NORDIS – NORdic observatory for digital media and information DISorders

Opportunities and challenges of public service media organisations in countering information disorder:

The case of the NORDIS countries

Report on scientific paper with an executive summary

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Executive Summary

Public service media (PSM) are widely considered to play a significant role in the fight against disinformation. The basic remit of PSM, formed around values of universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability, and innovation, implies a responsibility to fight disinformation by producing fact-based news content and identifying remedies for disinformation. The importance of PSM is recognised in the resolution of the Council of Europe (CoE, 2019), which calls on member governments to support PSM while also urging PSM organisations to make countering disinformation a priority.

This report examines the role of PSM in countering disinformation in the four countries of the Nordic Observatory for Digital Media and Information Disorder (NORDIS): Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The analysis is based on a multi-method research framework that provides a triangulation of contextual factors to determine the role of the PSM organisation in the national environment, the PSM activities conducted to fight disinformation, and expert assessments, based on interviews and questionnaires with PSM and stakeholder experts, of the opportunities and challenges facing PSM in their respective contexts. The analysis shows that PSM organisations are able to build on their legacy and show agile responses to changing circumstances, although recent media landscape developments continue to pose significant challenges. The analysis also highlights strategies that can be applied to both the NORDIS and a wider European context.

The NORDIS countries share multiple contextual similarities: high levels of news consumption, high levels of trust in media, and high awareness of and resilience to disinformation. PSM are the most trusted and wide-reaching news outlets in all four countries, which allows them to play a leading role in the fight against disinformation. However, the dominance of social media, increasing pressure from commercial competitors, and politically articulated distrust are all potential threats. While still relatively insignificant in the NORDIS countries, political polarisation and fragmentation also create challenges for PSM.

Content-wise, the provision of wide-reaching, high-quality news journalism is generally seen by NORDIS PSM experts as the most important way to fight disinformation. However, all NORDIS PSM also provide more specialised programming. Typical examples found in all countries include current affairs programs, specialised programmes addressing disinformation, programmes promoting critical media literacy, educational programmes, and news programmes for children and young people.

Interviews with PSM and stakeholder experts highlight the challenges posed by the dominance of use of social media platforms for news consumption, which leads to almost-constant exposure to disinformation and other non-editorial content. In this fast, complex, and highly competitive media landscape, PSM must find new strategies to maintain

a high reach, especially among hard-to-reach groups, such as young audiences, minority language speakers, and audiences particularly susceptible to disinformation and negative perceptions of PSM. PSM also face a constant need to stay abreast of the latest technological and contextual developments, including dealing with targeted harassment.

PSM are still the most trusted news outlets in a majority of European countries. Prior studies have shown that European PSM organisations engage in fighting disinformation in the same two core ways as NORDIS PSM: high-quality news journalism and specialised, educational programming. Assuming a comparative lack of political interference, PSM should be recognised as an effective tool for addressing disinformation, both in individual countries and in an EU-wide context.

Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction: Why study PSM and information disorder?

In recent years, disinformation and related phenomena has posed numerous challenges in areas such as healthcare, election coverage, and political journalism in Europe and worldwide. The Nordic countries have not been immune to these trends and have developed strategies to counter so called "fake news" (Nordic Council, 2018). Even so, recent debates about remedies for disinformation have mostly focused on changes to the governance and regulation of digital platforms and the need to improve the transparency of their actions. At the level of the European Union (EU), this has recently (in spring 2022) been addressed with the Digital Services Act (see, e.g., European Council, 2022) and the strengthened Code of Practice (European Commission, 2022a); the former facilities combat of disinformation on digital platforms, and the latter emphasises concrete fact-checking and literacy activities. The European approach to disinformation is "balanced and tailored" (Jourová, 2022), with the understanding that geopolitical and contextual variations must be taken into account when seeking remedies to the current situation.

To be sure, while many disinformation challenges are global, they also take specific regional and national forms. The search for solutions to disinformation must involve giving attention to national media systems and facilitating the independence, diversity, and sustainability of those media outlets. This approach is at the heart of the EU's proposed European Media Freedom Act, which seeks to ensure the role of public service media (PSM) as independent media outlets (e.g., Breton, 2022). Similarly, the latest Rule of Law Report of the European Commission (2022b) includes, for the first time, a section on PSM that states the importance of their existence as independent parts of the media sector. Indeed, the basic remit of PSM, formed around values of universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability, and innovation (EBU, 2012), implies a responsibility to fight disinformation by producing fact-based news content and identifying remedies for disinformation.

The above has already been recognised in the European context in Resolution 2255 of the Council of Europe (2019): The resolution calls on member governments to support PSM while also urging PSM organisations to make countering disinformation a priority, specifically requiring actions such as multi-stakeholder collaborations and partnerships as well as the creation of innovative and diverse content.

The view of the CoE is unsurprising given the central position PSM hold in many European countries. While trust in legacy knowledge institutions has been in decline all over the world (Edelman, 2022; Newman et al., 2022), PSM are still associated with high levels of trust and value in many nations (Newman & Fletcher, 2017; Newman et al., 2022; Sehl, 2020), and they reach a politically diverse audience (Schulz et al., 2019). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have highlighted that, amidst conflicting and ever-changing

information, including both accidental and purposefully false information, not only the consumption of news but also the appreciation of legacy media and journalism has a strong standing in many countries (e.g., Newman et al., 2022).

This report on an upcoming scientific paper by the Nordic Observatory for Digital Media and Information Disorder (NORDIS), Task 3.2, examines the supportive role that PSM play in a healthy national communication environment (e.g., Horowitz, 2019). This study is based on two basic definitions. First, it follows the broad definition of disinformation and related harms utilised by NORDIS in all its activities, as suggested by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017): This so-called information disorder has multiple causes and manifestations, ranging from unintentional creating and sharing of false information (misinformation) to purposeful false information (disinformation) and malicious false information meant to harm targeted recipients (malinformation). Accordingly, the framework of this study encompasses a variety of activities that have the potential to tackle this information disorder. Second, while no specific and standardised normative or practical definition of public service media, PSM exists, and the report utilises that term in the way it is often used in academic and policy contexts: It has become common to refer to PSM instead of public service broadcasting (PSB) to indicate that most organisations now have a multi-platform presence. The working definition of PSM in this study is a public service broadcasting organization that also has an established presence online.

Specifically, the study and this report provide an evaluation of how PSM in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden—the NORDIS countries—meet the expectations to counter disinformation set by the CoE. The analysis is based on a research framework (Horowitz et al., 2021) that provides a triangulation of contextual factors that determine the role of the PSM organisation in the national environment, the activities carried out by such organisations aimed at fighting disinformation, and expert assessments of the potential of PSM to reduce the impact of disinformation and other harms caused by information disorder. These three dimensions are examined with a multi-method approach that ranges from analysis of contextual secondary material and a desktop study of relevant policy and other documents to content analysis, expert questionnaires, and interviews (Figure 1).
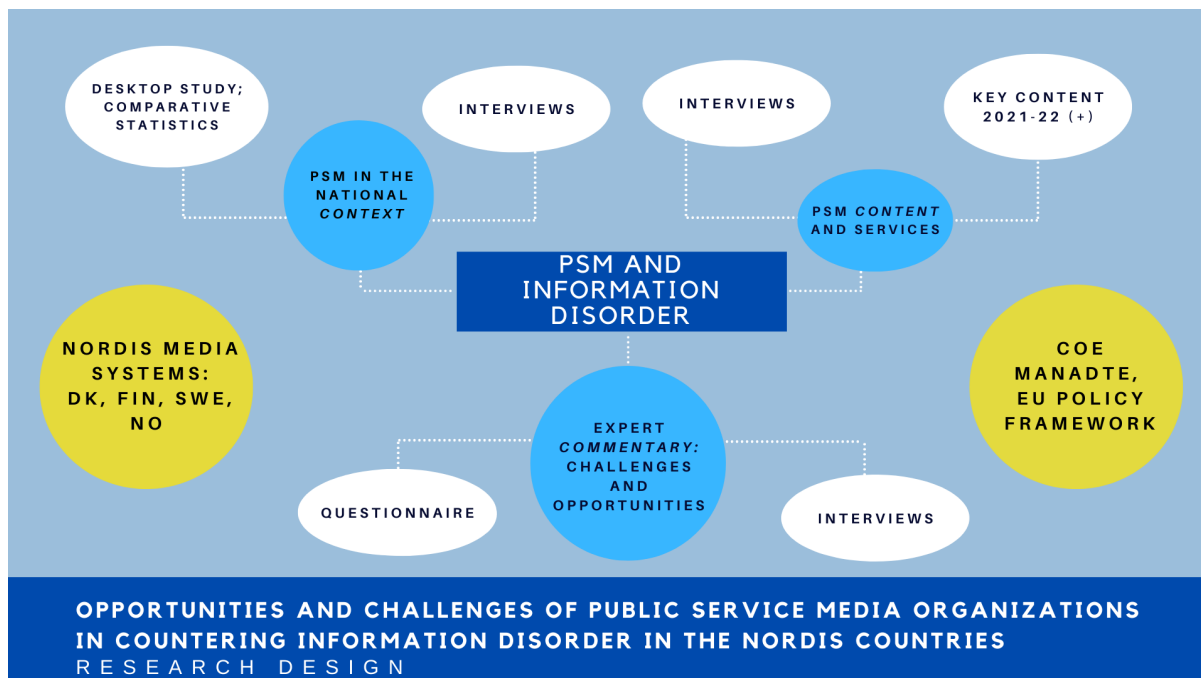
Figure 1. Opportunities and challenges of PSM in countering information disorder in the NORDIS countries: Research design

Accordingly, the purpose of this report is threefold. First, it provides an outlook on the role of PSM in the fight against disinformation in the NORDIS context—where PSM have a strong legacy and even today occupy a significant position in the national media markets. The overall view highlights the contextual factors that should be considered when assessing the impact and tools that PSM can offer to counter disinformation.

Second, the purpose is to highlight recent activities by PSM organisations in the NORDIS countries that are relevant to the CoE resolutions: What concrete applications and best practices have these PSM organisations created and codified? Are there programs, services, processes, and ideas that could be transferable to other contexts?

Finally, the research seeks to inform thinking and policy-making around the opportunities—and challenges—related to PSM in the struggle to secure independent, trustworthy, and sustainable media in the NORDIS countries and throughout Europe.

This report is organised as follows: First, the analytical framework, including methods and research material, is described, followed by an overview of the media landscape in the NORDIS countries and the role of PSM in the respective country contexts. Third, relevant recent examples of content and services, coupled with expert commentary, are presented. Finally, the broader implications of the findings to national and EU approaches regarding PSM are discussed, as are further research needs.

NORDIS

1.0 Benchmarking the role of PSM: The framework

The research depicted in this report is an adaptation of a published framework to assess PSM against the CoE-defined benchmarks (Horowitz et al., 2021). Given the multi-dimensionality of information disorder and the complex national–global factors and manifestations, this multi-method framework combines an overview of specificities of national media systems with concrete PSM offerings and expert assessments. Accordingly, the research material includes both numerous secondary sources as well as original content analysis and expert commentary (Table 1).

Dimension	Research material
Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden	
Context	
Comparative statistics	16 indicators (see Table 2)
Desktop study	Annual reports, external reports, policy documents, news reporting
Content	
Content and services	Recent/noteworthy content: Denmark: DR Finland: Yle Norway: NRK Sweden: SVT, SR, UR Coded according to the CoE mandate: 1. Quality and innovative communication practices (new formats, etc.) 2. Specialised programmes containing analysis and comments regarding false news and propaganda 3. Programming that stimulates critical thinking among audiences 4. Targeted online communication with young people 5. Collaborations
Expert commentary	When relevant to specific content (see below)

Commentary	
PSM expert interviews	18 targeted interviews
PSM stakeholder questionnaire	15 responses
Background stakeholder interviews	15 interviews (not focused on PSM but addressing its role in combating disinformation, NORDIS Task 3.1).[1]

Table 1. Research dimensions and material
Note: DR = Danmarks Radio, Yle = Yleisradio, NRK = Norsk rikskringkasting, SVT = Sveriges Television, SR = Sveriges Radio, UR = Utbildningsradion.

2.1. Context

The **contextual dimension** of the framework is informed by the fact that each PSM organisation is unique in its organisational design, funding model, ability to include digital services, and relationship with its audience, political stakeholders, and commercial competitors. This dimension focuses on factors that define the standing of PSM, including press freedom (the World Press Freedom Index, RSF, 2022)[2], a global dataset by the Digital Society Project/V-Dem Digital Society Survey on disinformation and online harms (Mechkova et al., 2022), resilience to online disinformation (a factor analysis of several political, economic, and media indicators; Humprecht et al., 2020), audiences' experiences of disinformation (Eurobarometer, 2022a), and the reach of PSM news (Newman et al., 2022). In our framework, these secondary sources are not weighted indicators but allow for broad comparisons of the role of PSM among the NORDIS countries (see Table 2) and they are coupled with a desktop study of related research, policy documents, and news stories.

Issue	Source
National media landscape	
Press freedom	World Press Freedom Index ranking (RSF, 2022)

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[1] See the report of Task 3.1:
https://datalab.au.dk/fileadmin/Datalab/NORDIS_reports/Report_task_3.1_-_Policy_approaches_to_in formation_disorder_in_the_digital_welfare_state.pdf
[2] It should be noted that the Digital Society Project/V-Dem Digital Society Survey is based on a questionnaire to national experts. While the survey is designed to be appropriate for gathering data from a wide variety of national contexts, the scores are to an extent relative to those contexts. Still, broadly speaking, it can be argued that the NORDIS countries share many political, economic, societal, and cultural characteristics, and their results can be understood to be highly comparable.

Online national government disinformation	Digital Society Project/V-Dem Digital Society Survey, index (mean) (Mechkova et al., 2022)
Online foreign interference	Digital Society Project/V-Dem Digital Society Survey, index (mean) (Mechkova et al., 2022)
Polarisation of society	Digital Society Project/V-Dem Digital Society Survey, index (mean) (Mechkova et al., 2022)
Online content diversity of views	Digital Society Project/V-Dem Digital Society Survey, index (mean) (Mechkova et al., 2022)
Structural resilience to disinformation	Factor analysis of indices (Humprecht et al., 2020)
Audiences	
Internet access: penetration of population	% Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2022)
Using social media to get news: most used source	Top source, % of use (Newman et al., 2022)
Sharing news via social media, messaging services, and/or email	% (Newman et al., 2022)
Awareness of disinformation as a problem for democracy	% Eurobarometer 2021–22 (Eurobarometer, 2022a)
Awareness of disinformation as a problem for one's own country	% (Eurobarometer, 2022a)
Own exposure to disinformation	% (Eurobarometer, 2022a)
Confidence in own ability to detect disinformation	% (Eurobarometer, 2022a)
Public service media	
PSM news, weekly reach, offline	% (Newman et al., 2022)
PSM news, weekly reach, online	% (Newman et al., 2022)
PSM news, trust	% (Newman et al., 2022)

Table 2. Contextual dimension: Comparative data

2.2. Content

The second dimension, the content of PSM, illustrates how PSM address the challenges of information disorder. The typology used to depict content and services is derived from the mandate by the CoE to PSM organisations (specifically, the content typology is derived from the Council's resolution). The challenges posed by information disorder have been noted and addressed by PSM organisations for some time (EBU, 2018). Our framework highlights current efforts and recent noteworthy examples that follow the CoE's (2019) stipulations regarding content and services. These examples have been identified from the programming of Danmark's Radio (DR); Yleisradio (the Finnish Broadcasting Company, Yle), Norsk rikskringkasting (the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, NRK), Sveriges Television (SVT), Sveriges Radio (SR), and Utbildningsradion (Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company, UR). The depiction of content and services has also drawn from relevant expert commentary. The categories used to identify relevant content are:

1. Quality and innovative communication practices, especially regarding news and current affairs;
2. Specialised programmes containing analysis and comments regarding disinformation;
3. Programming that stimulates critical thinking among audiences;
4. Targeted online communication with young people; and
5. Projects and collaborations which address information disorder with other PSM organisations and national stakeholders.

2.3. Commentary

The third dimension, **commentary** on activities carried out by PSM, draws on stakeholder interviews to reflect both the context (first dimension) and PSM output (second dimension), which deepens understanding of the systemic and organisational constraints and opportunities for PSM. Since PSM are expected to take a distinctive role in the fight against disinformation, the interviews give insights into how this expectation—and the presumed ambition on the part of PSM—is met at the national level. The interview scheme focuses on experts who can elaborate on relevant issues and activities and communicate well-informed opinions on PSM and the state of information disorder because they plan to or are currently engaged in such activities within the organisations or observe them professionally from the outside.

In light of the diversity of both PSM and the stakeholder interviewees, the design of these discussions was open-ended, allowing a variety of views. Still, while the interviewees reflected at times on the specifics of their professional roles, the questions are decidedly focused on broader strategies that might shed light on policy discussions and illustrate transferable best practices.   The PSM representatives were selected to illuminate the

organisations' strategic and journalistic contributions. They were asked to reflect on the following:

1. The organisation's role vis-a-vis national activities against information disorder;
2. Specific activities, contents, and services they wished to highlight, including possible innovative approaches; and
3. The context and impact of current crises: the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The stakeholder commentaries were derived from a questionnaire about PSM that entailed the same general questions, as well as from an earlier interview round that aimed to gauge stakeholder views on information disorder in the NORDIS countries[3]. Both the questionnaire and background interviews represent policy-makers, various journalism organisations, and media literacy organisations.

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[3] See partial account in the report of Task 3.1:
https://datalab.au.dk/fileadmin/Datalab/NORDIS_reports/Report_task_3.1_-_Policy_approaches_to_in formation_disorder_in_the_digital_welfare_state.pdf

3.0 The NORDIS context and PSM

We know relatively little about the extent of information disorder in Nordic countries, including the extent of disinformation on various platforms, the key sources of disinformation, and the spread of disinformation across borders within the Nordic region. This lack of comprehensive comparative data has been one of the key motivations for the NORDIS observatory.

The lack of specific, systematic research may be partly due to the seemingly robust and free context of communication and the media in the four NORDIS countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. NORDIS countries fare remarkably well by many measures assessing democratic and robust communication environments, as noted in several rankings of the state of democracy that include measures of civil liberties and media freedom (e.g., Boese et al., 2022; EIU, 2022; MPM, 2022). It is not surprising that a recent research effort to discover structural resilience to online disinformation in 18 countries (Humprecht et al., 2020) placed the NORDIS countries among the most resilient. Based on seven indices constructed from various comparative statistics as indicators of political, economic, and media environments, the study found three different clusters of countries: resilient, challenged/polarised, and extremely vulnerable, of which the U.S. is among the latter.

The NORDIS countries have media-supportive environments defined by factors such as a relatively low degree of populism and political polarisation, robust PSM, a high amount of shared news content and online users in general, and a high degree of trust in news. Based on the above indices (Humprecht et al., 2020), Finland and Denmark were found to be the most resilient, and Norway and Sweden were in the middle of the list of the countries studied, all of which were part of the most resilient country cluster. In these countries, structural resilience is coupled with a long tradition of policies and practices of media literacy (e.g., Forsman, 2020).

Although the NORDIS countries are challenged by the necessity to rethink journalism and content creation business models, and they face a notable decline in advertising revenue due to COVID-19 (e.g., Ohlsson et al., 2021), these markets still feature strong national media outlets that are both consumed and trusted. This is partly due to each government's direct and indirect support of public and private media (e.g., Piirainen et al., 2022). Even in the global context of diminishing societal and media trust (e.g., Edelman, 2022), the NORDIS countries embody trust in traditional institutions, including legacy forms of media. Conversely, trust in social media and news via social media is remarkably low in NORDIS countries. Still, digital platforms are a significant information source, even for news, in all the NORDIS countries and are also used for news-sharing (Newman et al., 2022). Audiences in

these countries recognise disinformation as a problem, and in each country, well over 50% report having encountered disinformation (Eurobarometer, 2022a).[4]

The national, policy-driven principle of supporting journalism and the media in the form of various mechanisms, including funding of PSM, in the NORDIS countries is a significant factor in creating a national media environment that can resist viral disinformation, foreign attempts to influence the national media sphere, hate speech, and other information disorders better than a system without public media. This has become evident during crises such as COVID-19, when audiences turn to national media, especially public broadcasting, for trusted information (Ohlsson et al., 2021). The crucial role of sustainable national media systems with independent news outlets for democracy and functioning markets is also recognised in the EU's proposal for the European Media Freedom Act (2022).

It may seem that the NORDIS countries need not worry about the robustness and resilience of their media systems and the central role of their PSM in supporting the national media landscape. Yet, even in these countries, PSM have recently faced scrutiny and a potential narrowing of their offerings, spearheaded by political and commercial actors. To be sure, Nordic public service broadcasting has been affected by both right- and left-wing pressures and biases over the decades (Syvertsen et al., 2014), yet they still fare well in perceived political pressure (EBU, 2020).

As an example, the right-wing government decided on a 20% cut to DR's funding—while this decision was later reversed, it called into question the stability of the "arm's length principle" that has traditionally guided politicians when allocating resources for PSM (e.g., Boberg, 2021). Another illustration of the opposition to strong PSM is the complaint lodged by the Finnish commercial media to the European Commission that alleged unfair competition due to Yle's text-based digital news offerings. As a result, the law on Yle was modified in 2022 to limit Yle's text-based news (Yle, 2022) and the development has inspired similar discussions in Denmark and Sweden (Morgenbladet, 2022; SVT Nyheter, 2022).

Yet another challenge is political polarisation. While still moderate (e.g., (Mechkova et al., 2022), political leanings impact news consumption (Newman et al., 2022). For instance, in case of Finland, polarisation results in notably different degrees of trust in news media by different audience groups (Ojala, 2021): unsurprisingly, those with populist views are more skeptical of mainstream news than audiences with other political leanings.

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[4] See a more elaborate account of the media landscape of the NORDIS countries in the policy brief of Task 3: https://datalab.au.dk/fileadmin/Datalab/News_-_pdfs/NORDIS_Policy_Brief_Assesing_Information_Disorder.pdf

Against this backdrop, this overview of the current role and the potential of PSM as a tool to counter disinformation in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden is intended to provide an accounting of the vulnerabilities and transferable opportunities in mature PSM countries that, due to their approach to media policy, have been called the Media Welfare States (Syvertsen et al., 2014). The following country-by-country depiction of contexts also illustrates some of the differences between the NORDIS countries.

3.1. Denmark

Denmark, following the ethos of editorial independence of media outlets, a feature typical to the Nordic Media Welfare States (Syvertsen et al., 2014), ranks second in press freedom in the world—Norway takes first place (RSF, 2022). The country also features a high resilience to online disinformation, partly due to the robust role of PSM in its media system (Humprecht et al., 2020). Even so, the Danish media landscape and consumption are not devoid of the impact of information disorder.[5] While the government is not spreading misleading or false information online, foreign online interference is not considered to be significant, and domestic online outlets feature a diversity of opinions, there is a sense that the Danish society is at least moderately polarised, and that is evident online (Mechkova et al., 2022).

This is not a surprise given the high internet penetration and the importance of many social media outlets in Danes' lives, both generally and as a news source. For example, Facebook, the most used social media platform, is a significant news source for over one-third of Danes (Newman et al., 2022). The audiences' experiences reflect the awareness of challenges: Almost 80% consider disinformation a problem for democracy, over 60% think it is a problem in Denmark, and over 50% say they have encountered disinformation (Eurobarometer, 2022a).

Modelled after the BBC, public service broadcasting in Denmark began in 1925. Today, Denmark features two PSM organisations, DR[6] and TV2[7]. DR broadcasts nationwide on three television channels and seven radio channels, of which three are digital-only stations. The programming is available online on DR TV (video) and DR Lyd (audio) streaming services. Public service in Denmark is regulated by law on a general level and, more specifically, through media agreements and public service contracts and permits, which are usually renewed every four years (Kulturministeriet, 2022b).

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[5] See, e.g., the collection of reports and studies on various aspects of information disorder collected by the fact-checker Tjekdet: https://www.tjekdet.dk/forskning
[6] https://www.dr.dk/
[7] https://tv2.dk/. Publicly owned and bound by public service obligations, TV2 still operates commercially, making it unique amongst the studied countries. It is not discussed in this report.

Judging by the level of trust alone, PSM provide an antidote to disinformation in Denmark. Of Danish news sources, DR news had the highest reach offline and online, and DR was also the most trusted news outlet (Newman et al., 2022). All in all, trust in public service in Denmark is relatively stable across party preferences. Generally, left-to-centre voters have higher trust in both public service and media overall than do centre-to-right voters, but in the case of DR, the differences between most parties are relatively small (Andersen et al., 2021). The Eurobarometer survey (2022) paints a more nuanced picture: only 18% of the respondents view their PSM as completely free from political pressure, while some 50% view it as free to some extent. Still, these figures are higher by approximately ten percentage points than the EU average.

Generally, audiences' trust in Danish PSM is reflected in their strong position in the national media market. DR reaches over 93% of the population weekly. Its reach is lowest in the age group of 25–31, at about 87%, a figure that is still relatively high considering industry-wide struggles to reach younger audiences. Weekly, 61% of Danes accessed DR's television channels, 79% accessed radio channels, and 72% accessed DR's content on digital platforms (DR, 2022). DRTV was the second most used streaming service, after YouTube and before Netflix (DR Medieforskning, 2022). Although facing competition from global streaming services, PSM organisations are responding with ambitious initiatives of their own (Schrøder et al., 2022).

Such efforts and other forms of innovation—such as that needed to combat disinformation—require resources. For most of DR's history, financing has been based on license fees, initially paid by all households with a radio. As noted, DR faced significant cuts to its funding in 2018, causing concern regarding its ability to serve the Danish society (EBU, 2018). While most of the cuts were reversed, the plans to change the funding model remain in place: the license fee was replaced by a tax-based financing model in 2022 (DR, 2021). In 2021, DR had a total revenue of 3,790 million DKK, a figure comparable to the PSM of other Nordic countries with similar populations (DR, 2022).

Furthermore, in a proposal in early 2022, the Danish government initiated several significant actions to strengthen both the governance and editorial independence of DR. In addition to suggesting, among other things, that global technology giants should extend special treatment to Danish public service media content so that certain content cannot be deleted from those platforms, the government forwarded a proposal that would require streaming services to pay a contribution from their annual turnover in Denmark to help fund public service provision. The government also sought to end political appointments to DR's governing board (Petersen & Vestergaard, 2022).

3.2. Finland

Of the four NORDIS case countries, Finland is the most structurally resilient to disinformation (Humprecht et al., 2020). That resilience has been attributed to high press freedom, to innovative media literacy policies, or to other educational and e-participation activities (Lessenski, 2021); however, these are features that characterise all Nordic countries. Still, in 2022, Finland ranked only sixth in the World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2022). One of the reasons for Finland's loss in the 2020s of its former leading place in the ranking is its relatively low subscore (10th) for the safety of journalists. Although harassment of journalists has been recorded as a risk in European comparative analyses and domestic studies (e.g., Hiltunen & Suuronen, 2020), that harassment is mostly verbal threats and smear campaigns by individuals rather than systemic actions by institutional forces (e.g., Mäntyoja & Manninen, 2022). All in all, Finland still fares well regarding the safety of journalists when compared to other European countries (MFRR, 2021).

Despite the high internet penetration in the country (94%; Newman et al., 2022), Finnish audiences reported the lowest, in all of Europe, degree of awareness of misleading or false information as a problem in their country, and their confidence in detecting disinformation was the highest reported. At the same time, over 80% of Finns consider misleading or false news to be a problem for democracy, although only a little over 50% think it is a problem in Finland (Eurobarometer, 2022a). Perhaps that is why up to one-third of Finns share news online (Newman et al., 2022). Finland is not exposed to a large number of foreign disinformation campaigns online (Coppedge et al., 2021; see also, Mäntyoja & Manninen, 2022), and the diversity of domestic online media outlets is considered quite good (Mechkova et al., 2022). Still, both Russian propaganda (e.g., Aro, 2019) and global phenomena like QAnon (e.g., Sequeira, 2020), have been present in Finnish digital spaces. The Finnish fact-checker Faktabaari frequently documents either misleading or designed-to-be-false news stories, including stories related to COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and the Finnish NATO membership application.[8]

Established in 1926, the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle) has maintained its central role in the Finnish media system and society despite the proliferation of commercial broadcasting and online media. In 2021, 94% of Finns accessed one of Yle's services at least once weekly (Yle, 2021a). Audiences view commercial news outlets with markedly more scepticism than Yle news (Horowitz et al., 2021). Yle fares the best in the country in terms of offline news and trusted news brands, with a significantly high trust score of 84%, while also ranking as the third most popular online news source (Newman et al., 2022). Yle's news audiences are not characterised by a particular educational level or political views (Schulz et al., 2019).

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[8] https://faktabaari.fi/fakta/

Yle's central role in Finnish society is exemplified by its relatively generous resources and numerous distribution channels. Yle's net turnover in 2021 was 499.9 million € (Yle, 2021b), which is noteworthy in a country with 5.5 million inhabitants. The funds come from tax that replaced the license fee in 2013. Yle hosts four television channels, six radio channels, and a popular audio and video streaming service, Yle Areena, in addition to its presence on the most widely used social media platforms.

While the role of Yle has been significant in terms of Finnish culture, education, and political life, its role in the digital age has shifted from universal service to a "fill-in-the-gap" model that complements commercial media outlets. While PSMs have been under commercial and political pressure in many European countries (e.g., Wilson, 2020), Finland has remained a markedly strong and mature PSM country with high audience reach and trust (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2021), as well as wide political support among the main parliamentary parties.

Nevertheless, private media companies claim that Yle has an unfair competitive advantage in the national media market, and such complaints have intensified in recent years. In 2017, the Finnish Media Federation, an advocacy organisation for private companies in the media and printing industries, filed a complaint with the EU Commission, claiming that Yle's textual online content conflicts with EU state aid rules. In 2020, Finland's government, after (non-public) discussions with the EU Commission's Competition Department, considered amending the Act on Yleisradio, which would limit Yle's mandate to provide text-based web content that is not directly related to audio-visual content. To counter the proposal based on the complaint, an official citizen's initiative to stress Yle's importance as a news outlet collected vast support, which led to its consideration by Parliament. Despite public criticism, the change to the Act on Yleisradio was ratified in 2022 (Ala-Fossi et al., 2022). This might partly explain the general sentiment, similar to that reported in Denmark, that PSM are not fully free of political pressures (Eurobarometer, 2022).

Amidst the debates about the proposed amendment, it also became public that Sanoma Media Finland, the largest Finnish commercial cross-media company with journalistic and educational arms, had also asked the EU Commission to investigate whether Yle's streaming service, Areena, and Yle's e-learning content violate EU state aid rules. Furthermore, in 2022, RadioMedia, the umbrella organisation for commercial radios, requested an assessment of Yle's online audio content. While these claims are understandable from the perspective of the national commercial stakeholders who struggle with sustainability and hence potentially weaken media plurality in Finland (Mäntyoja & Manninen, 2022), accessible news, new audio formats such as podcasts, and educational programming seem to be strongly aligned with the CoE's PSM mandate. PSM's role as a key supporter of Finnish democracy was also widely noted in the open public commentary opposing the amendment to the Act on Yleisradio (Lausuntopalvelu, 2020).

3.3. Norway

Norway, the world's leader in press freedom (RSF, 2022), also excels in online content diversity and is free from undue governmental influence online (Mechkova et al., 2022). It ranks sixth of 18 countries in the factor analysis indicating resilience to online disinformation (Humprecht et al., 2020), possibly because of indicators that point to a degree of polarisation of political views (Mechkova et al., 2022).[9]

Norwegians are avid social media users: Facebook is the most used service (78%), which is also used as a news source (31%), and one-fourth of news audiences share content online. This, again, is not a surprise in a Nordic media welfare state that features almost full internet penetration of the population (Newman et al., 2022). Also, over 90% are aware of disinformation, almost 80% find it is a problem in Norway, over 60% are confident they can detect it, and almost 70% say they have encountered it (Eurobarometer, 2022).

NRK, established in 1933, broadcasts nationwide on four television channels (two of which share the same channel, split between daytime and nighttime) and thirteen radio channels. Text, audio, and video content are available online on nrk.no, the streaming service NRK TV, and several apps. NRK also runs a popular weather forecast website and app called yr.no in collaboration with The Norwegian Meteorological Institute.[10]

In 2021, 92% of Norwegians accessed content produced by NRK daily. It is worth noting that this exceptionally high number includes the popular weather forecasting service. NRK's reach was highest among older and highly educated audiences. Daily, 53% of Norwegians accessed NRK's television channels, 37% accessed radio channels, and 81% accessed NRK's content on digital platforms. 85% of audiences reported that they trust NRK, and 74% reported that NRK achieves its goal of impartiality and independence. 72% reported that they get value for their tax money (NRK, 2022a). NRK was also the most trusted Norwegian media outlet in 2021 and had both the highest reach of any media outlet offline (television and radio) and the second highest reach online, after the daily newspaper VG (Newman et al., 2022).

From 1933, when NRK was established, to 2019, NRK was financed by a broadcasting fee that was paid annually by all households with a radio or television. In 2019, the fee amount was around 3000 NOK, and the fee was replaced the next year by an NRK tax (NRK, 2019). In 2021, NRK had total revenue of 6,023 million NOK, a figure comparable to other Nordic countries with similarly sized populations (NRK, 2022b). In 2020, the Parliament introduced a new system for managing and reviewing financial media support, including the financing of

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[9] Humprecht et al. (2020) used a V-Dem study from 2019 in their analysis of societal polarisation and online fractionalisation.

[10] It should be noted that the Norwegian commercial broadcaster TV2 follows some, limited, public service mandates.

NRK, in four-year windows The first such four-year period will be 2023–2026 (Kultur- og likestillingsdepartementet, 2020).

The impact and value of NRK is monitored internally and externally. In addition to NRK's yearly public broadcasting reports, the Norwegian Media Authority also publishes yearly reports that assess how well NRK has fulfilled its public service obligations (NRK, 2021). In terms of independence, a key issue in current EU debates (e.g., Blázquez et al., 2022; European Commission, 2022b), discussions are ongoing regarding the ownership of NRK. In 2017, a Media Diversity Committee submitted a report to the Ministry of Culture and Equality that recommended changing the ownership of NRK from the state to an independent foundation; this is similar to the Swedish model of PSM ownership. While the proposal received support from NRK, The Norwegian Union of Journalists, and several political parties, no formal decision has been made.

As in Finland, commercial competitors have generally been critical of NRK's role in the Norwegian media landscape (e.g., M24, 2018). The national trade organisation for private media, Mediebedriftenes Landsforening (MBL), has demanded more balance between NRK and private media. MBL considers NRK to currently have the "broadest mandate" among PSM organisations in the Nordic countries and is advocating instead for restrictions on content distributed on digital channels and a stricter definition of NRK's public service role (Mediebedriftenes Landsforening, 2021). However, the response to criticism has been somewhat different in Norway than in Finland. In a report delivered to the Ministry of Culture and Equality, the Norwegian Media Authority concludes that NRK, as it currently exists, poses no threat to media diversity in Norway and that there is no reason to restrict NRK's use of digital channels. The report notes that the competition between NRK and private media has increased over recent years but sees the competition effects as mainly beneficial for both. The report proposes only some minor changes to NRK's role, including a stronger focus on local news and culture. Besides noting the increased competition, the conclusions were similar to the last report about NRK's contribution to media diversity that was published by the Media Authority in 2018 (Medietilsynet, 2021).

3.4. Sweden

Sweden fares well in the global press freedom ranking, scoring third place after Norway and Denmark (RSF, 2022). However, in the study on resilience to disinformation, it takes only the 9th place of the 19 countries studied (Humprecht et al., 2020). While still in the resilient country cluster, the 2022 scores of the indicators from Digital Society Project/V-Dem Digital Society Survey are somewhat lower than those for other NORDIS countries, including for societal polarisation (Mechkova et al., 2022). Although political independence is not currently at risk in Sweden, there are worries about potential risks in the future due to increased polarisation (Färdigh, 2022).

Just as in neighbouring countries, respondents in Sweden reported a high awareness of disinformation—86% see it as a problem in general, and 76% consider it to be a problem in Sweden. A significant portion, almost 70%, of Swedes say they have encountered false media content (Eurobarometer, 2022). This is unsurprising in light of the highly digital communication context in the NORDIS countries, including Sweden. As noted in the Digital News Report 2022 (Westlund, 2022), the PSM and commercial news publishers operate in a context with practically universal broadband access and with audiences who use digital services in numerous aspects of their daily life, including social media, which they utilise for news, and streaming services. In addition, alternative news media have gained a strong foothold. Just like in other NORDIS countries, Facebook is still the number one social media, including as a source of news. Some one-third of Swedes share news online, a figure similar to that of Finns and Norwegians (Newman et al., 2022).

Public broadcasting started in Sweden in 1925. The country has three PSM organisations with distinct roles, Sveriges Television (SVT), Sveriges Radio (SR), and Sveriges Utbildningsradio (UR). SVT broadcasts on five regular television channels and publishes news online. Most television programmes, along with some exclusive content, are also available on the streaming service SVT Play, and written companion pieces to news programmes are available online on SVT Nyheter. SR broadcasts on four nationwide radio channels and several local and digital channels. UR provides educational programming that is broadcast on SVT's and SR's channels. All three are owned by a one trust foundation, Förvaltningsstiftelsen (MPRT, 2022a). Swedish PSM, like their NORDIS counterparts, seek to retain universal reach by maintaining a presence on the most popular social media platforms.

In 2021, 8.5 million Swedes accessed content produced by SVT at least once a week, and 7.4 million Swedes accessed content produced by SR at least once a week, making SVT and SR the most used Swedish news media outlets on television and radio, respectively (Sveriges Radio, 2022; Sveriges Television, 2022). Public service also does well online, with SVT Nyheter, SVT's online news, ranking second in online reach, just behind the evening newspaper Aftonbladet (Newman et al., 2022). SVT Play is the second most used streaming platform in Sweden, after Netflix (Ohlsson, 2021). Like other news media outlets, PSM in Sweden struggle to reach younger audiences. Public service media enjoy high trust in Sweden, with SVT and SR being the most trusted media outlets (Newman et al., 2022).

The audiences of Swedish PSM are not strongly characterised by any ideological leanings, but there are some notable dividing lines when it comes to trust in and use of public service. Several studies and surveys (Dahlgren, 2019; Falk, 2021; Medieakademin, 2022) have found that trust in public service is significantly lower among supporters of conservative right-wing parties. While the overall levels of trust have stayed relatively stable during the last few decades, the polarisation along party lines has grown.

In the basics of its PSM funding, the Swedish situation resembles those in other NORDIS countries. In 2019, the earlier funding model of a television license fee was replaced by a public service tax. In 2021, SVT had a total revenue of 5,303 million SEK (Sveriges Television, 2022), and SR had a total revenue of 3,057 million SEK (Sveriges Radio, 2022). In comparison, TV4, the largest commercial television broadcaster in Sweden, had a revenue of 4,193 million SEK in 2020 (MPRT, 2021).

Although public service enjoys high levels of trust in Sweden, its role and value have been actively debated, especially over the last decade. Criticism can roughly be divided into two categories, political bias and market distortion. The criticism of public service's perceived impartiality and political bias is strongest among the Sweden Democrats (SD). Still, other right-wing parties have also called for restrictions on content or cuts in funding. Individual members of the SD, the Christian Democrats (KD), and the Moderate Party (M) have called for the complete abolishment of public service; although no party has adopted this as their official position, all three officially maintain that structural reforms and severe cuts in funding are necessary. The reasoning for political calls to restrict public service mostly relates to securing political impartiality and removing "unnecessary" programming (RSF Sverige, 2021).

The role of Swedish public service in a changing media landscape has also been the subject of public debate in recent times. The current regulatory framework has been characterised by both commercial and political actors as insufficient and outdated, as it does not properly consider the public service companies' online activity. Commercial competitors, mainly the newspaper publishers' trade organisation, Tidningsutgivarna (TU), have called for a more narrow and enforceable definition of PSM core activities and have questioned to what extent online content, especially exclusively online content, can be considered part of their mandate. The amount and length of written content produced by SVT has been the target of the most criticism from commercial competitors. In 2022, TU announced that they are considering reporting SVT to the European Commission, citing Finland and Yle as a precedent. TU wishes to severely limit the text production of SVT in the next broadcasting license. SVT considers itself to already have a stronger emphasis on video content than Yle (Voss Sundell, 2022). All in all, new proposals to increase accountability for Swedish PSM reflect the debates about their digital remit. As of 2022, only PSM content broadcasted on radio and television is subject to PSM regulation and has a duty to report to the Swedish Broadcasting Commission, an independent decision-making body that is part of the Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority. The Ministry of Culture is considering a proposition to also make PSM content published on the internet subject to the same regulation (MPRT, 2022b).

4.0 PSM content

The CoE Resolution (2019) highlights several ways in which PSM can enhance their output, ranging from (1) innovative informational programming to (2) critical media literacy content, (3) special programmes and services for young people, and (4) programming specifically addressing disinformation. In addition, PSM should (5) collaborate with other relevant stakeholders. The following depicts recent and relevant examples of these practices in the NORDIS countries. It should be noted that multiple interviewees stressed the importance of the general perception of PSM's trustworthiness, which is partially based upon content quality and the ability to serve diverse audience segments, as a key component in countering various harms caused by information disorder.

4.1. Denmark: DR

The output of DR features an array of programmes addressing information disorder, some of which have existed for decades as investigative factual programming. One example is a news program, Detektor, which focuses on combating "lies, spin, and half-truths." Detektor, via a radio program/podcast[11] and an online article series,[12] in addition to traditional fact-checking, conducts investigative journalism and provides explainers and interviews with the targets of fact-checks. The programme features several elements suggested by CoE as countermeasures to disinformation, including specialised segments containing analysis and comments regarding false news and propaganda that entail a quest to boost critical thinking in audiences.

While a challenge to all legacy media, DR aims to attract young audiences with integrated multiplatform content production. Especially relevant are a news app for teens and preteens and an associated social media channel by DR's online children's channel, Ultra (Schrøder et al., 2022).[13] DR has also produced specific educational material on "fake news" to be used at schools.[14]

Since 2015, DR has also produced a yearly interactive news show called I sandhedens tjeneste (In the service of the truth).[15] The goal of the show, which is produced with 8th–10th grade primary school students, is to teach children about journalistic ethics, source criticism, and media literacy, and free workshops for school classes are organised in connection with it. Since its inception, over 150,000 students have participated.

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[11] https://www.dr.dk/lyd/p1/detektor-radio
[12] https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/detektor
[13] https://www.dr.dk/drtv/serie/ultra-nyt_7071
[14] https://www.dr.dk/skole/dansk/udskoling/tema/fake-news
[15] https://www.dr.dk/skole/dansk/udskoling/om-i-sandhedens-tjeneste-2021-med-dr-nyheder

Innovative content can also be an unexpected challenge and also result in unwanted consequences. For instance, DR's Konspirationsfolket har ordet (Conspiracy theorists have a say)[16] was a TV experiment that gave the opportunity to four conspiracy theorists to discuss a theme they found to be the most important – to eventually be fact-checked by the Detektor team. Following a similar idea, DR has recently received critique from the scientific community for the program Ellen imellem (Ellen in-between)[17] where people could ask questions anonymously, mediated by a DR journalist. Some of the questions related to conspiracy theories; yet the experts did not know that the origin of the questions was not the journalist.

4.2. Finland: Yle

Like DR's, Yle's output features news and current affairs programmes that address various manifestations of information disorder. An example of multiplatform factual/educational programming is Valheenpaljastaja (Lie Detector),[18] a programme that began in 2015 after being created for Yle by freelance journalist Johanna Vehkoo. Another ground-breaking effort has been journalist Jessikka Aro's early, award-winning reporting on Russian online disinformation campaigns.[19] Both Aro and Vehkoo have been harassed because of their work and were involved in related, widely publicised court cases. The war in Ukraine has prompted numerous news stories about understanding propaganda, and, as a proactive measure, Yle has added a Ukrainian service to its foreign-language news.[20]

While Yle has challenges reaching young audiences with its news output (e.g., Schulz et al., 2019), much of its educational material targets that demographic. Specifically, Yle hosts a platform targeted toward schoolchildren that allows them to explore content found on the Internet and gain media literacy. For example, Uutisluokka (Yle News class)[21] is a set of resources intended to create a learning-by-doing experience in the journalistic profession, including fact-checking skills. In general, Yle seeks to address young audiences with distinct content and a unique online presence. Yle Kioski is a journalism content hub for younger audiences, the video content from which is featured on Yle's streaming platform, Areena,[22] and on social media platforms, including Facebook and TikTok. Yle has also developed several online games to highlight how disinformation is created and disseminated.[23] In

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[16] https://www.dr.dk/drtv/episode/konspirationsfolket-har-ordet_-signe-molde-saetter-tv_eksperimentet-i-gang_271164

[17] https://www.dr.dk/drtv/serie/ellen-imellem_317491

[18] https://yle.fi/aihe/oppiminen/valheenpaljastaja

[19] https://kioski.yle.fi/omat/jessikka-aros-prize-winning-stories-on-russian-propaganda

[20] https://yle.fi/news/3-12425501. It should be noted that Russian-language news is a standard staple of Yle's offerings: https://yle.fi/novosti

[21] https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/uutisluokka/

[22] https://areena.yle.fi/tv/ohjelmat/30-402?t=suositellut

[23] See, e.g., *Trollitehdas* (Troll Factory): https://trollitehdas.yle.fi/ and Troll Bunker (Trollibunkkeri): https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2020/11/11/trollibunkkeri.

general, Yle is known for its educational material about media literacy and digital skills, which targets a wide array of audiences, including adults.[24] Still, similarly to DR, Yle has also been criticized in attempting an innovative format when documenting the views by young women proponents of etnonationalism and anti-immigration in a reality-style format.[25]

Yle exchanges information related to information security with the authorities and other established legacy media. In addition, it is in conversation with Faktabaari, and has, for instance, included questions on disinformation in a survey of Finnish politicians to gather insights for the fact-checker.

4.3. Norway: NRK

Norway combines strong national public service media with a reputation for innovation in content and business models (Moe, 2022). Indeed, NRK is internationally acclaimed because of its innovative approaches to reaching young people with novel multiplatform content. One of the most well-known and revered products is the series Skam (Shame), which garnered a global following and was eventually bought by Facebook for a U.S. version (e.g., Sundet, 2019).[26]

Similarly to its NORDIS counterparts, NRK has featured programmes focusing on critical media literacy for years.[27] NRK Skole (school educational programming) offers tools for teaching and self-study. All informational and news content addressing "fake news" can be found on a specific site, Falske nyheter.[28]

The approach to fighting information disorder that NRK and Norway are spearheading, not only in the context of the NORDIS countries but in all of Europe, is collaboration. The Norwegian Faktisk.no fact-checker and media literacy organisation, a member of the international fact-checking network (IFCN), represents a model that brings together the main legacy media outlets. While independent, Faktisk.no is owned by VG, Dagbladet, TV 2, Polaris Media, Amedia, and NRK.[29] While other NORDIS PSM have engaged in various collaborations, including in their official role as communication partners of public authorities in extraordinary circumstances,[30] NRK's involvement with an independent fact-checker is a

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[24] Various programmes and educational tools, many of them addressing information disorder, are collected under one address: https://yle.fi/aihe/oppiminen/media-ja-digitaidot

[25] https://areena.yle.fi/1-61929993

[26] See also, https://www.nrk.no/presse/programomtaler/everything-you-need-to-know-about-skam-1.13465189

[27] E.g., *Kurer* (Cures) https://radio.nrk.no/serie/kurer; *Folkeopplysningen* (*Public Enlightenment*) https://tv.nrk.no/serie/folkeopplysningen.

[28] https://www.nrk.no/nyheter/falske-nyheter-1.13438363

[29] https://www.faktisk.no/om-oss

[30] All NORDIS countries have a stipulation about the special role of PSM in exceptional circumstances.

special, targeted strategy that supports a healthy national communication environment. Faktisk is also the central hub that connects NRK and other actors in various activities related to combating information disorder.

4.4. Sweden: SVT, SR, UR

Provision of media criticism is a typical feature of NORDIS PSM. In Sweden, examples include SR's Medierna (The Media),[31] a media criticism and literacy programme that first reported on an epidemic of "fake news" back in 2014. Similarly, culture news on SR has covered the topic widely (e.g., Horowitz, 2020). During the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, regular news programming has also begun to feature news items that focus on false information and propaganda.[32] SR serves its Russian-speaking audiences with Russian news as a part of its non-Swedish offerings.[33]

Given the division of labour that assigns UR the task of producing educational programming, it is unsurprising that its output features the widest array of content dedicated to teaching, especially for school-aged audiences. Offerings include digital skills and safety,[34] source criticism,[35] and the like. Mediesnacket (Media chat)[36] is an ongoing online selection of stories featuring current media-related phenomena, and Källkoll (Source check)[37] is another significant series that an interviewee called a pop-up format, a product that can respond to new and changing phenomena around and about disinformation in an agile manner. SVT, in contrast, has invested in young adults by developing formats that fit their consumption: mobile-friendly video content. This has paid off, as the proportion of those between 20–29 years old for whom SVT is their number one destination has increased from 9% in 2017 to 26% today (EBU, 2022; Westlund, 2022).

It should be noted that a fact-checking collaboration, entitled Faktisk and similar to faktisk.no, took place in 2018 as a joint effort by SVT, SR, and several major newspapers. However, this effort was project-based and was discontinued.[38] More recently, collaborative activities include UR's work on educational activities with the fact-checking organisation Källkritiksbyrån.[39]

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[31] https://sverigesradio.se/medierna

[32] See, for example, this article from July 23, 2022 on different depictions of the war in Ukraine: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/utrikes/sa-olika-ar-bilden-av-kriget-i-ukraina

[33] https://sverigesradio.se/allaprogram?categoryid=11

[34] https://urplay.se/serie/207894-varlden-online; https://urplay.se/serie/206241-vi-forklarar-digitala-begrepp

[35] https://urplay.se/program/202390-sa-funkar-sverige-kallkritik; https://urplay.se/program/218279-vi-forklarar-kallkritik

[36] https://urplay.se/serie/226072-mediesnacket

[37] https://urplay.se/serie/221605-kallkoll

[38] See, e.g., https://sverigesradio.se/faktiskt

[39] https://kallkritikbyran.se/

5.0 Expert commentary

The PSM and stakeholder expert interviews summarise much of the above-described contextual insights but also highlight strategic and policy challenges and opportunities for their organisations, their countries, and Europe. This report groups these results not by country but by PSM experts' and other stakeholders' views for two practical reasons. First, the aim is to highlight generalisable takeaways, especially best practices from countries with similar media systems and strong PSM organisations, including opportunities for close collaboration between Nordic PSM. Second, interviewees were promised anonymity due to the sensitivity of some of the topics discussed, especially because PSM representatives would be easily identified. Therefore, all commentators are referred to only as journalism, policy, or strategic experts. It should also be noted that there were surprisingly few differences between expert commentary from different countries or sectors, be they PSM experts or outside stakeholders.

5.1. Challenges: PSM experts

My experience is that most disinformation is somehow unintended. (It is) not directly disinformation and not directly incorrect but (it is) half true, one-sided stories or claims. But still, this problem of unintended disinformation might increase because information flows very fast and we have a large range of live TV, live radio news feeds.[40]

(W)e discovered during the years that we were active, especially on Facebook, that (the distributors of disinformation) used the commentary (function of posts) intensively because then you knew that this (fake news) was placed with big traffic. So, I think it is something that all publishers should be aware of. So even if they publish real news, they can use real news to publish fake news.[41]

We currently focus on how we could speed up information gathering. The news does not necessarily happen only in the Parliament anymore but can happen on social media, and then the members of the Parliament react to it.[42]

While trust in PSM and editorial media overall is high in the Nordics, many of the PSM experts expressed worries about social media as a distribution platform for news. In all programming, traditional PSM television and radio channels and the companies' websites still fare well among audiences, but changes are happening fast within social media platforms. Media consumption on social networks exposes audiences to disinformation and

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[40] A Danish PSM journalism expert.
[41] A Norwegian PSM journalism expert.
[42] A Finnish PSM journalism expert.

other non-editorial content. Moreover, it poses problems for PSM on several levels: challenges to news production processes, distribution strategies, and competitor relationships, the need to upgrade PSM journalistic tools and skills, and concerns regarding journalists' security and well-being.

First, as expressed in most interviews, social media as a news platform blurs distinctions and boundaries, and PSM can easily become just a part of the information overflow. Increasing polarisation and fragmentation can lead to some audience groups actively tuning out. Others may tune out more passively due to difficulty navigating an increasingly complex and crowded information landscape. Communicating the role of PSM to audiences, with emphasis on independence and reliability, becomes increasingly important to maintain high reach and trust.

Second, disinformation spreads faster than ever on social media and can effectively reach targeted audiences, even in the comment sections of PSM accounts' posts. The online environment allows for audiences to bypass the gatekeeping function of editorial media and more easily look up information on complicated topics independently, which can accelerate the unintentional spreading of disinformation. At this stage, there is no research that would prove or disprove any dramatic increase in false information in the NORDIS countries. Still, PSM experts note that disinformation has intensified significantly, especially related to COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine. This development is pronounced concerning video content. While most viral false content is shared accidentally, one interviewee[43] noted that those creating disinformation from domestic sources have predominantly also been the sources of Covid-denialism, anti-vaccination rhetoric, and pro-Kremlin content, a phenomenon also found in other countries (e.g., NCRI, 2022).

While journalistic professionalism is high within the NORDIS PSM organisations, the speed of recent developments has left a generational competence gap related to countering disinformation that spreads on social media and the internet. Never-ending technological, social, and political developments require constant learning and updating of professional skills within PSM organisations: As an example, NRK and other Norwegian media inadvertently published content from Russian trolls due to lack of context to detect such disinformation sources (NRKBeta, 2020). Additionally and unfortunately, one of the new skills needed pertains to managing the targeted harassment of journalists. The interviews indicate that campaigns to remove credibility from journalists or PSM organisations have increased during the pandemic.

Another challenge relates to the lack of collaboration with commercial media. Many interviewees see a need for a common front between media organisations. Still, commercial

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[43] A Finnish PSM strategic expert.

competitors' somewhat negative attitude towards PSM is an obstacle. To be fair, examples of successful collaborations were also mentioned, both in terms of information exchange and concrete activities.

All NORDIS PSM organisations engage in a variety of literacy activities. However, PSM experts' commentary suggests that promoting media literacy and reporting on disinformation is not enough. PSM organisations must also consider promoting a more nuanced, accurate understanding of current information disorders. PSM—like any other quality content source—also must consider the risk of amplifying disinformation by trying to debunk it.

Moreover, several interviewees noted that, in order for PSM to be even more effective at countering information disorder, they need to know more about who is spreading false content, as well as how and why, in their respective countries, and they need to understand how different audiences experience misinformation. The PSM representatives were also keen to know more about the effectiveness of technological and other strategies and tactics utilised by fact-checkers and other stakeholders.

Finally, a few interviewees mentioned the risk of polarisation of the Nordic societies—also noted in the contextual overview—and saw this as one of the most fundamental challenges for PSM. How can PSM serve everyone with the kind of information they need, and respect their views, while also remaining the most trusted and valued source, one that provides the most accurate and relevant information and connects different groups and individuals?

5.2. Challenges: Stakeholders

In contrast to the time of PSM monopoly (up to the 1980s), the total media/news offer of
today is overwhelming. PSM is but one voice in a cacophony where a growing part of the
citizens—especially young people—are looking elsewhere for news. Also, government and political parties are more and more often circumventing established news media through their own news outlets (e.g., YouTube, Twitter), trying to influence public opinion.[44]

The most important challenge is probably the expectations from the public (that media do) fast digital reporting. The companies also need to find good ways to dialogue (appropriate for free media companies) with expert authorities, etc. Public service broadcasters are at once expected to be free and independent and to be a part of the resilience of society and the civil defence.[45]

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[44] A Danish strategic media expert.
[45] A Swedish policy expert.

Stakeholder experts echo the above commentary and add some broader assessments of PSM as a part of NORDIS countries' media landscape. The key challenge is the reach of PSM. These organisations must maintain their mandate in an increasingly fast, complex, and crowded media landscape and are forced to compete for attention with social media and commercial competitors. Although not bound by a profit motive, this market forces PSM organisations to follow a similar logic, which can risk prioritising attention-seeking content and reader numbers over science, truth, nuance, and depth. A potential lack of resources—money, time, and competence—exacerbates the problem. Finding strategies to maintain a high reach, especially among hard-to-reach groups, such as young audiences and minority language speakers, has become exceedingly important for PSM. Such problems related to the role of PSM in the national media sphere are not new but have escalated with media platformisation and, recently, the two major global crises of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Another challenge is negative perceptions of PSM as biased or under government control. Government intervention and capture are not a problem in the NORDIS countries as they are in countries like Hungary, Poland, or Slovenia (e.g., Mechkova et al., 2022). Still, PSM organisations need to not only maintain but also assert their editorial independence. However, independence does not mean extreme neutrality, which can be used as an excuse for exaggerated carefulness or even avoidance of controversial topics. This is easier said than done, as noted in the PSM and stakeholder commentary: The knowledge of information disorder is still limited, and a more "nuanced and comprehensive" understanding of how disinformation works is needed, especially an understanding of the rhetorical and psychological aspects of disinformation.

5.3. Opportunities: PSM experts

We have invested increased resources above all (during the pandemic and the war in Ukraine). On the one hand (...) we have added airtime and broadcast a lot more in our major news programs, extended airtime. And on top of that, we've amplified the power to manage online reporting, which has been a huge strain to stand as a response to what the audience needs in this time of crisis. We have enlisted the help of people from outside. But we have had to gather strength throughout the company to cope with the reporting and received help from colleagues at local news or at the sport or other parts of the company. And it's been a strength for us that this company has been able to show this flexibility to allocate resources where it's needed.[46]

Unsurprisingly, the PSM interviewees see PSM in general, and their organisations in the NORDIS context specifically, as an antidote to information disorder. There are numerous

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[46] A Swedish PSM strategic expert.

reasons for this belief that range from the strong legacy and current position of PSM in these countries to the concrete activities and initiatives that they offer:

> *Yle's mandate is to offer trustworthy, meticulously created, and vetted content in ordinary circumstances, as well as in exceptional ones.[47]*

> *I see that the purpose for my program, my team, is to come after all the live TV, fast news, live radio. (…) (We) clean those debates for misunderstandings, false claims and provide a new level of knowledge to people, make it possible for them to form an opinion on some of the big topics.[48]*

The context of the NORDIS countries is characterised by a special relationship between audiences and PSM. Possession of the highest reach and trust enables PSM to have central or even leading roles in countering disinformation. However, according to PSM expert commentary, this elevated position also creates a responsibility to live up to the audiences' expectations. A high level of media consumption and media literacy in NORDIS (and the Nordic) countries strengthens awareness of the importance of trusted quality content and ethical standards.

Given the risk of growing societal polarisation and fragmentation, the interviewees stressed the importance of reaching all audience groups—different generations and minority groups, including minority language groups, and across the political spectrum—in all possible distribution channels. Regarding reach, one interviewee highlighted the importance of the tradition of strong local PSM news production as strengthening trust and ensuring audience reach in crises situations.[49] This need for local responses has been highligted by a report for the EU (Zamparutti et al., 2022).

Yet another factor supporting the role of NORDIS PSM is the early adoption of digital channels. This has led to a good relationship with new generations of digital media consumers, even if reaching younger audiences is a continuing challenge to all legacy media. All NORDIS PSM also invest in children's programming and feature special news programmes and collaborations with schools. This robust reputation and digital-forward approach allows PSM to innovate with new tools and technologies.

More specifically, NORDIS PSM have two core methods of combatting disinformation. The first, educational programming, including media literacy content, has a long legacy in the NORDIS PSM and is considered important within PSM output. Still, the primary strategy is the production and wide distribution of reliable, high-quality news journalism and factual

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[47] A Finnish PSM strategic expert.
[48] A Danish PSM journalism expert.
[49] A Finnish PSM strategic expert.

programming. As expressed by one interviewee,[50] the aim is to reinforce the understanding among audiences that PSM are real, professional media sources offering reliable content for everyone, even if one may feel disenfranchised from the mainstream discourse. Most interviewed PSM experts noted, following the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, an increased need to provide reliable information and foster literacy in a variety of ways. Several interviewees mentioned an increase in the production of well-researched programmes and articles that complement the daily news feed by providing context, background, and clarity to complex issues. Interviewees also noted that innovative journalistic presentation and narrative frames increase potential reach, such as stories uncovering personal motives behind spreading disinformation or those that explain how algorithms work to spread disinformation.

NORDIS PSM organisations, due to their mandates to serve all audiences and respond to extraordinary circumstances, aim at being agile when faced with manifestations of information disorder. They are actively responding to new competence requirements for journalists, not only relating to technological developments but also to contextual ones, most recently those connected to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Reporters are assigned to follow social media actively, topical presentations are held regularly for employees, and collaborations are fostered with universities and other media organisations to keep competence up to date. Also, collaborations via the European Broadcasting Union are considered meaningful, especially regarding verifying new images, videos, and social media content.

5.4. Opportunities: Stakeholders

> *I think that these kinds of fact-checking tools, whether technical or more cognitive, they are the new civics. They should be distributed as widely as possible to people, and I think Yle is almost the only possible platform. It is a public service organisation, free and reachable by all.[51]*

The stakeholders' commentary replicates much of the PSM experts' assessments. The stakeholders, too, noted that awareness of disinformation and propaganda is fairly high in the Nordic countries and has increased during the last decade. Similarly, media literacy and trust in editorial media were reported as fairly high. Even so, the stakeholders posited that neither trust nor literacy alone guarantees resistance to disinformation, given the continuous new challenges of information disorder. A strong PSM organisation has been seen to decrease the risk of polarisation of the media landscape, as during the recent crises. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have emphasised the importance of PSM as trusted news outlets and led to an increase in their audiences.

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[50] A Finnish PSM strategic expert.
[51] A Finnish journalism expert working for Yle, among other media and related organisations.

The stakeholders reiterated the two basic strategies available to PSM: continuous, high-quality, trust-evoking journalism and programming addressing specific phenomena of information disorder, whether in news journalism, educational programming, or another genre. Collaborations are an underutilised opportunity to strengthen approaches against information disorder. PSM should increase collaboration with academic institutions, researchers, think tanks, fact-checkers, and relevant authorities.

Finally, the stakeholders emphasised the role of PSM as media outlets for everyone. NORDIS PSM organisations must reach out to audience groups that may not be commercially attractive to mainstream legacy media and who may otherwise navigate toward alternative, marginal information sources. Also, increasing viewership among young people should remain a priority for all PSM.

NORDIS

6.0 Takeaways

We have seen that in the case of every big (development in the) news that a lot is happening quickly, both pure misinformation but also the spread of rumours that may not actually have an evil intention, but that just turn out to be wrong. It is very important that, in order to maintain our credibility at all times, we ensure that we never give out information that we cannot confirm or that we do not join in spreading rumours.

I think that it is very important that we also educate our audience about everything, such as fake news and misinformation.

I think it is important that we are as transparent as we can (be) and show that we are open with our working methods and that the audience should be able to ask us questions. And that we explain the trade-offs we make when it comes to why we don't publish or publish something.

I also think that we have an important role to play, for example, especially towards young audiences who are on social media a lot, and I think it's our damned responsibility actually to also be there (in social media) with credible factual, correct information, above all for the young target group. (...) I think we have a responsibility as a public service.[52]

6.1. NORDIS PSM

The three-tiered study depicted in this report on the NORDIS PSM and information disorder has documented several results that can be deemed unsurprising in terms of the NORDIS context, the content provided by PSM, and the expert commentary assessing the situation. Contextually, the NORDIS countries are very similar when viewed in the wider European context. On average, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden each feature a strong national media system in which PSM have a significant role. Audiences in these countries are more aware than Europeans on average about disinformation as a challenge to democracy and feel they know how to detect false information when they encounter it. At the same time, they express less concern about disinformation in their own countries (Eurobarometer, 2022). Research on Sweden also indicates positive correlations between daily usage and high trust in PSM and "the media welfare state of mind" that supports a diverse and robust national media system (Lindell et al., 2021). Yet, risks of societal polarisation and fragmentation, media ownership concentration, and debates about PSM—their funding, their digital remit—are not absent from the NORDIS countries.

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[52] A Swedish PSM strategic expert.

NORDIS

Examining the content of PSM, all NORDIS PSM organisations engage in all activities stipulated in the Council of Europe's resolution (2019). Partly this is due to the long legacy of their educational activities and partly to their early digital strategies that continue as innovations with new platforms and technologies, including Artificial Intelligence. NRK stands out as a special case in all of Europe due to its involvement in the activities of Faktisk; the fact-checker that acts as a hub for various activities that combat information disorder in the country. A remarkable result arises from the commentary: There seems to exist a strong consensus that PSM play a significant, if not the most important, role in combating information disorder and will need to continue to do so in the future. PSM are seen as a vehicle that can bring groups at the margins of the public sphere - e.g., youth, ethnic and linguistic minorities, groups created around a shared issue such as vaccine-critical thinking—into the realm of shared knowledge and discussions of common interests. The above takeaways from the Swedish PSM strategist sum up the key responsibilities of PSM: to understand information disorder and to meticulously provide trustworthy information, to actively interact with audiences, and to use social media to cater to audiences, such as young people, who predominantly consume content online.

As Figure 2 indicates, PSM in the NORDIS countries have a solid foundation and legacy that creates opportunities to safeguard audiences from information disorder. Their most important tools are a consistent focus on the quality and transparency of journalistic processes and educational offerings, the agility to react to extraordinary circumstances, and the mandate and ability to serve diverse audiences. Major challenges are identified by both the PSM and external experts as pressures from outside factors that might hamper the role of PSM in combating information disorder. The main, complex challenge is platformisation as an ongoing process, as it intersects with polarisation and growing distrust in knowledge institutions and with related reactions from political actors and commercial competitors.
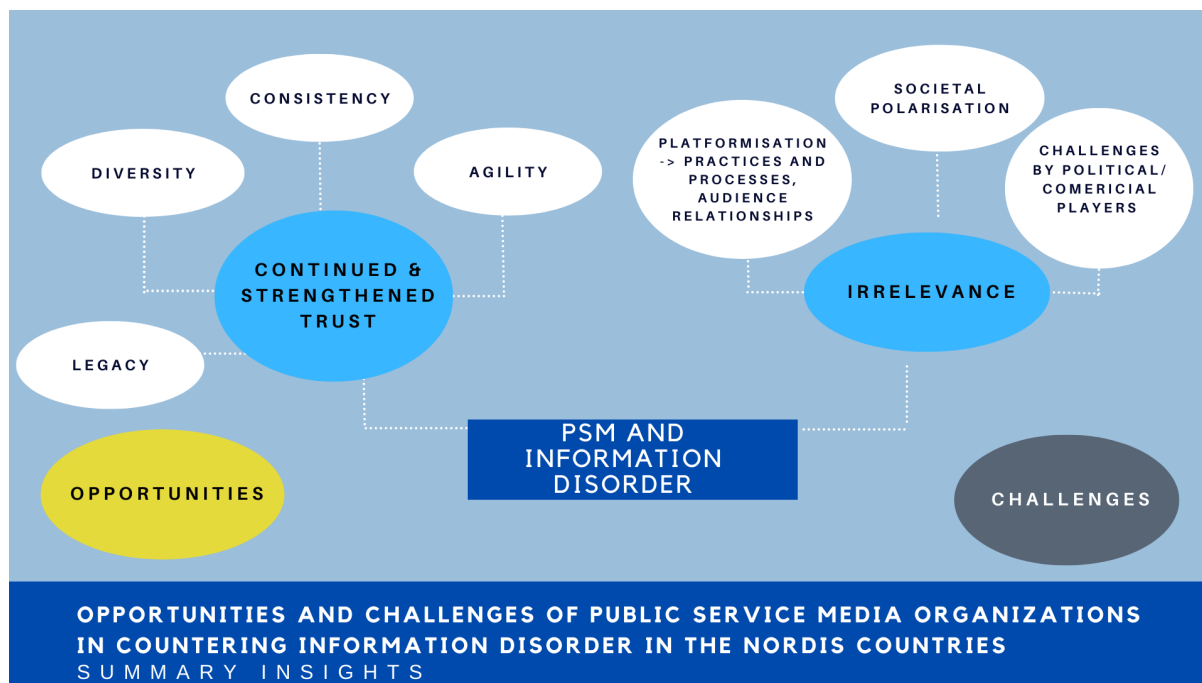
Figure 2: Opportunities and challenges of PSM in countering information disorder in the NORDIS countries: Summary insights

6.2. European reflections

It is obvious that the NORDIS countries and their PSM organisations do not represent the larger European context, within which many significantly different media systems exist (e.g., Hallin & Mancini; Herrero et al., 2017). PSM with ample resources and wide audience reach are typical to Northern Europe and to the Nordic Media Welfare States in particular. Furthermore, factor analysis of national resilience to online disinformation indicates that particular political contexts and media use are closely connected (Humprecht et al., 2020). Populist politics tend to challenge legacy media, diminishing trust and encouraging audiences to migrate to social media.

The same analysis suggests, however, that strong PSM can act as a link between society and the media, thus mitigating the fragmentation of audiences (Humprecht et al., 2020). As an example, a Eurobarometer survey (2021) on digital rights and principles reveals that Danes, Finns, and Swedes are the most optimistic in the EU about their digital future. That result speaks to the ongoing ethos of the media welfare state in the digital era. PSM organisations are a central part of that system and have the potential to promote fundamental human rights (e.g., Horowitz & Nieminen, 2016). While PSM seem vulnerable to the populist and illiberal tendencies of so-called media capture (e.g., Dragomir & Horowitz,

2021), they have also proven to be the most valued source in many European countries during times of crisis.

All in all, the trust gap is growing between traditional and social media in Europe, and trust in quality and vetted sources seems to be the key component to combating disinformation and other online harms; in the EU, PSM are the most trusted news sources (EBU, 2022). To be sure, the public's trust in public television and radio stations and the written press varies greatly between countries. For instance, in Finland, 73% of respondents trust public TV and radio stations, but this is only true for 22% of respondents in Hungary and for 23% in Poland (Eurobarometer, 2022b). Still, according to a 2021 study by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), people trust PSM news the most in 16 out of 26 European markets (EBU, 2021a). In addition, a set of correlation analyses by the EBU (2021b), which combined PSM audience data and several independent value surveys, suggests that larger national PSM audiences and increased resources for PSM are both linked with fewer worries about misinformation. Furthermore, the larger a country's PSM audience, the greater the national confidence in election reporting.

Indeed, an earlier study comparing PSM in four European countries (the Czech Republic, Finland, Spain, and the UK; Horowitz et al., 2021) reveals how, despite the global challenge of disinformation, each case country embodies different degrees of resilience to disinformation. Although the respective PSM occupy differing roles in their national media systems, there are commonalities among the case countries in both programming and services for combating disinformation: quality journalism and educational programming were highlighted in each case.

Interestingly, the study further suggests that, as much as the legacies and roles of the PSM organisations differ, the expectations that PSM actively combat information disorder are shared in each case country. The study concludes that, although only a few specific actions might be transferable from one PSM to another, they are invaluable tools for fighting information disorder if supported adequately. PSM must be guaranteed political, editorial, and financial independence to responsibly and credibly play a leading role in fighting disinformation. This support must come from national governments, with policy support from the EU. PSM should also be encouraged or required to collaborate with fact-checking groups and become more involved in empowering audiences to counter information disorder. Finally, PSM should be allocated the resources necessary to produce quality content, lead in media literacy efforts, and innovatively adapt their online presence as a way to increase their impact (Horowitz et al., 2021). This research effort seconds the above-stated need for timely research on the key players of information disorder, as well as on audiences' experiences and needs.

It is evident that PSM alone cannot solve the problem of information disorder (e.g., Humprecht et al., 2020). This is surely the case, even in the NORDIS countries. However, the premise of PSM as a tool to counter manifestations of information disorder seems realistic and potentially highly effective, even in different national contexts. In the cases where PSM do not exist or have been captured, other types of commercially and politically independent media may be better suited to guaranteeing democratic communication. However, in countries where PSM has some legacy and reach, it should be cultivated and supported.

Moreover, as this report highlights, the role of PSM in combating disinformation can be benchmarked and evaluated. While the so-called public value tests, which assess the relevance and market position of PSM in national markets, have been a common practice in Europe for some time (e.g., Moe, 2010), recent rethinking has suggested the use of more nuanced, multidimensional evaluations (e.g., Mazzucato et al., 2020). If developed further, an assessment of the role and potential of PSM in tackling information disorder could include more in-depth data on what people view as disinformation, how they view other harms of information disorder, and what they want from PSM in that regard.

Research has proven that sustainable and diverse national media systems—a key focus of the European Media Freedom Act proposal—are not disturbed by publicly funded PSM (Sehl et al., 2020). The study depicted in this report further confirms that strong PSM are essential to robust national media systems. Yet the trend, in Europe and globally, is that truly independent media are a diminishing phenomenon (Dragomir & Söderström, 2021). While PSM are largely a policy question for national markets, the NORDIS case may help to encourage recognition of the potential of PSM to address disinformation in EU-wide contexts. In any case, the NORDIS countries cannot afford to lose their strong PSM.

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