information integrity is growing at the same time as the news media and civic space landscapes are shrinking. This imbalance threatens the interests of the 2025 G20 priorities of combating climate change, inequalities, and dangerous debt levels, as well as addressing issues of disaster resilience and critical minerals. Current trends foresee an increase in low-quality and false information, with increasing AI "hallucinations" and deceptive deepfakes being produced and circulated. These outputs are reintegrated as training data for AI development in a further downward spiral for quality information.

Current trends also point to a continued global decline in press freedom on the one hand, and the business viability of news media institutions on the other. A perfect epistemic storm is intensifying. The G20 needs to realise that without stronger efforts

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to support information integrity, humanity will flounder as new challenges appear and opportunities are lost.

Defining the critical issue and the role of the G20

The G20 in 2024 overall gave much attention to "information integrity", a concept increasingly superseding earlier references to "information disorder" (which in turn was a replacement frame for what used to be widely called 'fake news'). This was partly reflected in the G20 declarations of that year (including a substantial appendix to the Ministerial statement of the Digital Economy Working Group). Informing this attention was a UNESCO report, mapping the information integrity debate, and another that examined possible approaches for the G20 states to promote information integrity.

The 2025 G20 agenda gives less attention to the topic, but will nevertheless host a "Workshop on generative AI and its evolving ability to produce high-quality deepfakes at a lower cost, and the impact on information integrity, and consideration of possible recommendations". This provides an entry point for media issues this year, and follow-up may also be possible on the 2024 recognition of intellectual property issues and AI, which implicates news, amongst other content.

Many international organisations – from the United Nations to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) – have embraced the notion of information integrity as a holistic perspective, which at the same time has the possibility of avoiding being caught up in hostility to words like "disinformation" and "misinformation". The phrase "information integrity" originates in IT practice, where it refers to information security and data protection within enterprises. Applying the terms more broadly, the UNDP says that information integrity is determined by "the accuracy, consistency, and reliability of the information content, processes and systems to maintain a healthy information ecosystem".

The UN's Global Principles for Information Integrity refers to it as a condition "where freedom of expression is fully enjoyed and where accurate, reliable information, free from discrimination and hate, is available to all in an open, inclusive, safe and secure information environment". The UN Principles add: "Information integrity entails a pluralistic information space that champions human rights, peaceful societies and a sustainable future. It holds within it the promise of a digital age that fosters trust, knowledge and individual choice for all".

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Also in the UN Principles is:

Independent, Free and Pluralistic Media

Information integrity is only achievable with an independent, free and pluralistic media. Robust and urgent responses are needed to support public interest journalism around the world.

However, as international tensions rise and platforms like X are instrumentalised for political purposes, some commentators now talk about "epistemic security" to deal with "democratic emergency" and to reinforce the "supply chain" of information. This focus includes "epistemic vulnerabilities" to adversaries, amongst other factors. Such a framing may raise eyebrows if it leads to media being framed in a geo-strategic paradigm, with concomitant weakening of respect for the independence of journalism and a reinforcement of the view by political actors that media should be a tool in power plays. From the point of view of defending and advancing journalism, and institutions that produce it, media stakeholders need to prevent such 'framing creep', and hold the line that journalism is an exercise of free expression according to professional standards and ethics, and not a resource for external manipulation.

With this background, it can be argued that the frame of information integrity, rather than other conceptions, offers opportunities for independent news media. First, the concept denotes an imperative to deal with threats to the integrity of information in the public domain (such as lies, hate speech and deepfakes), which puts investigative journalism and fact-checking on the agenda. Second, by highlighting what is being striven for (the integrity of information), it also puts the focus on those types of information that do have integrity – of which journalism is a key component.

Journalism plays a key role on both sides of the information integrity coin. First, it plays a reactive role in debunking lies and exposing information operations. Second, it plays a proactive role in contributing reliable news and informed comment into the public information ecosystem. In short, professional journalism is an antidote to informational weeds – plus an essential fertiliser for informational crops. Put another way, it is not just a "fixer", but also a "creator" of integrity.

Journalism, even when behind a paywall, contributes to a wealth of information resources in society. When it is available to all, (eg. through free-to-air broadcasting,

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free apps or open online websites) it is a direct public good. When the offerings are restricted, they still count as a merit good. The total output merges and mingles, providing a unique knowledge resource in the wider content ecology. But, with low-value AI content being increasingly inserted and reinserted into the public information system, even AI companies are beginning to realise that they should start paying for new and quality data, as produced by news media.

The G20 could aid this recognition by signalling media compensation as key to information integrity, building on their 2024 acknowledgements of intellectual property issues around AI.

Another opportunity for news media that is unlocked by the G20 is to highlight that in a context of content ubiquity and rampant deepfakes, there is unique value in contributions by credible content companies, i.e. media outlets that create professional journalism. Again, the G20 could be approached to explicitly signal appreciation of journalism in this new context, including in relation to the deepfake issue, and integrate media concerns into the possible G20 recommendations relating to this problem.

The multiple challenges to information integrity highlights the case – more than ever – for convivial legal and policy environments for press freedom, pluralism, independence and safety. At the same time, it opens the door to active measures that support journalism, such as through a range of tax incentives (easing the supply and demand sides of journalism), required bargaining between digital (incl. AI) companies with the news industry, and creating funds for media development and innovation. Linking these calls to the G20's concern with information integrity and deepfakes, provides a springboard for impacting on policy agendas.

Currently, state and corporate digital policies are in flux around the world concerning generative AI and deepfakes (even though there is a discernible trend by digital service companies to step back from earlier rhetoric that at least paid lip service to information integrity issues). In this fluid context, the G20 can be a news topic and a platform for media to:

- raise awareness about its role in quality content in a time of deepfakes;

- consolidate strategic direction within the media sector on contemporary challenges, using the framework of information integrity;

- strengthen partnerships for a healthy media ecosystem with relevant civil society bodies, independent media councils, journalism educators, editors and journalists organisations; and

- influence norms and help set the public agenda for follow-up in the form of concrete changes (especially at national level).

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Key questions for discussion during consultations

1. *Assessing the risks*: How damaging can deepfakes be to journalists who experience attacks via this content, and what are the risks to the credibility of authentic and original journalism, and how can the profession respond most effectively?

2. The *distribution question*: News media can produce quality information and debunk deepfakes, but much of the public is caught up in other content environments where information integrity barely features and where algorithms are hostile to news and to links to news sites. Accordingly, are there answers to distributing journalism more widely? Should there be must-carry obligations on other platforms, with options for authentic news feeds? Should there be requirements for curation algorithms to give more prominence to news sources? Would any "ranking" or labelling of media outlets by platforms be effective, or risky? (Some already label state-owned media, while NewsGuard's indicators and the Journalism Trust Initiative are also relevant to these matters.) Would a system need to be compulsory, or could enough normative pressure be brought on platforms to institute such measures?

3. Supporting the *production of journalism:* What measures beyond bargaining codes could be put in place to rebalance the value accrued to distribution platforms at the expense of news (eg. breaking up of digital advertising monopolies; compelled access to data on how news features on platforms). What intellectual property issues can be addressed to support the viability of news media?

4. How is *non-consensual scraping by AI companies* of news content feeding into deepfakes? Is there a way to ensure that AI "answer" services like chatbot interfaces on LLMs and search engines include links to original sources, including news sites? Can copyright law be updated to cover Generative AI companies that scrape news without permission, and do not compensate those carrying the costs of generating journalism?

5. How can the news media *avoid the risks of the weaponisation of "information integrity"* to discredit critical journalism in the way that the term "fake news" became a stick to beat the press?

6. Information integrity is a global issue, but realistically, practical solutions seem more likely at the country level. Given the diversity of political dispensations and the range of challenges facing news media in different jurisdictions, *how can international co-operation be leveraged for local progress*?

7. Reflecting on the quality of journalism itself, *what re-thinking, training or resourcing are needed* to ensure that journalists fulfil their role (e.g. ethics, investigative journalism, fact-checking, public interest etc.) in the face of rising

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deepfakes and news avoidance, and declining audience trust and attention to journalism?

Proposed text for inclusion in G20 outputs

It is worth keeping in mind the low proportion of the total text that was given to information integrity in the output declarations of the G20 in 2024. (See Appendix A). However, building on the G20 interest in deepfakes and information integrity in 2025, and intellectual property in relation to AI in 2024, the formation may be convinced this year to entertain the following proposals:

For the Digital Ministers 2025 declaration:

"News media can play a critical role in exposing deceptive deepfakes and in producing information of high integrity. In times of increased AI-generated content, there is value in fostering free and independent public-interest journalism, in G20 countries and beyond, as a critical resource for information integrity.

"News media content is amongst that which is scraped by AI companies, and attention is needed to ensure fair compensation for the value that this intellectual property adds to the business of the AI enterprises, as well as the business of digital distribution platforms."

For the Heads of State ("Leaders' declaration"):

"Threats to trust and the digital economy arise when information integrity is damaged by AI errors, biases, and the proliferation of deepfakes. Recognising information as a vital public good, there is an urgent need for a supportive environment for free and independent journalism. This kind of unfettered fosters resilience against these risks by exposing emergent problems and by producing reliable, quality content essential for informed societies and robust democracies."

Recommendations and opportunities for G20 media

1. News media and supporting organisations can get behind the concept of information integrity and highlight their essential role in countering threats and advancing credible content.

2. News media can insist that "information integrity" depends on freedom of expression, and should not be used as a club to punish independent outlets or reward captured media.

3. Journalists can report on G20's attention to deepfakes, point out the importance of their outputs to the G20 concerns, and alert the public if there are omissions

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in G20 statements in 2025, in comparison to acknowledgements of information integrity during 2024.

4. The issues raised in this brief should be pursued beyond the G20 agenda, with media engagement, alliances and advocacy in other international forums and at national levels.

5. The news media can welcome other realms of society that contribute to information integrity, for instance, fact-checkers correcting falsehoods; transparency of official information and data (which may not necessarily be accurate, but where the provenance is evident). Journalists can do well to align with such causes, in the face of the much bigger challenge to society's informational resources, of which deepfakes is a very serious threat.

6. Actively engage with other G20 Engagement Groups (e.g., C20 - Civil Society, T20 - Think Tanks, W20 - Women, Y20 - Youth, etc.) Seek opportunities for joint statements, collaborative research, and shared advocacy initiatives to amplify the message of information integrity and the vital role of news media within the broader G20 agenda and its diverse priority areas. This collaborative approach will strengthen the M20's voice and reach.

Acknowledgements and call for comments

This issue paper was drafted by members and supporters of the SA National Editors' Forum *and* Media Monitoring Africa. *As a collaborative M20 document, this paper is a working, live document. It included additional input by* RNW Media, *an international media development organisation.*

Share your suggestions or comments for consideration:
M20support@altadvisory.africa concerns.

The M20 initiative is a "shadow" parallel process set up to intersect with the G20 processes. The M20 seeks to persuade the G20 network of the most powerful global economies to recognise the news media's relevance to their concerns.

Source documents and further reading

G20 and UNESCO. 2024a. Mapping the Information Integrity Debate and Informing the Agenda of the G20. Integrity of Information and Trust in the Digital Economy. Digital Economy Working Group.

G20 and UNESCO. 2024b. Possible Approaches to Promoting Information Integrity and Trust in the Digital Environment. Integrity of Information and Trust in the Digital Economy. Digital Economy Working Group.

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G20. 2024. G20 [Maceió ministerial declaration on digital inclusion for all](#)

G20. 2024. G20 [Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration](#)

United Nations. 2024. [Global Principles For Information Integrity](#)

UNDP. 2022. [Strategic Guidance: Information Integrity: Forging a pathway to Truth, Resilience and Trust](#)

Alan Turing Institute. 2025. [Tackling threats to informed decision-making in democratic societies. Promoting epistemic security in a technologically-advanced world](#)

Demos. 2024. [Epistemic Security 2029: Protecting the UK's information supply chain and strengthening democratic discourse for the next political era](#)

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Appendix A

Information Integrity and related issues in the 2024 G20 declarations

The G20 2024 Ministerial declaration of the Digital Economy Working Group contains 27 paragraphs, of which four covered "Integrity of information online and trust in the digital economy". Media is not mentioned, but a substantive appendix contains a sub-heading: "Fostering the development and sustainability of content sources, enabling access to independent, factual and evidence-based information." Within this section, it states: "By supporting policies that foster news, science and culture creators." It encourages international "cooperation and information sharing on initiatives and best practices addressing the erosion of information integrity and its impact on the digital economy." It further adds "By protecting and strengthening cultural diversity and ensuring intellectual property protection, including copyright protection of original content." The declaration further notes that AI should respect "human rights, fundamental freedoms and intellectual property".

The 2024 Leaders' Declaration of 85 paragraphs includes one that references "misinformation and disinformation, hate speech and other forms of online harms", and urges platforms to do more, including enhancing transparency and researcher access. It calls for a "strengthened and effective global engagement on the discussion of copyright and related rights in the digital environment and the impacts of AI on copyright right holders".

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