The production, consumption, and dissemination of online disinformation has become a serious concern in many countries in recent years. Against the backdrop of increased online news use, and growth in the use of social media to find news (Newman et al. 2017), governments, policymakers, and other stakeholders have started to take formal steps towards assessing and tackling this issue.

The purpose of RISJ factsheet is to provide top level usage statistics for the most popular sites that independent fact checkers and other observers have identified as publishers of false news and online disinformation in two European countries: France and Italy. It specifically focuses on sites that independent fact-checkers have shown to publish demonstrably false news and information, whether for profit or for ideological/political purposes. The factsheet offers only a preliminary measure of the reach of the most popular identified false news websites in Italy and France.

It uses data from comScore and CrowdTangle to measure the use of both news and false news outlets. ComScore is a web analytics company that uses the combination of panel based and server side measurement to provide data on the use of the most widely-used websites within particular countries. CrowdTangle is a web tool that compiles engagement data for specified Facebook accounts by accessing the Facebook API. For both France and Italy, starting point was lists of unreliable websites compiled by independent fact-checkers and other observers. For France, it used the Decodox- a database of around 1000websites compiled by Le Monde’s Decodeurs project in the course of their fact-checking. In Italy, it combined lists of three different sources.

By examining comScore data from 2017, we can see that all of the false news sites in the French sample have a comparatively small reach. On average, most reached just 1% or fewer of the French online population each month in 2017.
This case study provides an overview of the ‘fake news’ phenomenon in Belgium. In light of the 2018 Reuters Report, it starts by sketching the present media landscape in Belgium. It then enquires whether Belgians are concerned about ‘fake news’; what their level of trust is in the media; which media sources are favored by them, and what their level of media literacy is. After analyzing these facts and figures, the emergence of ‘fake news’, through foreign political events, is discussed. Different examples of Belgian ‘fake news’ are then presented, which range from ‘hoaxes’ to misleading and inaccurate news articles stemming from qualified journalists. By means of these examples, the ambiguities of the term ‘fake news’, as an umbrella term to cover a wide variety of content, are explained.

This case study discusses the prominence, consumption, emergence and presence of fake news in Belgium. Multiple scholars have warned for the dangers of the term ‘fake news’, which serves as an umbrella term to cover a wide variety of content. The diversity of meanings masked by the term was very well illustrated by a Flemish documentary, which reported on ‘fake news’ and was broadcast by the weekly TV programme, ‘Pano’.

This case study has discussed the emergence and presence of ‘fake news’ in Belgium, the reasons behind it and the dangers it represents for society. It also outlines the measures that Belgian actors have already taken to counter the issue. As was shown in the 2018 Reuters Report, the level of trust towards traditional media is still considerably high. Traditional media are trusted significantly more than social media. The report indicates that Belgians are aware of the presence of ‘fake news’ and are also concerned about it, more particularly about ‘stories in which facts are distorted in order to achieve certain goals’

**Bibliography**

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