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The Information Ecosystem in the Digital Era
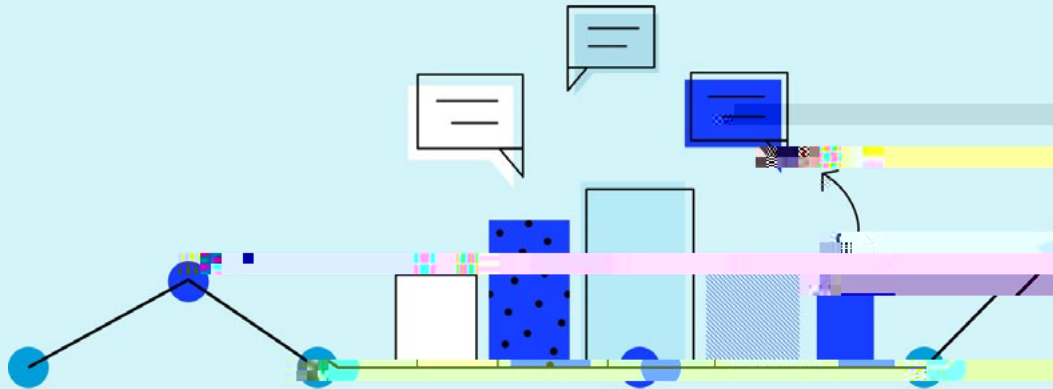
Technological advances have in a few short decades revolutionized communications, connecting individuals and communities on a previously unthinkable scale and presenting unparalleled opportunities for the diffusion of knowledge, cultural enrichment and sustainable development. They have in many ways raised ambitions for the integrity of the information ecosystem—where freedom of expression is fully enjoyed and where accurate, reliable information, free from discrimination and hate, is available to all in an open, inclusive, safe and secure information environment.

While these advances have enabled the mass dissemination of information, they have also facilitated the spread of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech by many kinds of actors at historically unprecedented volume, velocity and virality, risking the integrity of the information ecosystem. Such risks encompass a

Efforts to strengthen information integrity are crucial to preserve and further advance the Sustainable Development Goals. Erosion of the integrity of the information ecosystem can worsen existing vulnerabilities in

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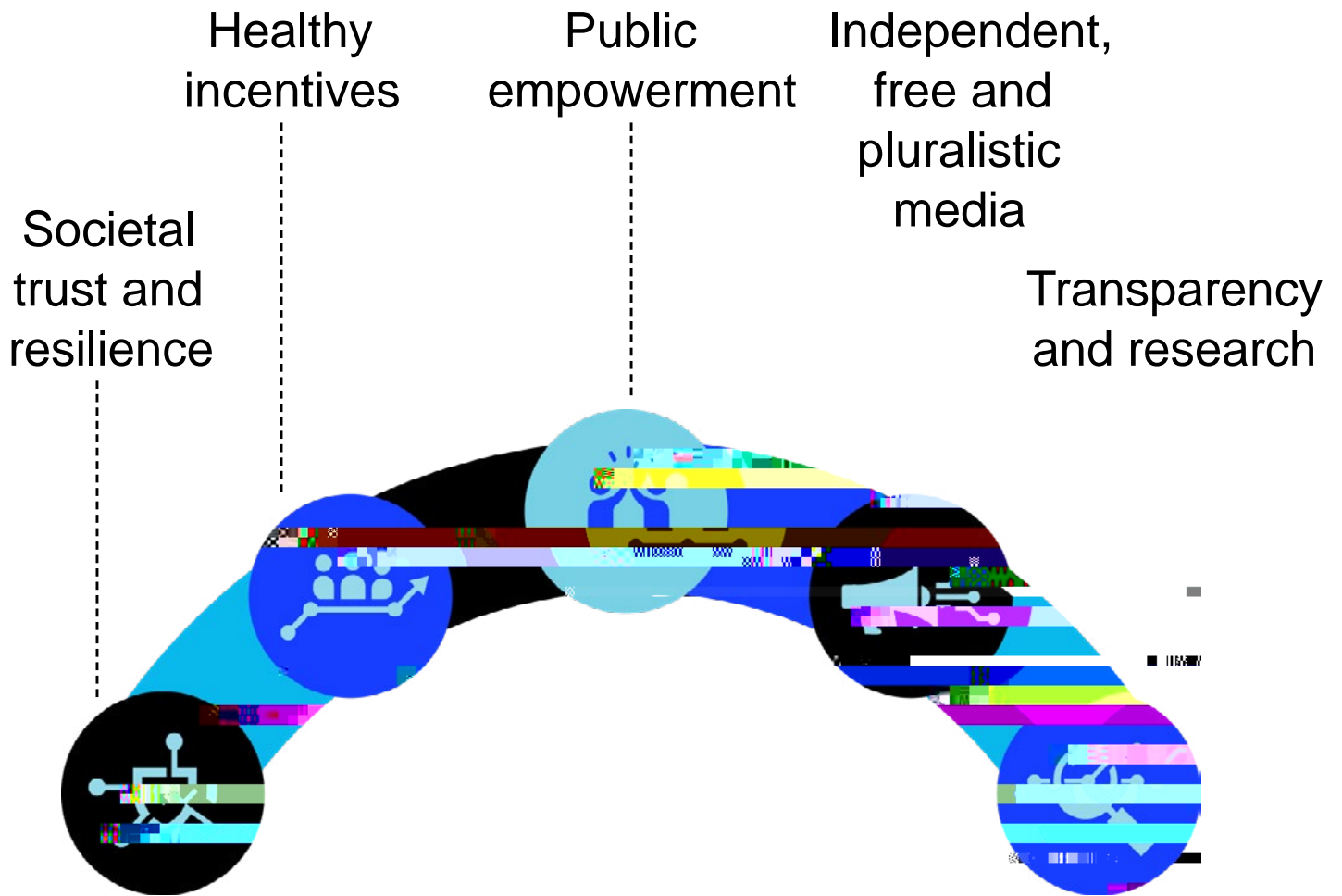
Societal Trust and Resilience

Trust and resilience throughout societies are key components of information integrity. Trust, in this context, refers to the confidence that people have in the sources and reliability of the information that they access, including official sources and information, and in the mechanisms that allow information to flow throughout the ecosystem. Resilience refers to the ability of societies to handle disruptions or manipulative actions within the information ecosystem.

Trust and resilience are vulnerable to actions driven by State and non-State actors who seek to exploit the information ecosystem for strategic, political or financial gain. These actions, at times widely coordinated, can result in a range of harms and jeopardize people's ability to critically assess science and facts.

Large technology companies hold significant power in the information ecosystem and exercise inordinate influence over the manner in which stakeholders, in-cluding other businesses, advertisers, news media and individual users, interact with and access information. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, such as generative AI, have introduced the means to create risks to information spaces at scale and with minimal costs. AI-generated or -mediated content, purpo04C0051>2a5with eate rl5 (or)0.5 (-medorige)1l, y -ies to , em
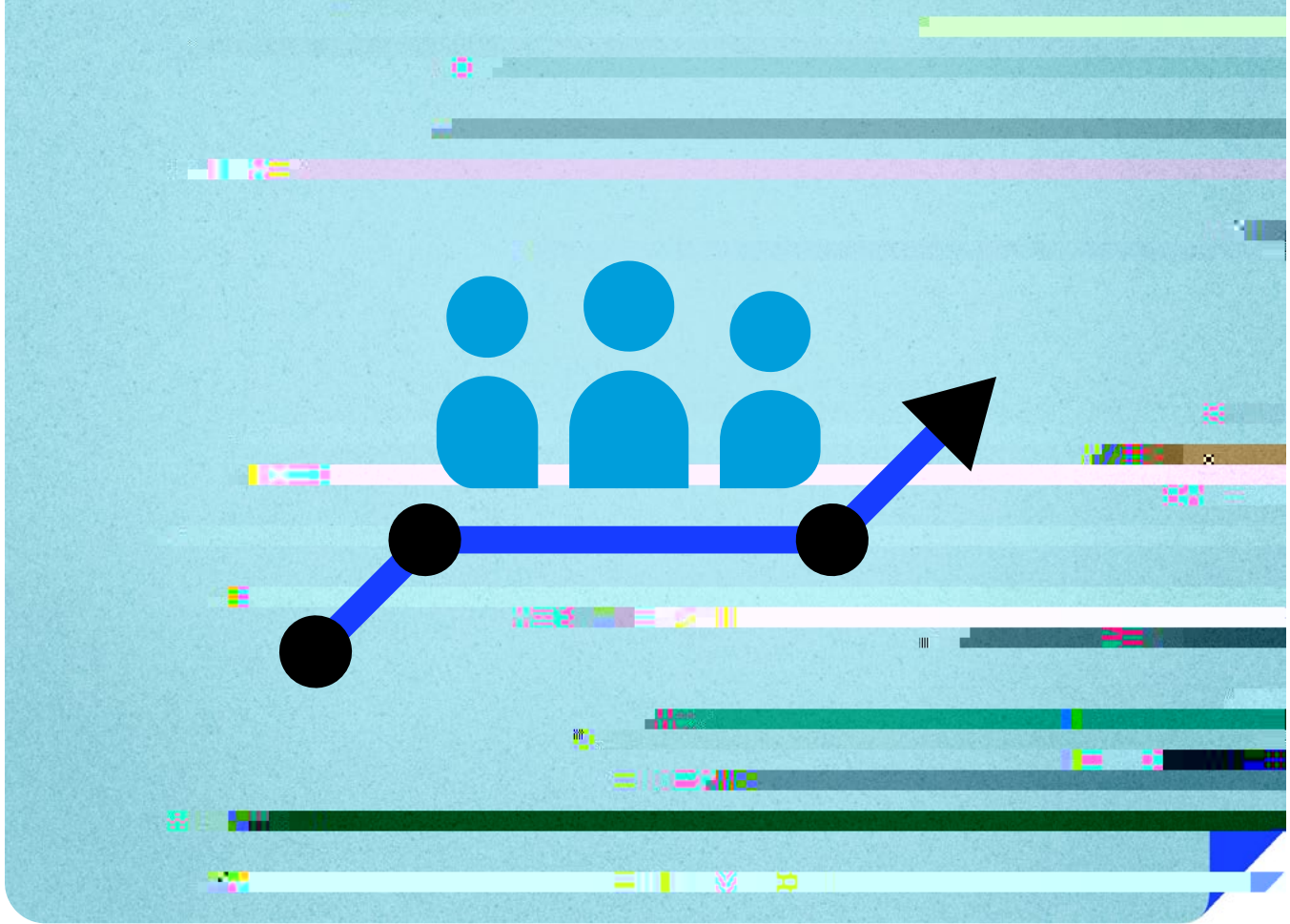
Healthy Incentives

Creating healthy incentives involves addressing the critical implications for information ecosystem integrity resulting from current business models, which depend on targeted advertising and other forms of content monetization as the dominant means of revenue generation.

These models have provided unprecedented growth opportunities for businesses of all sizes, foremost the technology companies that own and operate digital platforms, and have given rise to a creator economy powered by and benefiting countless people. These models have also enabled financial incentives and opportunities for purveyors of disinformation and hate who exploit the attention economy in which technology companies track user behaviour to collect data, feeding algorithms that prioritize engagement in a bid to maximize potential revenue for advertisers and creators. Messaging designed to polarize and produce strong emotions is often that which generates the most engagement, with the result that algorithms have led to rewarding and amplifying harmful content.

Actors exploiting these business models include information manipulators and mainstream public relations firms contracted by States, political figures and private sector entities to provide orchestrated manipulation campaigns, at times transnationally.

The technology sector has designed digital advertising processes to be complex and opaque with minimal human oversight. This is advantageous to many actors in the advertising technology (ad tech) supply chain, with large technology companies profiting most of all.

Such opaque design can lead to advertising budgets inadvertently funding individuals, entities or ideas that advertisers might not have intended to support, which can constitute a material risk for brands. These advertisement placements can also negatively impact advertising campaign effectiveness and brand safety.

The handful of companies who dominate ad tech are at the same time responsible for implementing advertising standards on the platforms that they own, where enforcement of such standards can be patchy and inconsistent.

Such erosion of information ecosystem integrity highlights the need for a fundamental shift in incentive structures. This can happen through business models guided by human rights and that do not rely on algorithm-driven targeted programmatic advertising that is based on behavioural tracking and personal data.

violence, leading at times to self-censorship and heightening professional risk.

At the same time, the news industry has suffered from the migration of advertising revenue to the digital space, which is dominated by large technology companies. These factors have allowed corporate interests to further tighten their grip on media outlets, threatening media diversity and undermining local and public interest journalism. Where editorial stan -

Transparency and Research

Increased transparency by technology companies and other information providers can enable better understanding of how information is spread, how personal data are used and how risks to informa - tion integrity are addressed.

However, power imbalances create barriers to trans - parency. A handful of technology companies enjoy access to an unprecedented volume of data and, along with some media owners, have significant control in the information ecosystem, sometimes in close relationship with States, political and eco - nomic actors.

Furthermore, regulatory choices around transparen - cy made in a small number of countries where the majority of technology companies are headquar -

Establishing a more nuanced global understanding
of information environments and enhancing tar -
geted, evidence-based actions for the promotion of
information integrity will require expanding the avail -

Calls to Action

The aim of the following recommendations is to operationalize the five principles into actionable steps for stakeholders across the information ecosystem. Intended as a holistic blueprint, these recommendations range from the legal obligations of States to the responsibilities of the technology sector to best practices for media and civil society.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS
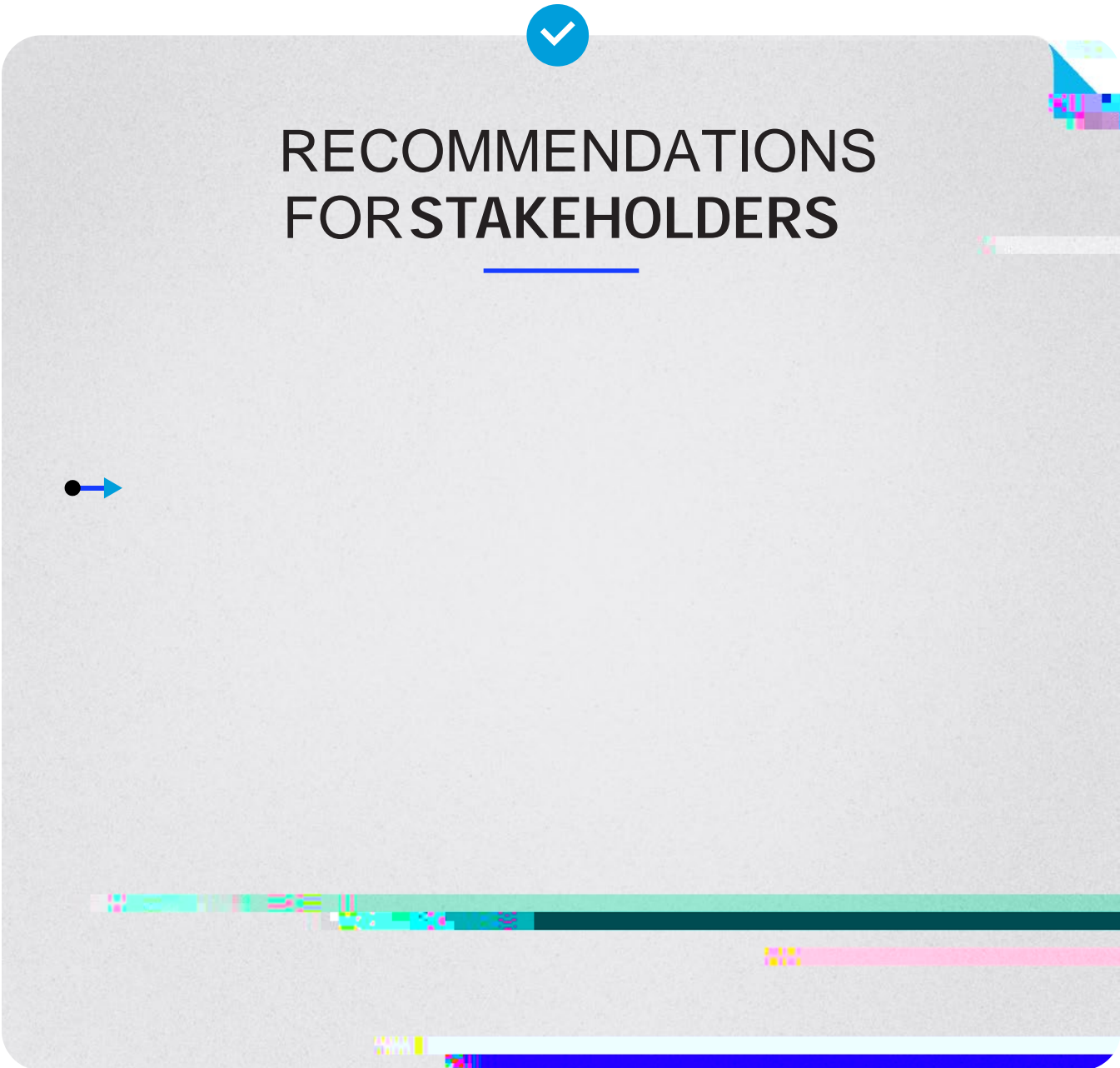
Technology Companies

Large technology companies, many headquartered in locations where technology regulation is limited, wield immense power. They profit from vast troves of data harvested on user behaviour, allowing them to shape transnational information flows and control digital experiences on a global scale.

To redress this power imbalance, a framework is needed that prioritizes both transparency and independent oversight. Users deserve control over their data and online experiences, with clear avenues for complaint and redress. Accountability mechanisms are needed to address the responsibility of technology companies for the consequences of the design and use of their products and services on human rights and social cohesion, including in crisis and conflict situations.

This will require a critical and transparent assessment of platform architecture to identify features that erode information integrity and undermine human rights. Strategies to prevent and mitigate such erosion should be implemented while safeguarding freedom of expression and access to information.

Disinformation and hate should not generate maximum exposure and massive profits. New commercially viable business models that do not rely on targeted programmatic advertising could foster innovation, increase user empowerment and serve the public interest. This multifaceted approach can create a more balanced information ecosystem that respects user rights and fosters a trustworthy online environment.

Recommendations

a. Integrate safety and privacy from design to delivery. Embed robust safety and privacy policies into the full life cycle of all products and services, including every phase of design, development, delivery and decommission, applying policies consistently to both human and AI-generated media. Cooperate with independent, third-party organizations to conduct and make public ongoing human rights risk assessments related to all products and services to proactively minimize societal risks and mitigate potential harms, including in advance of and around pivotal societal moments. Take measures to protect and empower groups in situations of vulnerability and marginalization, members of civil society and others often targeted online; and to address gender-based and other forms of violence which occur through or are amplified by the use of technology. Innovate to address emerging challenges including the potential prevalence of risks to information ecosystem integrity resulting from AI technologies. Ensure diversity and incluÚ M M

f. Uphold labour standards. Provide working conditions that are aligned with international labour and human rights law and prioritize initiatives that ensure the welfare, safety and quality training of all workers, including content moderators, involved in trust and safety efforts.

g.

j. Support political processes.   Undertake and make publicly accessible human rights risk as-sessments of all products and services in advance of and throughout elections and other political processes. Enforce all related policies to uphold information integrity, taking measures to address disinformation, harassment and violence against women and other groups commonly targeted in public life, including political candidates.

k. Collaborate with stakeholders.   Proactively engage with a diverse range of stakeholders, including States, academia, civil society, children, youth-led organizations and the technical com -munity, to gain deeper understanding of risks to the integrity of the information ecosystem and augment and calibrate trust and safety mechanisms accordingly.

l. Establish robust complaint mechanisms.   Ensure transparent, safe, secure and accessi-ble user and non-user complaint, reporting, appeals and redress mechanisms in a timely manner, including special processes for those in situations of vulnerability and marginalization. Establish and enforce procedures to prevent misuse of the reporting and complaints mechanisms, such as through coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

m. Communicate clear policies. Make terms and conditions, policies, community stan -dards and enforcement procedures easily accessible, consistent and understandable, including for children. Make clear all policies, guidelines and rules concerning news and political content.

n. Enforce advertising policies.   Establish, publicize and enforce clear and robust policies on advertising and the monetization of content. Review existing publisher and advertising tech partnerships on an ongoing basis to assess whether such policies are upheld by partners in the ad tech supply chain. Publicly report annually on the effectiveness of policy enforcement and any other actions taken.
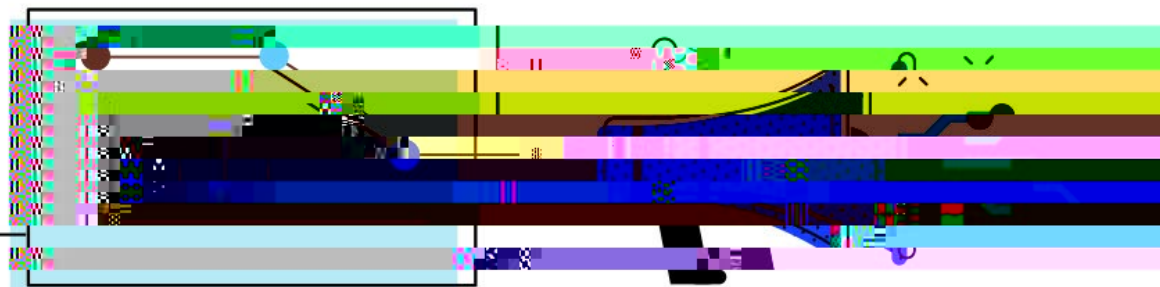
mitigation measures. It should include information on: algorithm-driven recommender systems, including explanations of how algorithms are trained to rank, recommend, distribute and flag content; accounts removed, banned or demoted; and resource allocation for trust and safety across languages and contexts. Facilitate data delivery for researchers at minimal cost in accessible, machine-readable formats.

r. Ensure disclosure. Make public State requests for content removal or placement. Disclose all collaborations with fact-checking organizations, including funding or other support provided; and funding provided to political bodies and candidates.

s. Offer control and choice. Offer user-friendly tools, functions and features that ensure informed consent and empower people to easily control their own online experience, including through interoperability with other services, allowing greater choice and providing informed consent over the content they see and how and where their data are used.

t. Label AI content. Clearly label AI-generated or -mediated content, investing in and developing solutions at the organizational level, to ensure that users can easily identify such content and to strengthen rather than undermine user trust in information ecosystem integrity more broadly. This includes information in the metadata that identifies such content as AI-generated or -mediated.

u. Ensure privacy. Ensure that the collection, use, sharing, sale and storage of data respects the privacy of users and that users can easily access information on how their personal data are harnessed, including for algorithmic decisions, and on how their personal data are shared with and obtained from other entities.

v. Foster digital literacy. Support media and information literacy drives to boost digital skills, including to improve public understanding of the function, effects and implications of algorithms. Dedicate literacy and capacity-building resources for all languages and areas of operation, especially fragile contexts. Provide safety-related training materials to children and youth. Enable and make publicly available independent external evaluations of the effectiveness of literacy initiatives.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Actors

Recommendations

a. Ensure safe, secure and trustworthy AI. Take measures to ensure the safe, secure and trustworthy design, development, deployment, use and decommission of AI technologies. Address and publicly communicate the implications of any innovations or advancements in the field that may present risks to the integrity of the information ecosystem, including malicious uses of AI technologies, overreliance on AI technology without human oversight and any related potential for further erosion of trust across geographies and societal contexts. Train AI on reliable, inclusive information sources on issues critical to public well-being and take measures to mitigate bias stemming from training data, including on gender and racial bias. Partner with a diverse range of stakeholders in carrying out human rights risk assessments to proactively minimize societal risks and mitigate potential harms, including to women, children, youth and other groups in situations of vulnerability and marginalization.

b. Commission independent audits. Commit to providing access and legal and technical safe harbour to institutional and individual researchers to conduct independent audits of AI models, with appropriate safeguards, such as compliance with company vulnerability disclosure policies. Ensure public accessibility of the results of independent audits, data about risks related to AI systems—such as the potential for harmful discrimination and "hallucinations", namely, content that appears factual but is completely made up—and steps taken to prevent, mitigate and address potential harms.

c. Respect intellectual property. Respect intellectual property rights, ensuring fair compen -sation for use of intellectual property, including original journalism, used in training AI tools.

d. Display data provenance. Develop and implement solutions and policies on provenance,

Advertisers

Advertisers can exert singular inf uence on the integrity of the information ecosystem by helping to cut off f nancial incentives for those seeking to prof t from disinformation and hate. In doing so, advertisers can better protect their brands and address material risk, boosting their bottom line while conducting business in line with their corporate values.

Recommendations

a. d Q @ Q U

c. Form coalitions. Collaborate across industry and with civil society to share best practic-es and lessons learned about information integrity in a timely manner, including assessing the impacts of advertising, and systematic mitigation of risks and potential harms stemming from advertising and content monetization.

d. Require data. Establish a full and detailed overview of advert adjacency on an ongoing basis, requiring granular data showing where adverts have appeared and conducting suitability reviews before advert placement. Carry out thorough audits of advertising campaigns.

e. Obligate transparency. Require ad tech companies to adopt transparency standards that enable end-to-end validation of the advertising tech supply chain, and share full advertising cam-paign data with clients and researchers including placement and blocking data at the log level.

f. Undertake audits. Require ad tech companies to carry out independent third-party audits and vetting of ad exchange supply partners.

Other Private Sector Actors

The actions of a broader range of private sector entities not directly involved in the technology sector can impact information spaces, serving to both weaken and support information integrity. Businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and to information, and can form collaborative partnerships with other stakeholders to help achieve a healthier information ecosystem.

Recommendations

a. Uphold integrity. Uphold human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and opinion and refrain from wilfully spreading or sponsoring risks to the integrity of the information ecosystem for f nancial or any other strategic goal.
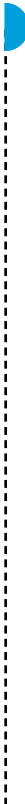
b. Invest in literacy.

News Media

Independent, free and pluralistic media serve a crit - ical role in informing the public on matters of public interest, fostering civic engagement and promoting accountability of those in power.

Direct and indirect threats to media independence, freedom and diversity, and the decline of local and public interest journalism, however, can undermine these vital functions. Where professional standards are not rigorously maintained, news media can erode information integrity. Through ethical reporting and editorial practices and a commitment to transparency, bolstered by quality training and working conditions, journalists offer an indispensable service and can help restore balance in the face of risks to the integrity of the information ecosystem.

Recommendations

a. Cover information integrity.   Invest in capacity-building for data-driven and investigative journalism to proactively cover and inform the public about risks to the integrity of the information ecosystem. Employ robust editorial processes and standards, including in the sourcing of information, to help maintain and secure trust among media consumers. Establish fact-checking mechanisms as a reference for the public.

b. Provide crisis response. Commit to providing cost-free and timely information to the public during emergency and crisis situations when risks to information ecosystem integrity may be heightened.

c. Maintain professional and ethical standards.   Commit and adhere to globally recognized norms and practices of professional and ethical journalism produced in the public interest, emphasizing impartiality and editorial independence, and actively adopt self-regulatory accountability mechanisms. Provide periodic, quality training to advance ethical, accurate and impartial reporting, and to update skills for promoting innovation and adaptability to changes in the communications landscape, including by adopting a "solutions" or "constructive" journalism approach. Disclose funding sources, ownership structure and f nancial incentives so that individuals can be better informed about the news that they select and consume.

d. Use AI ethically. Establish robust policies for ethical use of AI technologies, including clearly labelling AI-generated or -mediated material when publishing or broadcasting. This includes information in the metadata that identifes such content as AI-generated or -mediated.

e. Establish transparent, human rights-responsible advertising. Take steps to ensure that advertising does not drive risks to information spaces. Clearly distinguish between news, opinion and sponsored content, and ensure transparency as to the funding of opinion pieces and potential conficts of interest. Clearly mark all paid and AI-generated or -mediated advertising and advertorial content. Provide transparent reporting on advertising revenue sources and clear, accessible advertising policies and practices.

f. Respect labour standards. Establish working conditions aligned with international labour and human rights law and prioritize initiatives that help ensure the welfare and safety of journalists, including in digital spaces, and pay specifc attention to discrimination, abuse, harassment and threats of violence against women journalists and media workers.
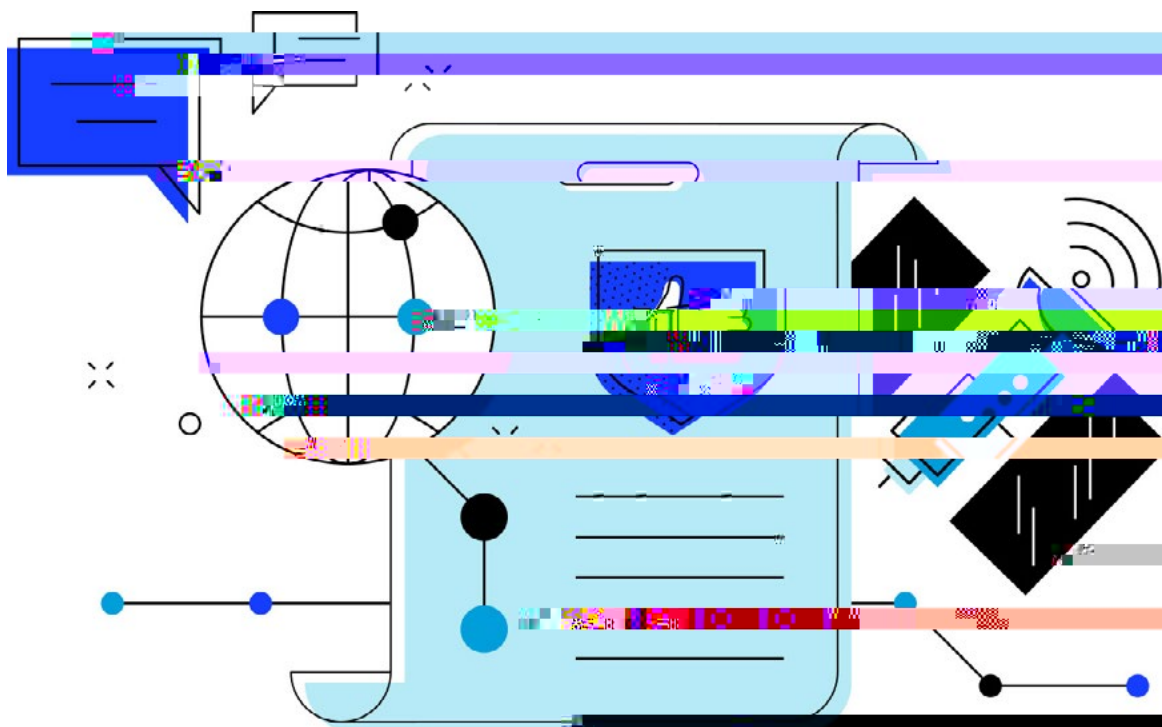
Researchers and Civil Society
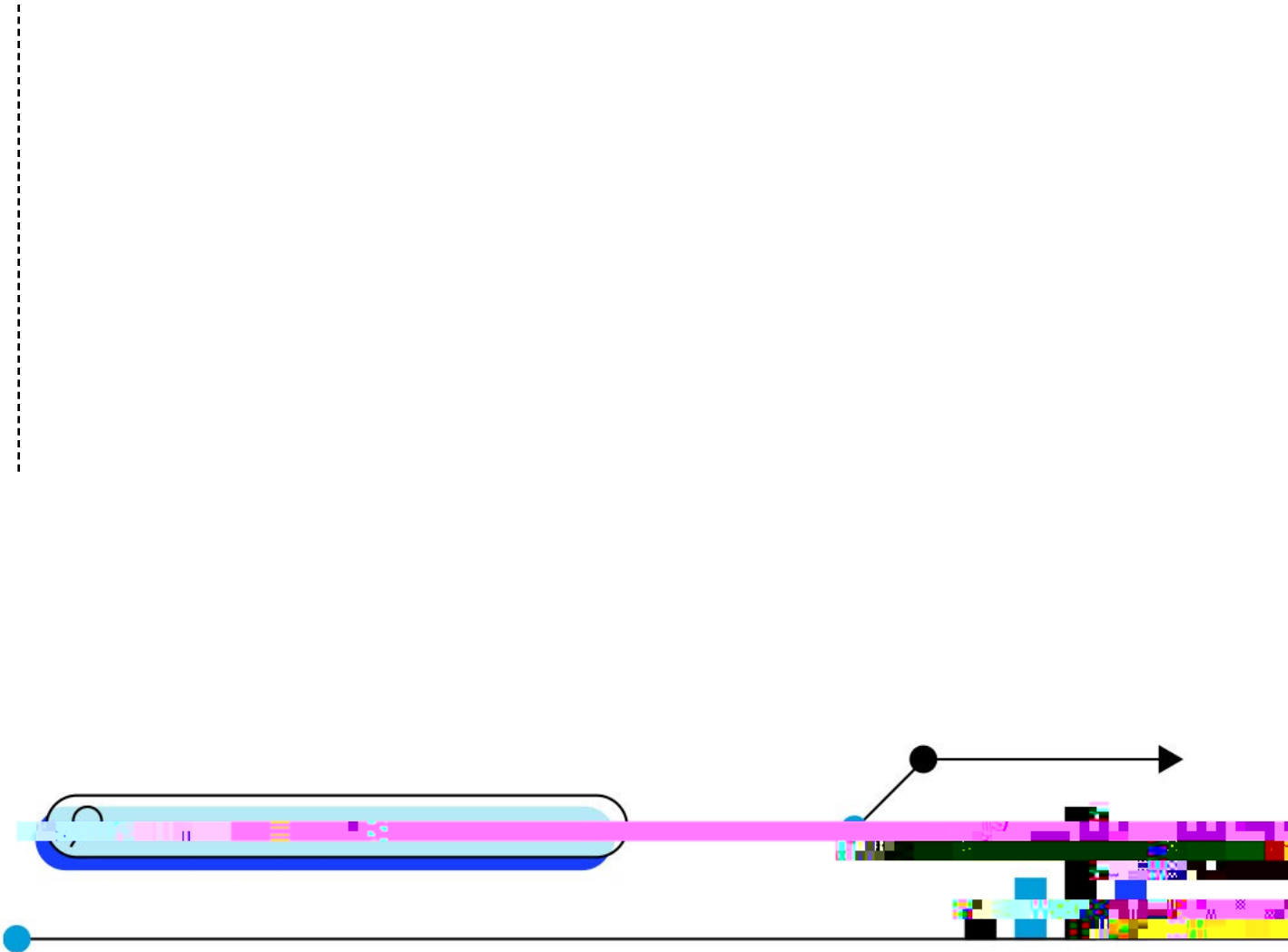
Recommendations

Recommendations

g. Provide transparency. Provide full transparency regarding requirements and data requests placed on technology companies and media organizations. Take measures to address non-transparent and deceptive lobbying tactics and conflicts of interest between technology companies and policymakers that undermine information integrity, such as unethical hiring practices and financial incentives.

h. Strengthen global solidarity, capacity-building and development assistance. Engage in collaborations and partnerships between countries to support capacity-building to strengthen information integrity and increase resilience to risks to information spaces, in particular in developing countries. Allocate financial resources, with full transparency, for training and capacity-building in digital, information and media literacy and awareness programmes, including in AI technologies, in all languages. Support developing countries in nationally led efforts to build societal resilience to risks to the integrity of the information ecosystem, undertake robust media and information literacy training and bolster public interest media, including through dedicated and adequate development assistance. Support the work of public institutions, including libraries, in improving access to literacy training and resources.

i. Promote political participation.   Protect the access of all electoral stakeholders to accurate and timely information throughout electoral processes. Take measures to promote inclusive political participation and leadership and to uphold the rights of women in public life, including protection from all forms of discrimination, abuse, harassment and threats of violence.

j. Prioritize inclusive, public-interest research.   Prioritize, invest in and support independent research that abides by ethical standards and review across disciplines related to information integrity, including in light of the emergent and the as-yet unknown capabilities and impacts of AI technologies. Support research conducted across geographies, languages and thematic areas, including the potential impact of risks to information ecosystem integrity on the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing particularly on underserved, underresearched and at-risk contexts and communities. Promote and publicize open access to research findings to enable the equitable sharing of information within and between countries.

k. Foster literacy. Foster a critical and informed public discourse through targeted media and information literacy drives, seamlessly integrating digital skills into formal and informal education curricula from an early age. Actively improve public understanding and awareness, including among children, of online rights, how digital information environments work and how personal data are used, taking into account specific social, cultural and linguistic needs of people of all

ages and backgrounds. Prioritize the literacy needs of individuals and groups in vulnerable and marginalized situations, including women, children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and the billions about to come online. Undertake literacy efforts around specific problems related to AI technologies and continually update literacy efforts to reflect new and emerging technologies and challenges.

l. Empower children, parents, guardians and educators. Provide sustained resources for children, parents, guardians and educators on safe and responsible digital behaviour, on navigating online media and on understanding children's rights to freedom of expression and information. Involve all parties in developing media and digital literacy guidelines and initiatives for safer online experiences, while harnessing the digital fluency of youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL **POLITICAL ACTORS**

Individuals, groups and entities involved in and influencing political processes

a. Maintain election integrity. Refrain from and publicly denounce efforts to undermine information integrity, including on voter eligibility, polling, ballot counting and results.

b. Protect inclusion. Publicly denounce and take measures to address abuse and harassment targeting candidates and public officials, especially women and members of groups in vulnerable and marginalized situations.

c. Offer transparency. Maintain transparency in communications, including the sources of funding for advertisements and the use of data driven targeting techniques.

The United Nations

The Global Principles for Information Integrity apply to the United Nations and its international civil servants. By adhering to the Global Principles, the Organization sets a compelling example for responsible stewardship of information integrity within the global community.

Scaling up its work to strengthen the integrity of the information ecosystem will contribute to advancing the Organization's mission of securing peace, fostering sustainable development and promoting and protecting human rights for all.

The United Nations Will

a. Scale up efforts. Intensify efforts to strengthen information integrity, including through context-specifc research, monitoring, risk assessment, community engagement and coalition building across diverse contexts and languages. Integrate information integrity into programmes and operations to enhance prevention, mitigation and response and identify emerging opportunities and challenges.

b. Support capacity-building initiatives. Assist with capacity-building in States by offering skill development initiatives, including training for young people, to help strengthen information integrity, with particular attention to the needs of developing countries.

c. Undertake advocacy. Promote and advocate for the Global Principles at the global level and across countries and communities, with particular attention to underserved contexts and groups in situations of vulnerability and marginalization. Actively contribute to social cohesion and strengthen resilience of communities to risks to information integrity, supporting efforts to realize the Sustainable Development Goals.

d. Increase dedicated capacity. Establish a central unit in the United Nations Secretariat to develop innovative and nuanced approaches to addressing risks to the integrity of the information ecosystem affecting United Nations mandate delivery and substantive priorities, coordinating with other capacities and serving the whole United Nations system as required.

e. Develop agile communications strategies. Harness innovative, evidence-based, agile and tailored communication strategies, utilizing digital and of ine information spaces for the common good and to better meet the needs of all the people that the United Nations serves.

f. Provide multilingual resources. Establish a multilingual online information integrity resource hub with shared research, guidance and best practices applicable to diverse contexts to support initiatives at the global, regional and national levels.

g. Support multi-stakeholder action plans. Support regional and national multi-stakeholder action plans and coalitions, making use of existing mechanisms and calling on the Organization's expertise and experience in international capacity-building and coordination.
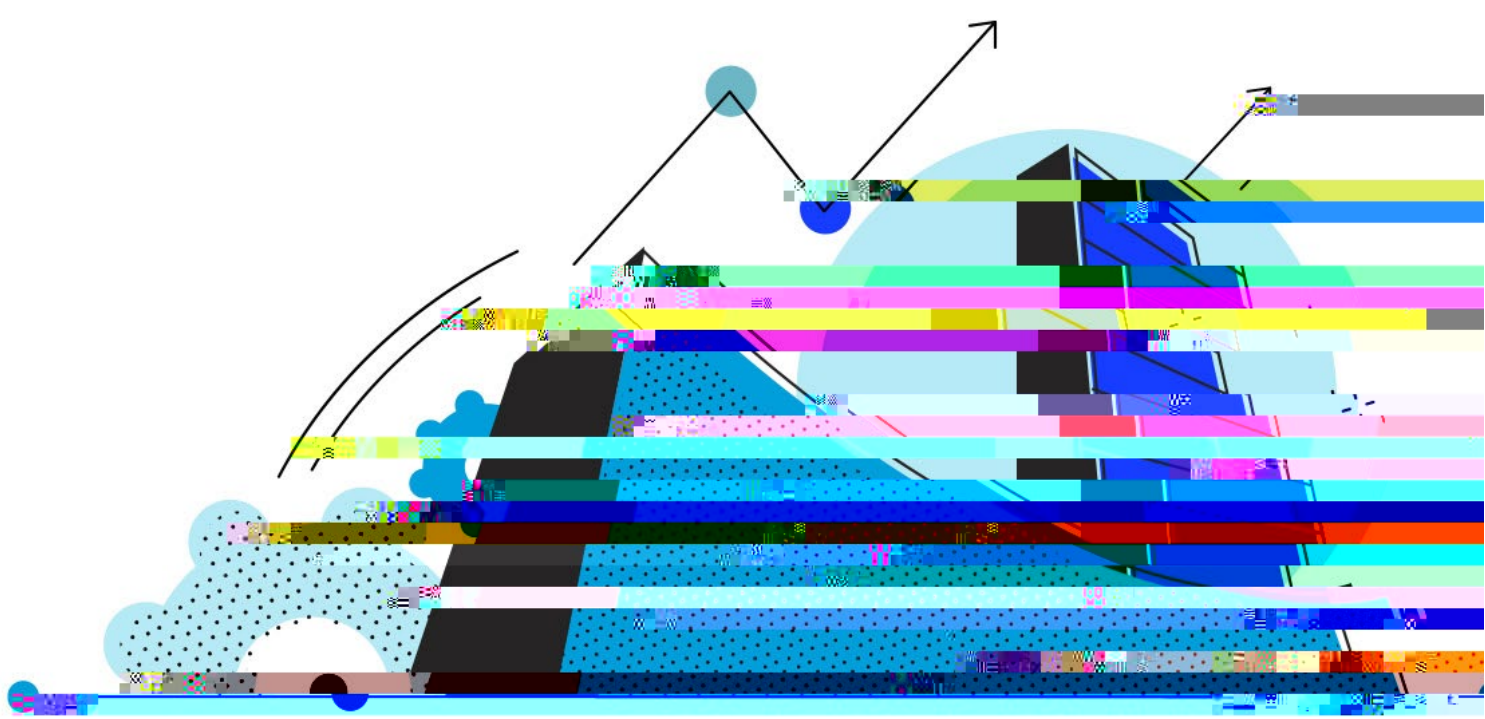
Next Steps

The urgency of strengthening information integrity cannot be overstated in the face of escalating risks to the integrity of the information ecosystem and the emergence of readily available advancements in AI technologies. The Global Principles offer a holistic and unified framework for action to protect and promote information integrity as the world navigates the complexities of the digital age and looks to find multilateral solutions at the Summit of the Future.

To this end, stakeholders are urged to:

Publicly **commit to**, **adopt and actively publicize** the United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity as a framework for immediate action.

Harness the Global Principles to form and actively participate in **broad cross-sector coalitions on information integrity**, convening diverse expertise and approaches, including for capacity-building, from civil society, academia, media, government and the international private sector, and ensuring full and meaningful youth engagement, such as through dedicated youth advisory groups.

Collaborate to develop **multi-stakeholder action plans** at the regional, national and local levels, engaging communities to support and learn from grass-roots initiatives and ensuring full and meaningful youth engagement.

By embracing the United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity, stakeholders from all sectors can demonstrate solidarity and collaboratively forge a path towards a reinvigorated information ecosystem that fosters trust, knowledge and individual choice for all.

Appendix

RESOURCES

1. United Nations Secretary-General's "Our Common Agenda policy brief 8: information integrity on digital platforms" (2023)
https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-information-integrity-en.pdf

2. UNESCO Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms (2023)
https://www.unesco.org/en/internet-trust/guidelines

3. Report of the Secretary-General, "Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms", 2022 (A/77/287)
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/NV-disinformation.pdf

4. UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)