Aspen Institute Germany

#InfluencersAgainstDisinfo:

Empowering Online Opinion Leaders to Enhance Democratic Resilience in the Age of Information Manipulation

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Context - Influencers and Content Creators are the Modern Opinion Leaders

- Trust in news declining; Norms reversing
  - 39 percent of people express high or moderately high trust in news media. (OECD, 2024.)
  - 44 percent express low or no trust. (OECD, 2024.)
- Change in media consumption habits; The turn towards social media platforms
  - 57 percent of 20- to 29-year-olds in Germany consider social media content more trustworthy than traditional news. (E Commerce Germany, 2025.)
- Lack of support for Influencers and Content Creators and vulnerabiliites
  - primary method of evaluating credibility is through engagement statistics. (UNESCO, 2024.)
- Influencer-for-hire networks
  - 23.8 percent create content for financial purposes (UNESCO, 2024.)
  - Romanian Presidential Election 2024/25
  - Moldovan Parliamentary Election 2025

Influencers and Content Creators Methods of Communication

- “influencer intelligence”
  - Navigating platform algorithms
  - micro-targetting
  - hooks
- Authenticity
  - Personal experiences
  - Emotions
  - Micro-influencers (<100,000 followers) the sweet spot
- Results in Parasocial Relationships
  - Strong bond
  - Trust
  - Loyalty

Critical Thinking Exercises

2025: Ethical Code of Conduct

2023: Policy Recommendations

Ethical Code of Conduct Exercise

- Initial presentation of the role of an influencers and content creator
  - variety of interpretations: size of audience, type of content, platform used
- Outlined the purpose of an ECoC
- Selection of 5 key thematic area
  - Responsibility and Accountability
  - Trustworthiness and Integrity
  - Factuality and Expertise
  - Respect
  - Information Quality and Media Literacy
- Operationalize with definitions
- Commitment points

Outcomes of Project

- Network Building
- Connection Building to Informed and Reliable Stakeholders
- Increased Awareness of Issue
- Fact-checing Skills
- Critical Awareness Skills
- Increased Responsibility
- Motivation!
- Reach

[2025 Cohort]
[2024 Cohort]
[2023 Cohort]
[2022 Cohort]