Integrity Initiative

INTEGRITY INITIATIVE

Research approach



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Introduction

The severe, negative impact of disinformation in societies is well-documented, with no easy fixes or singular solutions to solve it. Advances in technology, increasing access to both traditional and social media, and changes in how people interact with information are propelling the spread of false information at a speed and scale not seen before. BBC Media Action, in partnership with BBC Monitoring, has developed the Integrity initiative, which aims to counter the spread of mis- and disinformation and its negative impact on audiences by achieving three overall outcomes:

- More robust and consistent data gathering, evidence sharing and understanding of disinformation landscapes across relevant stakeholders;
- Strengthened interventions that support individual and societal resilience to disinformation; and
- Optimised and co-ordinated responses to disinformation from donors, the media sector, civil society and local populations.

In order to achieve these outcomes, the initiative is comprised of four workstreams:



Data gathering to build intelligence about disinformation environments, actors, narratives and threats;



Mapping and sharing evidence about the effectiveness of different disinformation tactics and the effectiveness of interventions to counter disinformation campaigns;



Piloting new approaches to tackle disinformation and delivering focussed research initiatives to fill critical evidence gaps; and



Capacity strengthening support to strengthen programmes designed to tackle and build resilience to disinformation.

This briefing describes the Data gathering workstream, highlighting the unique mix of data sources and analyses that BBC Media Action and BBC Monitoring conduct to provide a comprehensive picture of information disorder and how audiences understand and cope with it.

Approach

The Integrity initiative approach is based upon:

- A recognition that there are substantial gaps in the research into information disorder and how it impacts audiences where BBC Media Action works. Systematic reviews of disinformation literature have found a relative lack of research on LMICs.[1] Existing research is also heavily focused on computational and quantitative research (often leveraging digital data rather than audience data), with a small portion of research using qualitative or mixed methods approaches.[2] Additionally, there is a lack of analysis leveraging media data other than social media data.[3] The Integrity initiative focuses on a holistic approach to understanding the issue of information disorder, aligned with newer perspectives in the field.[4]
- An understanding that there are a multitude of factors that can influence someone's vulnerability to information disorder, which requires a holistic approach to the research. These factors can include demographic characteristics like age,[5,6] gender,[7] and education levels,[8] personal attributes like analytical thinking[9] and conspiratorial mindedness.[10] and factors like media consumption habits.[11,12] Political alignment[13] and self-confidence[14] have also been shown to impact one's vulnerability to information disorder. All of these factors are considered in our methodology and analytical approach.
- A desire to use this research to help improve audineces' resilience to information disorder. The research insights will support design of the intervention or communications approach – who the target audiences are and what their communication needs are. For example, some audiences may show lack of digital and media literacy, which needs to be addressed, whereas for others their behaviour may be shaped, not by a lack of skills but by social norms, indicating the need for a more social and behavioural communication approach.

[1] Robert A. Blair, Jessica Gottlieb, Brendan Nyhan, Laura Paler, Pablo Argote, Charlene J. Stainfield, Interventions to counter misinformation: Lessons from the Global North and applications to the Global South, Current Opinion in Psychology, Volume 55, 2024, 101732, ISSN 2352-250X, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2023.101732.

[2] Broda, E., & Strömbäck, J. (2024). Misinformation, disinformation, and fake news: lessons from an interdisciplinary, systematic literature review. Annals of the International Communication Association, 48(2), 139–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2024.2323736.

[3] Ibid.

[4] See, for example, Wardle, C., Scales, D. Advocating for a community-centred model for responding to potential information harms. Nat Hum Behav 9, 1546–1556 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-025-02233-2

[5] Yara Kyrychenko, Hyunjin J. Koo, Rakoen Maertens, Jon Roozenbeek, Sander van der Linden, Friedrich M. Götz, Profiling misinformation susceptibility, Personality and Individual Differences, Volume 241, 2025, 113177, ISSN 0191-8869, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2025.113177.

[6] M. Sultan, A.N. Tump, N. Ehmann, P. Lorenz-Spreen, R. Hertwig, A. Gollwitzer, & R.H.J.M. Kurvers, Susceptibility to online misinformation: A systematic meta-analysis of demographic and psychological factors, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 121 (47) e2409329121, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2409329121 (2024).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Seo, H., Blomberg, M., Altschwager, D., & Vu, H. T. (2020). Vulnerable populations and misinformation: A mixed-methods approach to underserved older adults' online information assessment. New Media & Society, 23(7), 2012-2033. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820925041 (Original work published 2021)

[9] M. Sultan, A.N. Tump, N. Ehmann, P. Lorenz-Spreen, R. Hertwig, A. Gollwitzer, & R.H.J.M. Kurvers, Susceptibility to online misinformation: A systematic meta-analysis of demographic and psychological factors, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 121 (47) e2409329121, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2409329121 (2024).

[10] Ecker, U.K.H., Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J. et al. The psychological drivers of misinformation belief and its resistance to correction. Nat Rev Psychol 1, 13–29 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y

[11] Delmastro, M., Paciello, M. Depression, reduced education, and bias perceptions as risk factors of beliefs in misinformation. Sci Rep 12, 16408 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-20640-7

[12] Greta Arancia Sanna, David Lagnado, Belief updating in the face of misinformation: The role of source reliability, Cognition, Volume 258, 2025, 106090, ISSN 0010-0277, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2025.106090.

[13] GRBEŠA ZENZEROVIĆ, Marijana, NENADIC, Iva, Strengthening resilience to disinformation : the state of affairs and guidelines for action, 2022, Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) - https://hdl.handle.net/1814/75571

[14] B.A. Lyons, J.M. Montgomery, A.M. Guess, B. Nyhan, & J. Reifler, Overconfidence in news judgments is associated with false news susceptibility, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 118 (23) e2019527118, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2019527118 (2021).

[15] GRBEŠA ZENZEROVIĆ, Marijana, NENADIC, Iva, Strengthening resilience to disinformation : the state of affairs and guidelines for action, 2022, Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) - https://hdl.handle.net/1814/75571

Research design

The research design has two primary aims: (1) to understand how audiences understand, perceive, and engage with mis- and disinformation; and (2) to understand the information environment in which audiences operate.

With these aims in mind, the key research questions are:



RQ1. How do audiences access information and what sources do they use and trust?



RQ2. How do audiences perceive media and information disorder?



RQ3. How do audiences engage with mis- and disinformation? What mis- and disinformation do they believe?



RQ4. How do audiences respond to information disorder?



RQ5. What mis- and disinformation narratives are prominent in the media (social and broadcast)?



RQ6. What are the primary sources of mis- and disinformation?



RQ7. How does mis- and disinformation spread through the information ecosystem?

In order to answer these questions, the research aims to collect two primary types of data: audience data and media data. These are summarised below:

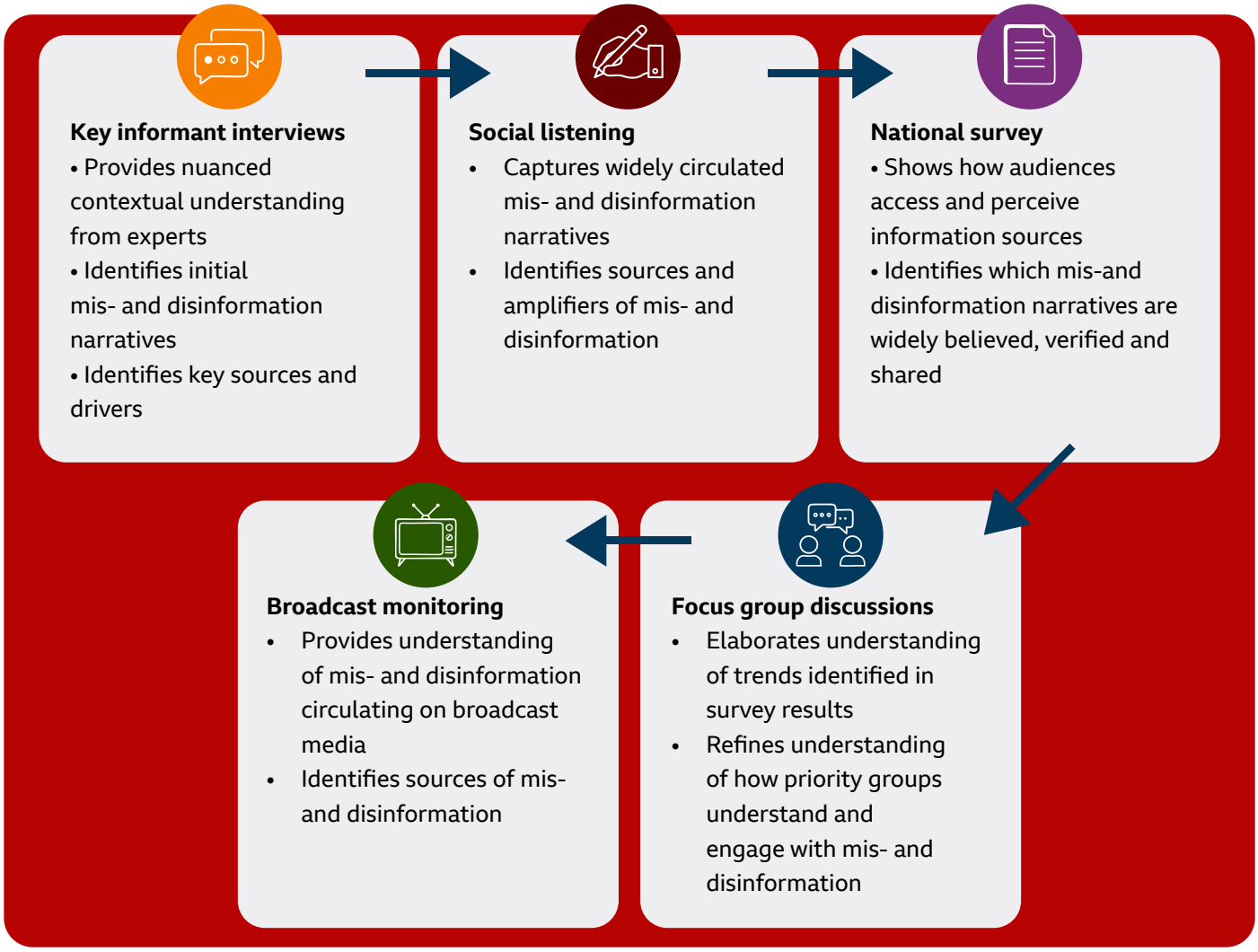
Audience data

- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with media experts and other stakeholders
- Nationally representative survey data
- Focus group discussions (FGDs) with priority groups

Media data

- Social media data (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X, etc.)
- Broadcast monitoring data

The varied data collection methods and sources allow for one method to inform another. The Integrity initiative takes advantage of this and uses each step in the method to improve our understanding and refine subsequent steps. While not every project can be linear, and each context will have different needs, the graphic below illustrates how the methods feed into each other.

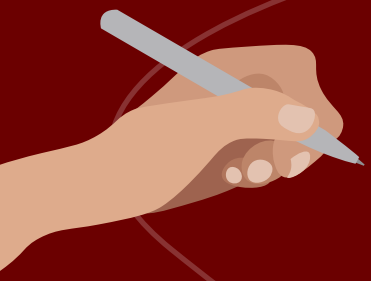


Key informant interviews



The first step in the research process is KIIs. These are semi-structured interviews with media practitioners and relevant civil society organisations (depending on project priorities), ideally with a particular expertise or understanding of trends in mis- and disinformation in the relevant market, as well as potential risks to audiences and how they may encounter mis- and disinformation in their media environments.

Social listening



The second step is social listening, or analysis of social media data. This includes analysis of broad social media trends in discussion as well as tracking of specific mis- or disinformation narratives. Based on the findings from the KIIs, in conjunction with specific project priorities, key themes of mis- and disinformation are selected for further analysis in social listening. These will be themes or narratives that emerged in the KIIs and appear to be widely circulated – and this wide circulation will be validated by the social listening. The research will be conducted on any social media platform(s) relevant for the country, pending data availability.

Nationally representative survey

The nationally representative survey is the primary quantitative element of this research, and aims to understand audience's information consumption habits and perceptions of their information environments, as well as their perceptions of mis- and disinformation. Integral in this process is asking about information disorder in a way that is easily understandable by broad audiences, which has required consultation with local experts and cognitive testing of the questionnaires used.

Narratives identified in the previous two steps will also be tested with audiences in this phase to understand whether or not their wide circulation correlates with widespread belief. Certain controversial factual statements may also be tested, if relevant, to understand what accurate information is widely disbelieved. Identification of these narratives requires substantial effort to first identify examples, then to fact-check as needed, and finally to ensure that they are appropriate to test with audiences (in particular considering the need to avoid exposing false and potentially harmful narratives to new audiences). Any false narratives tested are followed up with fact-checks referencing external, reliable, and locally-relevant sources.

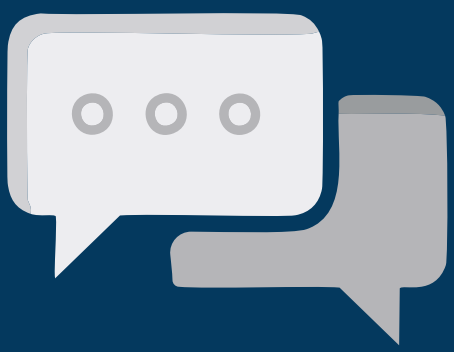
For example, in Nepal we have tested geopolitical narratives like 'Chinese companies are putting larger amounts of money into Nepalese businesses, infrastructure, and other projects compared to their Indian counterparts,' which was identified as a common narrative online but is

false according to official statistics. We also tested true narratives like 'Diseases such as Malaria, Kalazar, and Dengue are now appearing in the hills and mountains due to rising temperatures' to gauge whether audiences were aware of and believed this accurate information related to climate change.

Where possible we will conduct an audience segmentation exercise based on this data, which involves using advanced statistical analysis to divide respondents into different groups based on 'factors' that are found to distinguish people on how resilient they are to mis- and disinformaiton. The aim of this exercise in the Integrity initiative is to identify audience segments that are more or less resilient to mis- and disinformation. Segmentation analysis would be based upon the factors described above (e.g., conspiratorial thinking, media consumption habits, analytical thinking, DML levels, etc.). Based on the unique mix of factors that influence each group, the analysis would enable us to determine which approaches would be best suited to the communication needs of each segment. Audience groups with vulnerabilities associated with conspiratorial thinking, for example, may be best targeted with a social and behaviour change communications approach. Those linked to a lack of media literacy may be best addressed with a targeted DML intervention. Multiple approaches may be beneficial to one audience segment, and multiple segments may be targeted with the same approaches. Thus, this analysis allows us to selected the most effective approaches for the broadest possible audience.

How do we measure these factors in a survey?

Where possible, we use externally validated measures in our surveys. This is the case, for example, with measures of analytical thinking and conspiratorial mindedness. We measure more complex factors like DML with a series of questions that assess audiences' attitudes and behaviours with respect to things like fact checking, bias, and understanding of digital media systems. Testing of narratives, mentioned above, also informs the assessment of audiences' DML.

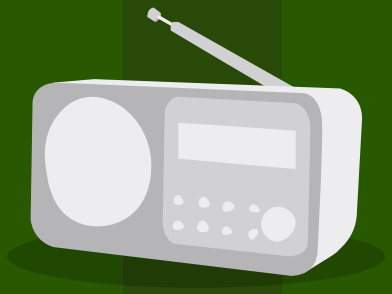


Focus group discussions

Following the quantitative research, qualitative research in the form of FGDs or IDIs, for example, will be carried out to elaborate and better understand results from the survey. The group(s) selected as priorities for the FGDs can be based on insights gained from the KIIs, vulnerable groups identified in the survey (i.e., groups that are more likely to believe mis- and disinformation), highly engaged social media users, or a cross-section of the population.

Broadcast monitoring

The final step is broadcast monitoring, which aims to understand how mis- and disinformation is spread via broadcast channels and what mis- and disinformation narratives reach audiences. This is a particular expertise of BBC Monitoring, who monitor and analyse broadcast channels and content using a proprietary digital platform. Selection of which channels or programmes to monitor will be informed by findings from the survey (i.e., information sources, trusted channels, and any channels associated with belief in mis- or disinformation) and findings from the KIIs, as well as local expert knowledge of the media landscape.



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