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Media release

Zurich, 26 October 2026

# Quality Media Bolsters Resilience to Disinformation

**The consumption of quality journalism and the ability to spot manipulative patterns of argument strengthen resilience to disinformation. By contrast, people who rarely consume news from professional journalistic sources and who rely mainly on social media to stay informed are more susceptible to believing conspiracy theories. This is shown by the Yearbook Quality of the Media 2026 from the Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society (fög) at the University of Zurich.**

The Swiss public sphere is under pressure on two fronts. On the one hand, disinformation – in other words, misleading and false information that is deliberately spread – is increasingly being seen as a societal problem by the population. And on the other, news media is losing audiences, loyalty, and revenue. In an in-depth study, the Yearbook Quality of the Media 2026 therefore looked at the public's resilience to disinformation and the role played by reliable news services. It is based on a representative online survey of 1,222 people in German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland.

## Disinformation is seen as a growing problem

57% of respondents rate disinformation as a big or very big problem. That is 8 percentage points higher than in 2021. 52% say that they often or very often come across what is clearly or presumably disinformation in their day-to-day lives. When asked about which channels are particularly used to spread disinformation, the respondents mainly mentioned social media (76%), video-sharing platforms such as YouTube (60%), messaging apps (44%) and AI chatbots (43%). Journalism is much less likely to be associated with disinformation and is therefore seen more as part of the solution than as part of the problem.

A number of disinformation-based conspiracies find considerable traction with the public, with 34% considering the claim that 5G mobile networks demonstrably cause serious damage to health as plausible or very plausible. Meanwhile, 37% believe it is plausible or very plausible that governments are using climate change as a pretext to control the population. "These findings show that disinformation resonates with a significant proportion of the population," says Professor Mark Eisenegger, co-director of the fög. "At the same time, however, it's clear that many people are not at the mercy of disinformation."

## News source makes the difference

What matters most for resilience against disinformation is how people use the media. It is not only about how often someone consumes news, but also which sources are part of their personal news repertoire. On the basis of a new measurement of such repertoire types, the study shows that those who combine private quality media with public service media, or who follow professional news on radio and television, are less susceptible to disinformation-based conspiracies.

Conversely, the problem of news deprivation is clear: People who barely consume any news, or who get nearly all their information from social media such as TikTok and Instagram, are more susceptible to disinformation-based conspiracy claims. "Consuming news via social media does not provide any

discernible protection against disinformation unless people get additional news from journalistic sources," says Eisenegger. The ability to spot the typical tricks of disinformation – such as pseudo-evidence and oversimplification – also has a protective effect, he adds. "We should therefore be working harder to promote these fact-checking skills."

**Media quality is stable, diversity is under pressure**

The regular longitudinal analyses in the Yearbook show that overall media quality is stable. At 6.4 points, the total score is similar to what it was in 2015 (6.3 points). Behind this stability are contrasting trends, however. The relevance of reporting is increasing in the long term and contextualization is improving slightly, while diversity is clearly declining. International news coverage is therefore increasingly concentrating on a small number of major powers and current trouble spots. In addition, media concentration is high and rising, with a small number of providers controlling most of the audience reach. Reporting is also concentrated in terms of content, as stories increasingly appear in several media outlets at the same time.

**Safeguarding reliable news outlets**

"A resilient democratic public sphere needs reliable journalism," says Eisenegger. The authors of the Yearbook recommend doing more to counter news deprivation, shoring up the economic foundation of quality journalism, and promoting information and media literacy as compulsory in schools and educational settings. Private and public media should pool their competencies in fact checking via a shared technical infrastructure. In addition, transparent and verifiable rules are needed for platforms, search engines and AI-powered answer systems, for example on how information is selected and weighted, and how disinformation is handled.

The Yearbook Quality of the Media 2026 also offers additional analyses and studies, for example on trust in AI chatbots compared with trust in professional news, and on the expectations of the Swiss public when it comes to the services that SRG SSR (the public broadcaster) should provide and on which channels it should be present. All the details are available at www.foeg.uzh.ch.

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