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Regulating Disinformation: Multidisciplinary Approaches and Global Legislative Challenges in 2024

Regulación de la desinformación: enfoques multidisciplinares y desafíos legislativos globales en 2024

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Abstract

Purpose: This study addresses the growing problem of disinformation, a complex phenomenon affecting the political and social sphere. Its implications and the regulatory strategies implemented to mitigate its effects are examined. **Methodology:** For this purpose, a methodological approach based on a bibliometric review is employed by analyzing 86 scientific publications related to the regulation of disinformation during the year 2024. **Results and conclusions:** Trends, emerging themes and actors involved in misinformation regulation are identified. The main findings reveal a predominance of studies focused on European Union countries and a recurrent focus on freedom of expression and the role of digital platforms. Despite the proliferation of regulatory proposals, challenges remain on the precise definition of disinformation and the need to balance its regulation with fundamental rights. **Singularities:** The main limitation of the study lies in its temporal restriction, focusing on the scientific output of the year 2024, which limits the retrospective view. The original contribution of this work is based on providing an updated overview of global regulatory trends on disinformation, highlighting the urgency of international cooperation and more robust legislative approaches.

Keywords

Disinformation; Fake News; Digital Regulation; Legislation; Freedom of Expression; Public Policy; Digital Governance; Social Media; Digital Platforms; Artificial Intelligence.

Resumen

Propósito: Este estudio aborda la creciente problemática de la desinformación, un fenómeno complejo que afecta a la esfera política y social. Se examinan sus implicaciones y las estrategias regulatorias implementadas para mitigar sus efectos. **Metodología:** Para ello, se emplea un enfoque metodológico basado en una revisión bibliométrica analizando 86 publicaciones científicas relacionadas con la regulación de la desinformación durante el año 2024. **Resultados y conclusiones:** Se identifican tendencias, temas emergentes y agentes involucrados en la regulación de la desinformación. Los hallazgos principales revelan una predominancia de estudios centrados en países de la Unión Europea y un enfoque recurrente sobre la libertad de expresión y el papel de las plataformas digitales. A pesar de la proliferación de propuestas regulatorias, aún persisten desafíos sobre la definición precisa de desinformación y la necesidad de equilibrar su regulación con los derechos fundamentales. **Singularidades:** La principal limitación del estudio radica en su restricción temporal, centrada en la producción científica del año 2024, lo que limita la visión retrospectiva. La aportación original de este trabajo se basa en ofrecer un panorama actualizado sobre las tendencias regulatorias globales en materia de desinformación, subrayando la urgencia de una cooperación internacional y enfoques legislativos más robustos.

Palabras clave

Desinformación; Fake news; Regulación digital; Legislación; Libertad de expresión; Políticas públicas, Gobernanza digital; Redes sociales; Plataformas digitales; Inteligencia artificial

1. Introduction

Disinformation and fake news are a complex phenomenon that has emerged in today's media and political landscape. There are various definitions and approaches to the concept of 'fake news', which are often used interchangeably with terms such as disinformation, misinformation, propaganda and low credibility content (Killi et al., 2024). A more precise definition distinguishes between these terms, categorising disinformation as a set of coordinated informational actions with an aim to mislead (Erhardt & Pentland, 2022) while fake news refers specifically to content that mimics the appearance of traditional media (Rosa et al., 2022). Despite the great rise of both terms today, disinformation and fake news are not a new phenomenon, but their scale and scope have been enhanced by the rise of social media and the proliferation of online information sources of questionable credibility (t'Serstevens et al., 2022).

In recent years, the proliferation of disinformation and fake news has become a growing concern for governments and citizens around the world, with significant implications for democratic processes, public discourse and individual decision-making (Tida et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2022; Roy et al., 2018; Lazer et al., 2018). Not only does this pose a danger to democracy and social cohesion by eroding trust in institutions, democratic processes and freedom of information (Muñoz, 2024; Erhardt & Pentland, 2022); it also gains the capacity to manipulate and concentrate public opinion, and, in extreme cases, to incite violence. Moreover, the negative impact of misinformation extends beyond the political sphere, as it can also cause serious economic damage, such as the manipulation of financial markets or the spread of misleading information about products and services, which can lead to significant economic losses for society.

The rapid spread of disinformation and misinformation has been driven by a confluence of factors, including the pandemic of the Covid-19 virus, which heightened public anxiety and uncertainty, and the increasing polarisation of political discourse, which has facilitated the entrenchment of false narratives (see, for example, the works of Chang et al., 2021; Alqurashi et al., 2021; Nightingale & Farid, 2020; and Khurshid, 2020). The increasing prevalence of disinformation, defined as the deliberate dissemination of false or misleading information, has been identified as a substantial threat to political processes on a global scale. This phenomenon is compounded by various contributing factors. On the one hand, technological advancements and the rise of social media and other online platforms have rendered the dissemination of disinformation more expeditious and widespread (Chang et al., 2021). This has, in turn, made it increasingly difficult to contain the "virality and velocity" of its online spread.

Research conducted by Fernández (2020), Llamas (2020) and Curiel and Molpeceres (2020) has demonstrated the particularly detrimental effects of disinformation and fake news in the political domain. The dissemination of misleading content by political figures for manipulative purposes, taking advantage of the ease with which information spreads on social media, has been identified as a key factor in this phenomenon. A particularly insidious effect of disinformation is its role in the exacerbation of political and social polarisation. The promotion of disinformation, in the form of manipulated and conspiratorial content, has been demonstrated to engender distrust, fragmentation, and conflict among diverse groups. This, in turn, has the effect of undermining social cohesion and threatening democratic stability. This increasing political polarisation engenders an environment in which individuals are more likely to accept information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, even if it is false. In this regard, Fernandez (2020) exemplifies this fact through the claims disseminated by the UK Conservative Party during the election, which were based more "on misleading or false claims", which is closely related to people being "more likely to believe information in line with their political beliefs". Others such as Lazer et al. (2018) have identified various vulnerabilities that make individuals and societies susceptible to the effects of false and misleading information, including cognitive biases and emotional reactions to influence individual and collective decision-making.

Furthermore, sophisticated methods such as "astroturfing" – a strategy characteristic of public relations studies in the context of electoral propaganda – have been employed to create a false sense of organic and widespread support, thereby generating a misleading impression of popular endorsement and complicating the identification and counteraction of disinformation campaigns (Arce-García et al., 2023). Consequently, public opinion on critical political issues is manipulated, electoral outcomes and policy decisions are aggressively influenced, public discourse is weakened – since the dissemination of false and misleading information hinders informed and reasoned dialogue on important issues – and social division is exacerbated, further fragmenting existing social classes and even creating new ones (Díez-Garrido et al., 2021; Bienvenue, 2020; Zannettou et al., 2018).

1.1 Regulatory Approaches and Responses to Disinformation

Efforts to address the problem have involved both private and public sector actors. Political figures, media outlets and digital platforms have developed various strategies to address the challenge of

misinformation, such as the implementation of fact-checking systems, the removal of false content and the media and digital literacy of citizens on how to identify and combat false information (Llamas, 2020; Fernández, 2020). These efforts, however, have been insufficient and a more comprehensive and coordinated approach involving multiple actors and levels of government is required (Magallón et al., 2022; Llamas, 2020).

In this context, the urgent adoption of robust measures to curb the spread of disinformation and to safeguard the integrity of communication and information processes has become imperative. As Serra Cristóbal (2023) has observed, the dissemination of false information has the potential to impede the open exchange of ideas and hinder the development of public opinion.

Strengthening *fact-checking* and *fact-checking* initiatives is one of the main approaches to combat disinformation, as well as demonetising disinformation and strengthening user complaint mechanisms (Meyer et al. 2020). However, the effectiveness of these initiatives has been limited by the speed with which disinformation spreads and the difficulty of reaching audiences that are reluctant to question their own beliefs (Canavilhas et al., 2019).

In the public sector, various countries have enacted legislative and regulatory measures to address the issue of disinformation and fake news (Muñoz, 2024; Meyer et al., 2020). These initiatives have taken various forms, including the establishment of disinformation observatories and committees, the enactment of specific legislation against disinformation, the adoption of codes of conduct, and the imposition of financial and administrative sanctions on digital platforms that fail to adequately manage the dissemination of misleading or false content. In certain cases, authorities have been granted the power to order the removal or blocking of such content (Barros & Amato, 2024; Magallón et al., 2022).

The initial legal responses were cautious. The first attempt was started in 2015 by the European External Action Service (EEAS) through the "EUvsDisinfo" initiative, the objective of which was to predict, combat, and respond to disinformation campaigns affecting the EU, its Member States, and neighbouring territories. Utilising data analysis and media monitoring in fifteen languages, the project sought to "increase public awareness and understanding of Kremlin disinformation operations, and to help citizens in Europe and beyond build resilience to digital information and media manipulation" (European External Action Service, 2020).

In 2015, the government of Germany initiated discussions to implement the "Network Enforcement Act" (NetzDG), which came into force in 2018. The legislation was originally conceived as a means of addressing hate speech on online platforms. However, it was subsequently expanded to encompass disinformation and illegal content in the wake of the widespread circulation of fake news during the 2016 US presidential elections. Legislation dictates that digital platforms with a user base exceeding two million must proactively remove or restrict access to such content within a 24-hour window of receiving a complaint (Balendra, 2024).

In 2018, the French government enacted the "Law against the Manipulation of Information" (Loi contre la manipulation de l'information), aimed at combating fake news during the three months preceding national elections. Upon receipt of a case, a collegiate body is required to implement precautionary measures and assess, within 48 hours, whether the false information is being disseminated artificially or automatically and on a large scale. However, the dissemination of such content may be prohibited by judicial authorities in instances where the content has been found to be inaccurate, misleading, and poses a risk to the impartiality of the electoral process (Dreyer, 2018). Additionally, the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (CSA) is empowered to suspend the broadcasting of television services controlled by or under the influence of foreign states that threaten the fundamental interests of the nation. The global and cross-border nature of disinformation has necessitated the promotion of greater international cooperation in combating this phenomenon. Notable examples include the EU's efforts in 2018 to coordinate responses among Member States and to develop common regulatory frameworks, such as the "Code of Practice on Disinformation" (Badillo, 2019), which was updated in 2022 and renamed the "Strengthened Code of Practice". This was the world's first regulatory instrument to be deployed in the fight against disinformation (Espaliú, 2024). It was grounded in fundamental principles and advocated for pluralistic approaches and the promotion of self-regulation (Renda, 2018). In the context of the European Union, other notable initiatives include the 2016 adoption of the "Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats" by the European Commission. The primary objective of this initiative was to raise public awareness and to prevent the dissemination of disinformation. Additionally, the 2018–2019 "Action Plan against Disinformation" (European Commission, 2018) focused on four interconnected pillars: enhancing the EU's capacity to detect, analyse, and counter disinformation; fostering coordinated actions among EU institutions and Member States; involving the private sector in the fight against disinformation; and increasing societal resilience to this phenomenon (Sabater-Quinto et al. The following text is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the subject matter. 2025).

Along these lines, in October 2022 the Council of the European Union approved the “Digital Services Regulation” (DSA Regulation), also known as the “Digital Services Act”, but it will not be implemented until February 2024. It is the first global regulation in the digital sphere that holds digital services companies across the EU accountable for the content published on their platforms and establishes a regulatory framework to address online disinformation, including transparency and accountability requirements for large platforms regarding their content moderation practices as well as measures to mitigate the spread of illegal content, including disinformation (Martín-Blanco, 2023).

As far as Spain is concerned, several failed legislative proposals on disinformation and *fake news* have been put forward to date, such as the latest “Proposición de Ley Orgánica de garantía del derecho a la información veraz y lucha contra la desinformación” of 2024, proposals that demonstrate the connection of this disinformation phenomenon with the stability and security of citizens.

In Asia, Malaysia has enacted legislation that is among the most stringent, with penalties imposed for the dissemination of “any news, information, data, and reports that are wholly or partly false” (Magallón, 2019). Turkey has also passed a law on the spread of misinformation that came into force in 2022 and includes prison sentences for those who disseminate false information. In the Philippines, a bill was proposed with the aim of holding government officials accountable for the dissemination of false information. However, the bill was ultimately rejected (Newtral, 2024).

In the case of Latin America, there are still no specific laws approved against disinformation and *fake news*, although there are proposals, as is the case of Brazil, which since 2020 has been trying to develop the proposal known as the “Fake News Bill” - Bill No. 2630/20 - based on the civil liability of platforms for third-party content and even legislating instant messaging platforms (Lupa, 2024).

At the international level, a range of recommendations and guidelines have been issued by organisations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, and the World Health Organization. These recommendations and guidelines encourage countries to adopt comprehensive approaches to disinformation. These frameworks underscore the necessity for the integration of legal, technological, and educational measures to address disinformation in a multidimensional and effective manner, while concurrently safeguarding fundamental rights such as freedom of expression (Astudillo, 2024). These regulatory efforts, when combined with educational and technological measures, aim to tackle disinformation holistically, preserving democratic values and fundamental rights (Barros & Amato, 2024).

While these measures have made progress and achieved some impact, the regulation of disinformation poses significant limitations and challenges in terms of privacy and transparency. Regulatory approaches must carefully balance these fundamental rights and principles with the need to protect citizens from the harmful effects of disinformation (Muñoz, 2024; Lendvai and Gosztonyi, 2024). One of the main challenges is to ensure that measures taken do not unduly undermine freedom of expression and the right to information, which are fundamental pillars of democratic societies. It is also essential that regulatory initiatives have a broad social consensus and are developed through participatory processes, avoiding the concentration of power in a few hands (Barros and Amato, 2024).

Another significant challenge is the adaptability and dynamism of disinformation actors, who are increasingly employing sophisticated strategies to evade controls. Furthermore, the globalisation and cross-border nature of the internet complicate the implementation and effectiveness of national regulatory measures (Muñoz, 2024; Pira, 2023; Serra Cristóbal, 2023; Teira & Elías, 2021; Forestal, 2020).

2. Methodology

The general approach adopted to comprehend the repercussions of disinformation and its regulation was predicated on a methodological design that was founded on bibliometric review. Bibliometric analysis is a technique that is employed extensively in the field of scientific research. It is a method of examining patterns in academic production and the dynamics of a specific discipline (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). This methodology facilitates the identification of trends, influential authors, collaborative networks, and emerging research areas through the analysis of bibliographic data extracted from specialised databases. It has been demonstrated in previous studies (Antona-Jimeno et al., 2024; Durr Missau, 2024) that this methodology is a valid means of assessing the maturity of a given research field.

To delimit the research, inclusion criteria were established based on keywords related to the regulation of misinformation in order to identify the scientific production on this topic in English and Spanish during the year 2024. This research follows recent work, such as that of Sabater-Quinto et al. (2025), who have retrospectively explored legal initiatives related to disinformation regulation between 2015 and 2023. This study focuses on the year 2024, considered to be the most active election year in history, with national and regional elections in more than 50 countries (Ray, 2024). This year is also considered crucial

because it precedes major electoral processes in 2025, such as the German elections, which creates a high level of concern about misinformation in the political arena.

The analysis was conducted on two main levels:

1. A descriptive analysis was conducted to identify general metrics related to the number of publications, the most productive authors, the most relevant journals, and the countries with the highest scientific output.
2. A keyword analysis was performed, through which the main topics and emerging terms related to disinformation regulation were identified.

The final sample comprised 86 publications by various authors: Al-Fatih & Aditya (2024), Anastácio (2024), Aseeva (2024), Baeza-Yates & Fayyad (2024), Baltrimas (2024), Bayer (2024a), Bayer (2024b), Bidzilya et al. (2024), Bilişli et al. (2024), Borz et al. (2024), Bouza García & Oleart (2024), Budiyanito et al. (2024), Bueno & Canaan (2024), Camarasa San Juan & Feng (2024), Carson et al. (2024), Cavaliere (2024), Chavanayam (2024), Corredoira y Alfonso (2024), Correia & Mergulhão (2024), Di Turi (2024), Díez Garrido (2024), Eka Wisanjaya & Rosy Widodo (2024), Elischberger (2024), Espaliú Berdud (2024), Farrand et al. (2024), Garlin Politis et al. (2024), Hajdúková (2024), Henric & Serrurier (2024), Herbón Costas (2024), Hilal et al. (2024), Hill et al. (2024), Hoang Vu et al. (2024), Hodge et al. (2024), Horta Pereira et al. (2024), Humphery-Jenner (2024), Husovec (2024), Hyun et al. (2024), Karamyshev et al. (2024), Kaushik (2024), Kaźmierczak & Laskowski (2024), Kira (2024), Koreman (2024), Kumar & Maurya (2024), Lee (2024), Lendvai & Gosztonyi (2024), Lima López (2024), Valle et al. (2024), Loschiavo Leme de Barros & Fucci Amato (2024), Martínez Hernández (2024), McNamara et al. (2024), Meneses (2024), Millar (2024), Mizerová (2024), Mudavadi et al. (2024), Mündges & Park (2024), Nagy (2024), Popova (2024), Prahassacitta (2024), Prahassacitta & Harkrisnowo (2024), Prawiraharja (2024), Rich (2024), Romero Moreno (2024), Santin et al. (2024), Sharma & Jenkins (2024), Sharma & Sharma (2024), Shattock (2024), Sherstoboeva (2024), Shiang & Wilson (2024), Sibirian & Labrador (2024), Solomon et al. (2024), Souto Galván (2024), Suing (2024), Surya & Pavan (2024), Svoboda (2024), Tan & Preece (2024), Teles de Lira et al. (2024), Trofimov (2024), Tyshchuk (2024), Ulbricht & Rizk (2024), Varela da Costa et al. (2024), Wachter et al. (2024), Wehri et al. (2024), Wei et al. (2024), White (2024), Yamaguchi & Yahagi (2024), Zarnsky (2024) and Zhang (2024). Duplicates were removed, and those not corresponding to the year under study or addressing disinformation from a perspective unrelated to regulation were excluded.

The procedure for conducting the review consisted of:

- Defining the field of study and the period of analysis: regulation of disinformation during the year 2024–25.
- Selecting relevant sources, specifically articles indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI): only publications indexed in high-impact databases such as Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus were included, using Boolean search strategies.
- Excluding articles that did not address the topic from a regulatory perspective or whose focus did not allow for conclusions to be drawn about the phenomenon under study. Publications were selected in English, German, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.
- Limiting the search to studies published in 2024 to ensure the currency of the analysis and to cover a complete year.
- Eliminating duplicates and documents that did not meet the defined methodological criteria.
- Conducting automated searches in WoS and Scopus using predefined descriptors: "law AND disinformation", "law AND misinformation", "law AND fake AND news", "legislation AND fake AND news", "legislation AND disinformation", "legislation AND misinformation", "regulation AND disinformation", "regulation AND misinformation", "regulation AND fake AND news".
- Managing and refining the results obtained.
- Identifying variables to be analysed, such as descriptive data related to the country of regulation, the topic addressed, and the stance taken regarding regulation.

This systematic approach was intended to enable a rigorous analysis of scientific contributions on the regulation of disinformation. The overarching objective of this study was to assess the necessity of regulation in the field of disinformation by mapping regulatory activity across countries, thereby providing insight into how different states are engaging with this issue and what priorities are being established.

In accordance with the overarching research aim previously outlined, the subsequent specific objectives were addressed:

- OB1. Identify the areas of knowledge in which studies on disinformation law predominate.
- OB2. Determine whether the studies focus on a particular country or region.
- OB3. Analyse the main issues addressed in the different approaches to the regulation of disinformation.
- OB4. Examine the positions (pro, con or neutral) presented in research on the regulation of disinformation.

3. Results

The field of Social Sciences was found to be predominant, accounting for 66 publications (75%), particularly within the categories of Law (32 publications, 37%), Communication (16 publications, 18%), and Sociology and Political Science (14 publications, 16%). Notable studies were identified within the domain of Computer Science (11 publications), particularly within the subcategory of Networks and Communication (6), along with those of a multidisciplinary nature (7). This distribution is indicative of a robust interconnection between the domains of social sciences and technology, particularly within the ambit of legal, communicative, and technological infrastructure contexts.

With respect to the geographical provenance of the journals publishing on this topic, the highest number of publications were from those based in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Spain. Academic leadership was observed in the US and the UK, which led to an increase in scientific production across various fields, including communication, law, and technology. A notable increase in Spain's research output was detected, particularly in the area of communication and regulation within the European context. In Spain, the phenomenon of disinformation has become a central issue in political debates, especially regarding elections, social movements, and the regulation of digital platforms.

The most prominent journals that were included in the analysis were the *Journal of Media Law* (with three publications), the *Hungarian Journal of Legal Studies* (with two publications), *AI & Society* (also with two publications), *Statute Law Review* (also with two publications), and *Journalism* (also with two publications).

The number of authors per article varied, with an average of two authors per publication, thus highlighting interdisciplinary collaboration in areas such as law, social sciences, technology, and communication. The mean length of the articles was 20 pages, although some exceeded this by up to 30 pages. This phenomenon may be partially explained by a greater tendency towards single authorship, particularly in the field of legal sciences.

A substantial proportion of the analysed publications (74 out of 86, or 86%) were written in English, thereby underscoring the international nature of the subject matter. This phenomenon is being addressed by a concerted global academic effort, reflecting its cross-border impact and the need for collaborative solutions. The dissemination of false information and the establishment of regulatory frameworks to combat it are not merely local issues, but transnational phenomena that have the potential to impact multiple regions.

The wide variety of journals suggests that disinformation and regulation are not confined to a single discipline. Instead, these phenomena are analysed from legal, technological, ethical and communicative standpoints. This underscores the intricacy of the phenomenon, emphasising the imperative for a holistic approach in its investigation.

Although there are a few more representative journals, the total number of publications on the topic under study is relatively low. This indicates that research on misinformation and regulation is still growing and is not concentrated in a single academic journal. This could be interpreted as a sign that the field is expanding and new research opportunities are emerging.

A clear predominance of case-based studies focused on specific countries or regions was observed. Of the 86 publications analysed, 70 (over 80%) addressed national or regional contexts, while only 16 studies adopted a non-geographically bound perspective. The European Union was the most frequently studied region, featuring in 21 publications, largely due to its recent legislative efforts from 2015 to the present.

Subsequent studies were conducted on Brazil, Indonesia, Russia and Ukraine, albeit at a considerable distance are the articles and chapters on Brazil, Indonesia, Russia and Ukraine. In the case of the latter two countries, 5 out of 6 are joint, i.e. they refer to disinformation during the armed conflict. It is curious, to say the least, that in the case of Brazil, most of the articles refer to the so-called "*Brussels Effect*", which consists of praising the EU for exercising unilateral soft power in the configuration of transnational norms (Bueno & Canaan, 2024). They are followed by four papers on the United States

and Spain, which is rather surprising in the case of the US given the November election process. The remaining countries represented in the sample included Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, France, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Senegal, Singapore, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, and Vietnam, with a total of 24 countries represented in the sample. Moreover, one study concentrated on the Andean region, whilst another focused on Latin America as a whole. As asserted by Al-Fatih and Aditya (2024, p. 86), legislation pertaining to the issue of disinformation has been implemented in 90 countries worldwide.

Regarding the thematic content of the publications, the most frequently addressed topic was freedom of expression, which appeared in 61 studies (71%). The overarching theme of this investigation is the extent to which legal frameworks can be utilised to ensure the safeguarding of freedom of expression in the context of content creation on social media and in the press. Consequently, it is unsurprising that 41 studies (47.7%) explored the role of platforms and social networks, highlighting both their potential and their risks, with the latter predominating. Recent studies have demonstrated that social media platforms have had a considerable impact on the nature of social dialogue, with a notable prevalence of inconsistent content and misinformation, which has the potential to nurture anti-democratic processes (Correia & Mergulhão, 2024, p. 9).

31 texts (36%) deal with intersections with Human Rights, mainly related to the right to information and freedom of expression. The right to information is one of the Human Rights and is attached to the state as a form of accountability to the people (Al-Fatih & Aditya, 2024, p. 77). It is also not surprising that artificial intelligence is present, albeit to a lesser extent than the previous topics with 17 articles (19.77%). Coined as "*weapons of math destruction*" by O'Neil (cited in Nagy, 2024, p.259), a greater presence was expected as it has burst onto the scene, especially from the point of view of content generation and large language models. Added to this is the ability to generate false images with perfect voices that can call into question trust in digital media. In combination with *fake news* they pose a clear threat to democracies, according to Baeza-Yates & Fayyad (2024, p. 13). In fact, in just under half of these 17 papers, it is argued that artificial intelligence has to produce truthful content. COVID-19 and health communication is also present in this sample with ten texts (11.63%). Although they take the pandemic as a starting point, they continue to study the effects on current legislation. With eight works (9.3%), hate speech and armed conflicts are included, all of them related to the case of Ukraine and Russia and how propaganda influences the transmission of messages in the context of different regulations in both countries. Undoubtedly, the point of view conditions the analysis and the results in each case. Next come *deepfakes* with five contributions (5.81%), always directly related to artificial intelligence, as much of the attention on these is focused on their potential to feed electoral disinformation and harm the creative industry (Kira, 2024, p. 2). The same number of papers address the importance of media literacy in the context of disinformation. The use of social media as a means of free speech has become unbalanced and full of negative content due to the lack of digital literacy skills on the part of some people (Wisanjaya & Widodo, 2024, p. 119). Surprisingly, only four research papers (4.65%) deal with electoral processes and none of them with the US case (Spain, EU and Australia). This is followed by two works (2.33%) on the intergenerational perception of *fake news*, with special emphasis on Generation Z as native users of social networks. One paper (1.16%) closes the list with natural disasters in the case of Turkey and the management of disinformation, defamation and cryptocurrencies.

The analysis also examined whether the publications expressed a clear position regarding the need to regulate disinformation and fake news. Despite the absence of a consensus, most of the authors exhibited a favourable stance towards the establishment, revision, or strengthening of holistic legislation in 55 studies (63.95%). However, several nuances were observed. Eleven of these articles emphasised the importance of precisely defining what constitutes disinformation. As Humphery-Jenner (2024, p. 26) pertinently observed, governments seeking to legislate against disinformation must exercise caution in defining it. Exclusions must be strict and not politically motivated. It is imperative that prohibitions do not result in the suppression of "innocuous" expression, and that freedom of expression is not regarded as collateral damage in the fight against disinformation.

Ten papers favour regulation as a tool against disinformation and for the protection of democracy, although it is worth remembering that while there are advantages to the state fighting disinformation, it also raises serious concerns about democratic compromise (Koreman, 2024, p. 808). Moreover, in authoritarian countries, the state may weaponise the label of fake news to justify the establishment of laws that curtail freedom of information and expression (Lee, 2024, p. 2389). Eight contributions argue for a more international approach along the lines of Sunig (2024, p. 8), since, in order to strengthen the fight against disinformation, both regulatory initiatives and citizen engagement initiatives must be articulated across countries, otherwise they are doomed to fail. Information disruption is by definition a global problem, so reflections must take place at the global level. This is followed by four approaches that occur in as many texts: it depends on how and by whom disinformation is defined (Bouza García & Oleari refer to empowerment or disempowerment depending on how disinformation is defined (2024,

p.1404), so as not to receive information that impedes a democratic discourse, there is a need to update and address the jurisdictional nature of social networks and that legislation must be adapted to the new demands of the digital age. In this context, Bilişli et al. (2024) stress the balance between freedom of expression and the need to prevent the dissemination of *fake news*. Three texts argue that penalties should be increased. Two advocate a multidisciplinary approach to literacy, regulation and awareness-raising, and two others advocate collaboration with media companies and platforms. Lastly, three texts argue in favour of legislation on the fifth generation of human rights, the guarantee of media safety and polarised democracies.

Twenty-five studies (29.07%) did not explicitly advocate for or oppose regulation. Of these, nine focused on the balance between protection from disinformation and the safeguarding of freedom of expression, particularly in the health sector (Loschiavo Leme de Barros & Fucci Amato, 2024, p. 735). Lira et al. (2024, p. 11) have proposed a middle ground between a regime of total freedom for platforms and one of complete state control over content. Four studies abstained from offering a definitive stance, citing incompatibilities with extant legal frameworks. In this context, Nagy (2024, p. 259) warned of the "black box" effect, whereby transparency is inhibited – for example, through the protection of trade secrets and intellectual property rights – thus sacrificing privacy in the name of national security and highlighting the fragile balance between human rights and security considerations.

Four other contributions emphasised the necessity to define the concept of disinformation, with some suggesting the development of country-specific definitions due to the influence of varying geopolitical contexts, particularly in relation to armed conflicts. Baltrimas (2024, p. 287) advanced the argument that the 'one size fits all' principle is not applicable to disinformation, given the evident differences between militarily vulnerable countries and those that are not. Three studies have highlighted the potential for legislation to serve the interests of the government, thereby raising concerns about its impact on societal interests. Two individuals abstained from taking a position due to the unpredictability of disinformation, while two others argued that red flags should be avoided and that there is room for legislation. One study debated the relative merits of self-regulation and public intervention.

Only six (6.98%) papers are clearly against regulation for different reasons - the most common (three) is that literacy, awareness and education are preferred as "it seems clear that law as a "single, particularistic regulator" is not sufficient to fight illegal content online" (Lendvai and Gosztanyi, 2024, p.8). Two further points to the risk to freedom of expression with the work of Carson et al. (2024, p.15) particularly belligerent against interventionism or the approach of Bayer (2024a, p.590) who argues that disinformation, manipulation and propaganda are forms of communication that cannot really be tackled by law, at least not without significantly infringing freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This bibliometric study provides a solid basis for understanding the evolution and current state of research on misinformation regulation. It identifies the main trends and emerging themes in the field. It highlights the importance of freedom of expression and the role of digital platforms as recurring elements in the literature. It highlights the need for a precise definition of disinformation as a crucial element in developing effective regulatory frameworks. These findings contribute to theory by offering a clear picture of current challenges and debates, providing a basis for future research that seeks to address the identified gaps. From a practical perspective, the results of the study have important implications for policy makers and regulators. The predominance of studies focusing on EU countries suggests that regulatory strategies in this region could serve as models for other jurisdictions. In addition, the focus on freedom of expression and the role of digital platforms highlights the need to balance the regulation of misinformation with fundamental rights. The study's findings can guide the implementation of more effective and balanced policies, promoting international cooperation and more robust legislative approaches to mitigate the effects of disinformation.

More specifically, the research provides several striking insights into a complex topic such as research on the regulation of disinformation, beyond Koreman's observation that "*To be clear: no regulation will be completely effective*" (2024, p. 820). Aseeva reminds us that the consequences of developing technology in an unsustainable way are tangible today. The algorithms that shape economies, society and even public discourse were developed with few legal constraints or commonly accepted ethical standards (2024, p. 2), while Suing notes that "misinformation generates political polarisation and affects the quality of democracy" (Suing, 2024, p. 1). Following the precepts set out in the methodology, according to OB1, an expected dominance of research in the legal area is evident, although others such as communication, sociology and political science follow closely behind. There is also a strong interconnection between the social sciences and technology, especially in the legal, communication and technological infrastructure contexts, making this an eminently interdisciplinary field of study that seems to be lacking from a single perspective, an aspect to be considered by legislators and the main actors in the media and communication ecosystem.

As might be expected, in line with OB2, the European Union dominates for its recent legislative efforts, although there were also critical voices pointing to another of the problems identified, namely the definition of the concept of disinformation. In this regard, Hill et al. argue that the EU's approach focuses on addressing the harms caused by disinformation rather than providing a single, comprehensive definition (2024, p. 5). Meneses notes in this regard that "nowhere is the importance of a correct definition more dramatic than in the field of justice: consider that someone can be convicted or acquitted for a single word or even a misplaced comma" (2024, p. 220). At the other end of the spectrum, the low number of articles on the United States - not only from an electoral point of view - and the total absence of the Israel-Palestine conflict, as opposed to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which was the subject of study in the context of disinformation, is surprising. Research on highly polarised countries where disinformation favours certain movements and interests was also to be expected. Not surprisingly, information warfare can be presented as the dissemination of information that is not verifiably false or outright misleading, but is intended to polarise society and disrupt its proper functioning (Baltrimas, 2024, p. 276).

According to OB3, almost three quarters of the texts deal with freedom of expression, which is well above the proportion of legal texts in the sample. This is evidence of another eminently multidisciplinary approach to a reality that is at risk due to the effects of disinformation and which is dealt with from different spheres. The platforms and social networks are the undisputed protagonists as a forum for the dissemination of *fake news*, and this is reflected in the texts. Everything related to artificial intelligence is making an appearance, mainly because of its capacity to generate content, but also as a tool at the service of jurists and legislators. Despite being an election year par excellence at the global level, more topics such as health or armed conflicts have been dealt with.

Regarding the positioning in favour or against disinformation legislation related to OB4 of this paper, it is worth noting that there is a convergence of reasoning to defend different positions such as the balance between protection against disinformation versus guaranteeing freedom of expression. That said, a large majority of the papers show an inclination in favour of creating regulatory frameworks and there are no major differences by area of knowledge, i.e., it is possible to speak of a broad consensus.

One of the limitations of the study is that the study period could be extended in both directions in the future. The limited impact of electoral processes on the results should be recalled here. On the other hand, the complexity of establishing the themes should be noted, given that many issues are cross-cutting and therefore difficult to delimit. With a view to future research, it is possible to consider comparative studies between continents and even between legal systems, and whether these affect the predisposition and acceptance of legislation and even its typology.

5. Contributions

Task	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3
Conceptualisation	x	x	x
Content curation	x	x	
Formal analysis	x	x	
Funding adquisition	x		
Investigation	x	x	
Methodology			x
Project administration	x	x	x
Resources	x		
Software			
Supervision		x	x
Validation	x	x	x
Visualisation	x	x	x
Writing: original draft	x	x	x
Writing: review and editing	x	x	x

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Translator: recuerden que deben indicarnos nombre y apellidos de la persona que ha traducido el texto.

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8. Declaration of conflicts of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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