

Policy brief: Europeans and False Online Information

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Strengthening Digital Fact-Checking Skills in the Age of AI

The rise of false, misleading, and deliberately deceptive digital content, often amplified by artificial intelligence, poses a growing threat to liberal democracy, human rights, and core European values.

This brief aims to answer the following questions:

1. What influences Europeans' confidence in digital fact-checking, i.e., verifying the truthfulness of online information and content?
2. What policy recommendations can be formulated to strengthen the digital fact-checking skills of European citizens?

The Confidence Gap

The CRONOS 3 survey asked people across Europe to what extent the statement: **“I know how to check the truthfulness of the information or content I find on the internet”** is true for them. Only 30% said it was very true. At the same time, as many as 86% say they use the Internet almost all the time or several times a day. That means 67% of these most frequent internet users are not confident in their digital fact-checking skills.

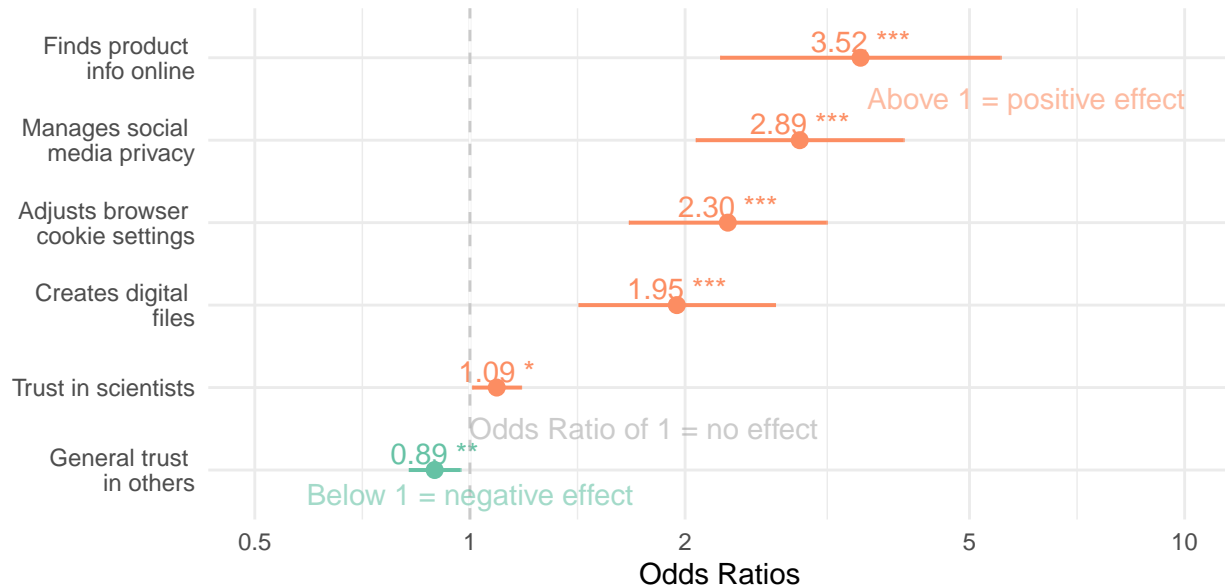
Factors of Confidence in Digital Fact-Checking

We analyzed several factors that influence respondents' confidence in digital fact-checking. We found meaningful associations between other digital skills and two types of trust:

What Helps People Spot False Information Online?

People who know how to search for products, manage privacy on social media, and adjust browser settings are much more likely to say they can tell if online content is true.

Trust in scientists also helps a little, while general trust in others may slightly reduce this confidence



Source: own elaboration with CRONOS 3, ESS 10 and 11 survey data

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Digital Skills Matter

The most important factor is confidence in finding information about goods or services online. People who declare this belief have **over 3.5 times the odds** of being confident in fact-checking **than those who do not**. This suggests that people look at information truthfulness as consumers.

Recommendation 1 – design fact-checking campaigns and training that mirror familiar online shopping behaviors. This makes the skill feel more intuitive and easier to learn.

The next essential factors are limiting access to one's profile or content on social media and restricting cookies via internet browsers. These digital privacy skills increase confidence by **2.9 and 2.3 times the odds**.

Recommendation 2– combine fact-checking campaigns and training with digital privacy issues. These skills reinforce each other and may have similar motivations.

We found that participation in any digital skills training does not affect confidence in digital fact-checking. Thus, the training needs to be focused on that skill set. However, basic digital know-how does matter. People confident in creating digital files have **almost 2 times the odds** of being confident in fact-checking.

The Surprising Role of Trust

Each step up of general trust in others decreases the likelihood of confidence in digital fact-checking **by 11% (0.89 odds ratio)**. The more trusting the respondents are, the less likely they are to consider themselves capable of fact-checking online.

Recommendation 3 – highlight the difference between trusting people in real life and trusting sources online. The internet is neither just an extension of the offline world nor has the same social rules.

Each step up of trust in scientists increases the likelihood of confidence in digital fact-checking by 9% (1.09 odds ratio). Therefore, fact-checking skills and trust in people who provide evidence-based and validated information are positively related.

Recommendation 4– invest in academia to support scholars in sharing their work in accessible ways. Train academic researchers to communicate their findings to the public.

Analytical note:

We studied 14 factors, and 8 had no meaningful impact on confidence in fact-checking: computer programming skills, using social media, frequency of internet use, participation in digital skills training, gender, age, education, income, and country of residence.

Open data from CRONOS3 Wave 1, ESS10, and 11 surveys represent 11 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom. Respondents who did not use the internet or had no access to it were excluded; a total unweighted sample in the analysis was $n = 9,538$.

Supplementary tables and code to reproduce our analysis are openly available at: <https://github.com/zremek/I4NG-Hackathon-2025>