Policy Brief

Interrogating Information Integrity: What the Concept Includes, What It Misses, and What Comes Next

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Key Messages for NORDIS

Information integrity has entered the vocabulary of work against disinformation and information disorders. Different understandings, definitions, and frameworks have emerged. Understanding the different contexts and meanings is paramount for NORDIS so we can use and operationalize the concept in our work.

- **"Information integrity" has become the main policy term for the broader information environment.** The UN, OECD, EU and Council of Europe adopted it within roughly the last two years. It replaces narrower or contested terms such as "disinformation" and "information disorder."
- **The concept has expanded far beyond its original meaning.** In data science it described the accuracy, completeness and timeliness of data. In policy it now spans journalism, trust, business models, media literacy, elections, platform accountability and open government.
- **The framing assumes democracy and information ecosystems work similarly everywhere.** Evidence on media systems, trust and press freedom shows otherwise.
- **Access to platform and media data is named as essential but never concretely resolved.** Digital divides and epistemic inequalities are also not central to current framings.
- **A usable concept needs contextual assessment.** Country- and region-level assessments, such as the global meta-analysis by Mansell et al. (2025), can fill that gap.

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1. Background

The information environment has been transformed by changes in journalism's organizational and business models, the growth of global platform power and the rise of AI-generated content. These changes have enabled new connections. They have also shifted power in politics, economy and culture, and fostered harms such as diminished privacy, weaker online safety and greater uncertainty about trustworthy content.

Most discussion has focused on the problems, using terms such as *information disorder* (Wardle & Derakhshan 2017), *infodemic* (WHO), *platformization* (Poell et al. 2019) and *epistemic*

crisis (Dahlgren 2018; Hannon & Woodard 2025). *Information integrity* emerged as the vocabulary for solutions, appearing in texts from the UN (2024), OECD (2024), EU (2024) and Council of Europe (2025).

2. How the Problem Is Represented

Using Bacchi's (2025) "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) framework, the policy texts share one thread: the problem is treated as fundamental, a threat to how mediated democracy works.

Actor	How the problem is framed
UN	The information environment undermines people's ability to exercise human rights and hampers peace, prosperity and a livable future.
OECD	Adds erosion of societal trust and of willingness to take part in democratic debate. It links the recommendation to its standards on AI, privacy, children online, open government, media and more.
EU	Sees strategic and systemic pressures, including "geostrategic rivalry." It ties integrity to the Democracy Shield: free people, free and fair elections, free and independent media.
Council of Europe	Calls disinformation too contested and narrow, and positions information integrity as a "constructive and more comprehensive approach." It offers the most concrete national-strategy framework.

3. What the Framing Presupposes

The proposed solutions share a common set of components:

- Monitoring and research on the state of information integrity
- Media and information literacy
- Quality journalism and sustainable, resilient media
- Fair digital competition and platform accountability
- Election integrity
- Foundations of freedom of expression, institutional trust and multi-stakeholder, cross-border collaboration

This is a very broad understanding. It links trust, business models, government action and technological innovation, well beyond the original data-quality meaning.

4. Gaps and Blind Spots

4.1 Data access is acknowledged but unresolved. All the texts call for monitoring and research, yet opacity of platform data (Zuboff 2019) and of legacy media data (Dragomir 2019; Karlsson 2020) remains. The EU's Digital Services Act (Article 40) requires Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines (45 million+ EU users) to provide data to vetted researchers. In mid-2026, open questions remain:

- How the request and receipt process will work
- How verifiable the data will be
- Who has the resources to analyze it
- Whether platform data is enough to capture users' own experiences of harm or the interplay of platform power and geopolitics locally

4.2 Inequalities are not central. Regional, age, race, education and economic divides, the "epistemic inequalities" described by Napoli (2024), are not at the heart of current framings.

4.3 Literacy places the burden on individuals. Media literacy is promoted as a central measure (WEF 2025). Critics argue this shifts responsibility to individuals to navigate a complex environment (Livingstone 2018; Pangrazio 2026). Literacy needs vary, and literacy alone does not deliver online safety or trustworthy news.

4.4 A one-size-fits-all assumption. The policy texts assume democracy and information ecosystems are similar across countries. Yet:

- Media systems differ significantly (Hallin & Mancini 2004, 2012)
- Trust varies widely (Egan et al. 2026)
- Press freedom varies, sometimes for different reasons (RSF 2025)

Just as "integrity" once had context-dependent definitions of accuracy, completeness and timeliness, the new concept depends on *whose* integrity is being protected, and *where*.

5. Evidence Base

A global meta-analysis (Mansell et al. 2025) reviewed over 1,600 texts. It noted a strong research bias toward the Global North and identified shared challenges across regions:

1. Weaponization of communication for political or other goals
2. Data monetization for profit by big tech companies
3. Pressure on quality journalism due to platformization
4. Exclusion from, and inequitable inclusion in, information ecosystems at local, national and regional levels, including inequalities in algorithms and AI training data
5. Lack of access to data to understand impact and assess harms
6. Gaps between global normative goals and regional, national and local practice

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Information integrity usefully brings together phenomena that were previously discussed separately, and comprehensive assessments can surface connections and issues missing from policy debates. But as an all-encompassing concept covering national resilience, literacy, journalistic sustainability and open government, it may be too ambitious. To be useful, it must be tied to context.

1. **The concept in context.** Challenges of information integrity are distinct in the Nordic region, and even between the countries. Make this clear when using the term.
2. **Fact-checking and literacy need support.** While NORDIS is well-known for these interventions against information disorders, information integrity frameworks highlight responsibilities of multiple sectors. This needs to be emphasized continuously; independent actors do not carry the burden alone.
3. **Emerging challenge:** Digital divides and epistemic inequalities, including those embedded in algorithms and AI training data, are increasingly important in the Nordics as well. This could be a new focus for NORDIS.

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