



unesco

Information and Elections in the Digital Era

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)


Organized by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas
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MODULE 3

The impact of online harmful practices on the electoral cycle and tools to tackle them

In this module...

- Strategies and techniques most used to spread disinformation.
- The main targets of disinformation within the electoral cycle.
- The electoral calendar.
- Operational planning.
- The four categories that group the responses to tackle disinformation, misinformation, malinformation and hate speech.



STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES TO SPREAD DISINFORMATION



Five main strategies to spread disinformation

1 - Coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB)

2 - Information operations and influence campaigns

3 - The computational amplification of disinformation

4 - False or misleading narratives

5 - Misleading visual content

1 - Coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB)

- Coordinated inauthentic behaviour online can make use of fake profiles, anonymous users, trolls and bots.
- The goals of Coordinated inauthentic behavior are to generate more traffic and/or try to silence certain opinions, depending on the motivations of the instigators.
- Instigators of Coordinated inauthentic behavior might deploy “troll farms” or “troll factories” to create and spread content creating made up tendencies, generateing online debate, influence public opinion and ultimately impact in decision-making.

What is a “troll”?

- A person or a user that systematically harass other users online can be considered as a TROLL.
- This kind of users provoke, disturb, attack other users with digital tools with a view to create a strong reaction or silence people.
- Trolls seek out emotional responses.



2 - Information operations

- Entail the collection of tactical information and the dissemination of propaganda in order to try to gain competitive advantage over an opponent.
- A similar concept is that of **influence campaigns**, which try to achieve a strategic and/or geopolitical outcome, like an electoral result.

3 - Computational amplification of disinformation



Use of Bots



Use of misleading
accounts to share and
promote content



Relies on micro-targeting

What is MICRO-TARGETING?

- Micro-targeting involves monitoring people's online behaviour and using the collected data (related to the concept of BIG DATA that we saw on Module 1),
- Sometimes enriched with other data, it is used to display individually targeted political advertisements.
- Individuals receive advertisement catered to their own preferences and online behaviour.



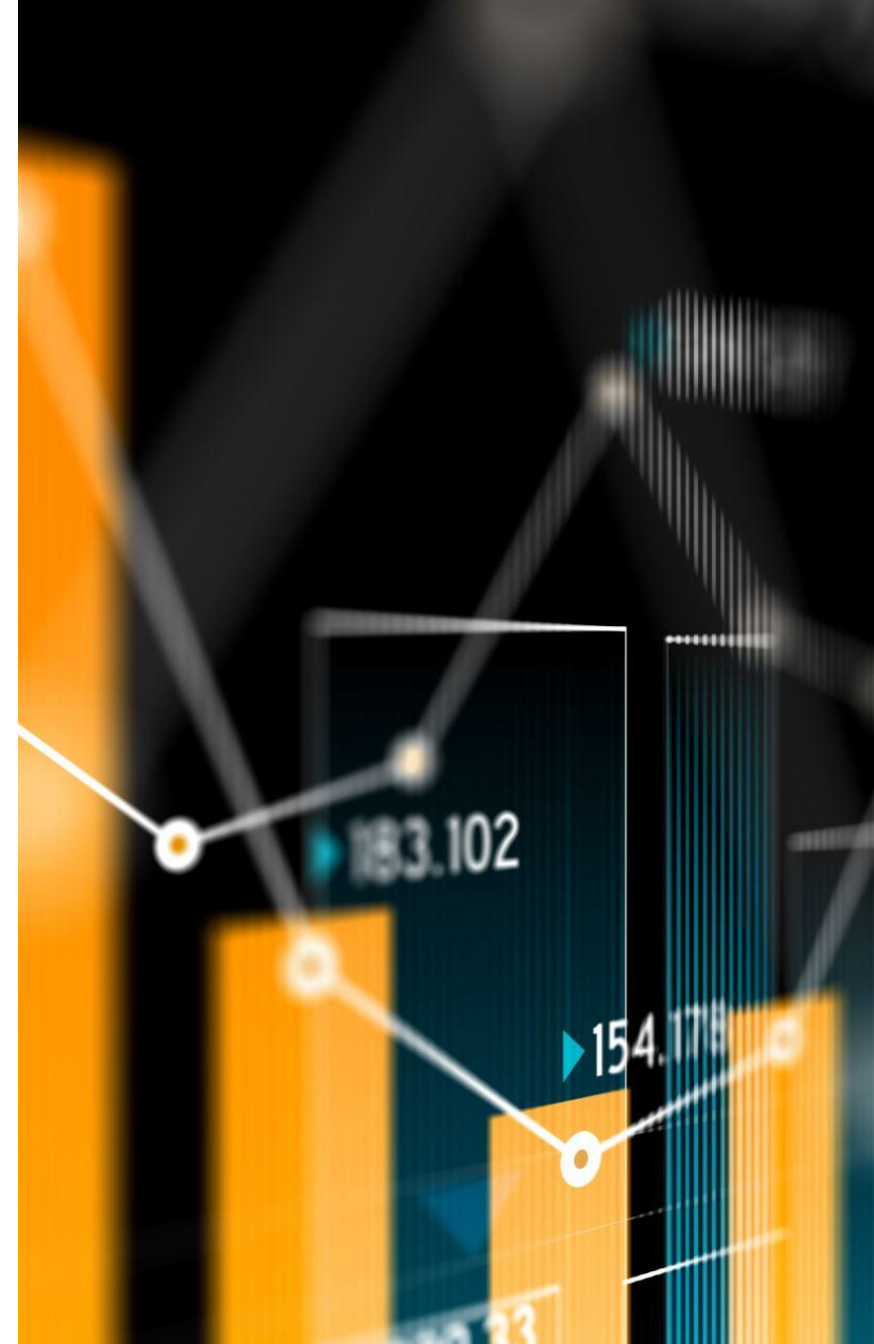
4 - False or misleading narratives

- Deliberately publish misleading, deceptive, or incorrect information purporting to be real news about politics, economics or culture.
- This content includes ideologically extreme, hyper-partisan, or conspiratorial news and information, as well as various forms of propaganda.
- In order to catch attention, they are very often accompanied by moving images, excessive capitalization, emotionally charged words and pictures, generalizations, and logical fallacies.



5 - Misleading visual content

- Much of the disinformation circulates in visual content and can be very persuasive.
- Visual content is more shared than text by social platforms' algorithms.
- Humans process visual content faster, often leading to emotional responses which diminishes the probability for them to use analytical skills.
- It can be up to impossible to trace the source of some viral images.





The main targets of disinformation within the Electoral Cycle






Electoral Management Bodies, electoral regulators and electoral related institutions

- GOAL: to discredit the electoral institutions and undermine and interfere with the electoral process.
 - Disinformation in this case can go from spreading misleading information about the voter registration process, to challenge the independence and transparency of the commission, to announcing fake results, and denouncing imaginary fraud.
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Candidates, particularly women candidates



- GOAL: Aims at dissuading political actors to run as candidates or to bully them to resign.
 - False information about women candidates spreads further, faster and more intensely than disinformation about men candidates and that disinformation tactics (for instance photos with sexual content) are often used to shame and deter women candidates and others who aspire to take public leadership positions.
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Political parties and independent political groups

- GOAL: Depending on the electoral system and legal framework, some political parties might have less resources for their campaigns, and hence be more vulnerable to disinformation attacks.
 - Disinformation may become a way of political propaganda
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Minorities and members of vulnerable groups





- GOAL: Aims at dissuading people from particular groups and minorities, to run as candidates or to bully candidates to resign.
 - Vulnerable groups might be targeted during elections by disinformation seeking to fuel intolerance and social polarization.
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Journalists, media outlets and citizen journalists



- GOAL: Looks to undermine media and journalists' reputation and discredit journalists and the information they share.
 - Among them, women journalists face gender-specific risks, besides those endured by their male peers.
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Citizens and voters in general

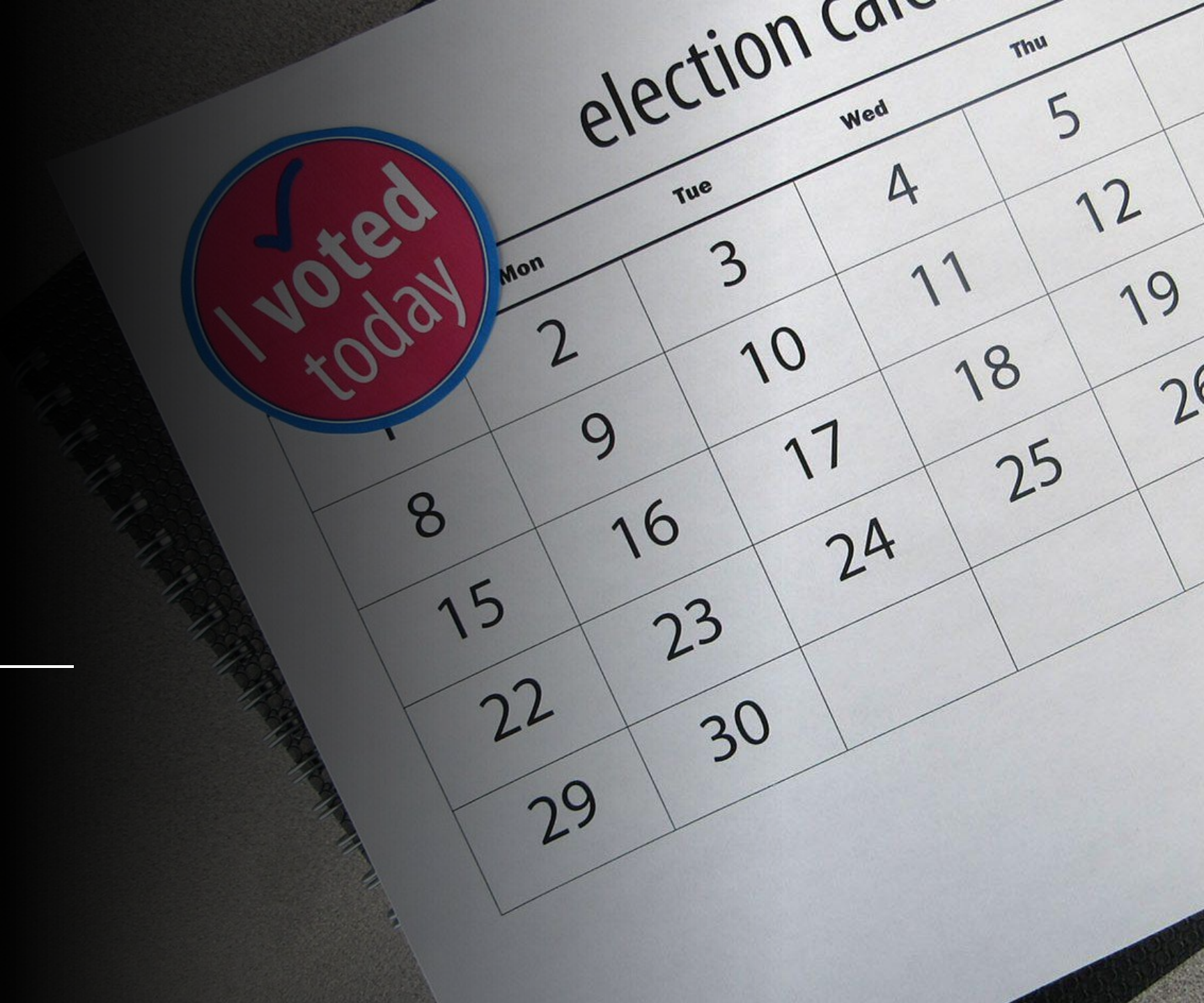
- GOAL: Through disinformation strategies that manipulate them mostly emotionally, generate confusion.
 - Intimidate voters, affecting their rights to access to information, freedom of expression, privacy and participation in public affairs or even discouraging them to go to vote.
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Coffee break



The Electoral Calendar



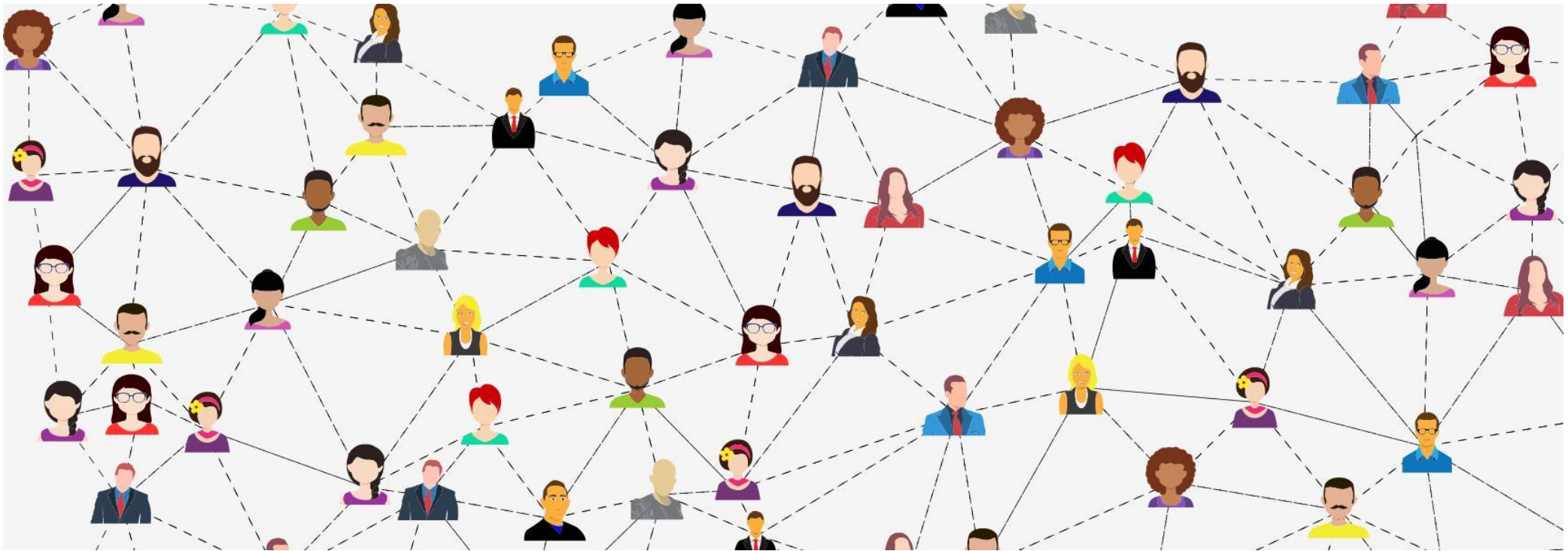
The Electoral Calendar & the Electoral Cycle

- The electoral calendar is the roadmap for all electoral stakeholders to plan and implement elections.
- The electoral calendar also informs the public, the security forces, electoral observation missions and the media about key dates, enhancing transparency and strengthening the link between the citizens and the democratic institutions.
- The Electoral Cycle approach and the Electoral calendar are the keystones of the electoral management operational planning – and the pillars for planning all electoral related actions and activities , including conflict prevention measures, both online and offline, and initiatives to prevent and tackle disinformation, misinformation and malinformation and hate speech.

Electoral Operational Planning

- Operational planning is usually done by the electoral authorities, and it shows how and when each activity is going to be carried out.
- Each activity needs to be targeted at the objectives stated in a strategic way, and then be reflected on the budget.
- Having adequate financial resources is critical, not only for implementation but also to be prepared for contingencies.





Everyone needs to be involved

- Effective measures require a range of responses from multiple actors.
- Measures can have different levels of impact and be designed for short-, medium- and long-term periods.

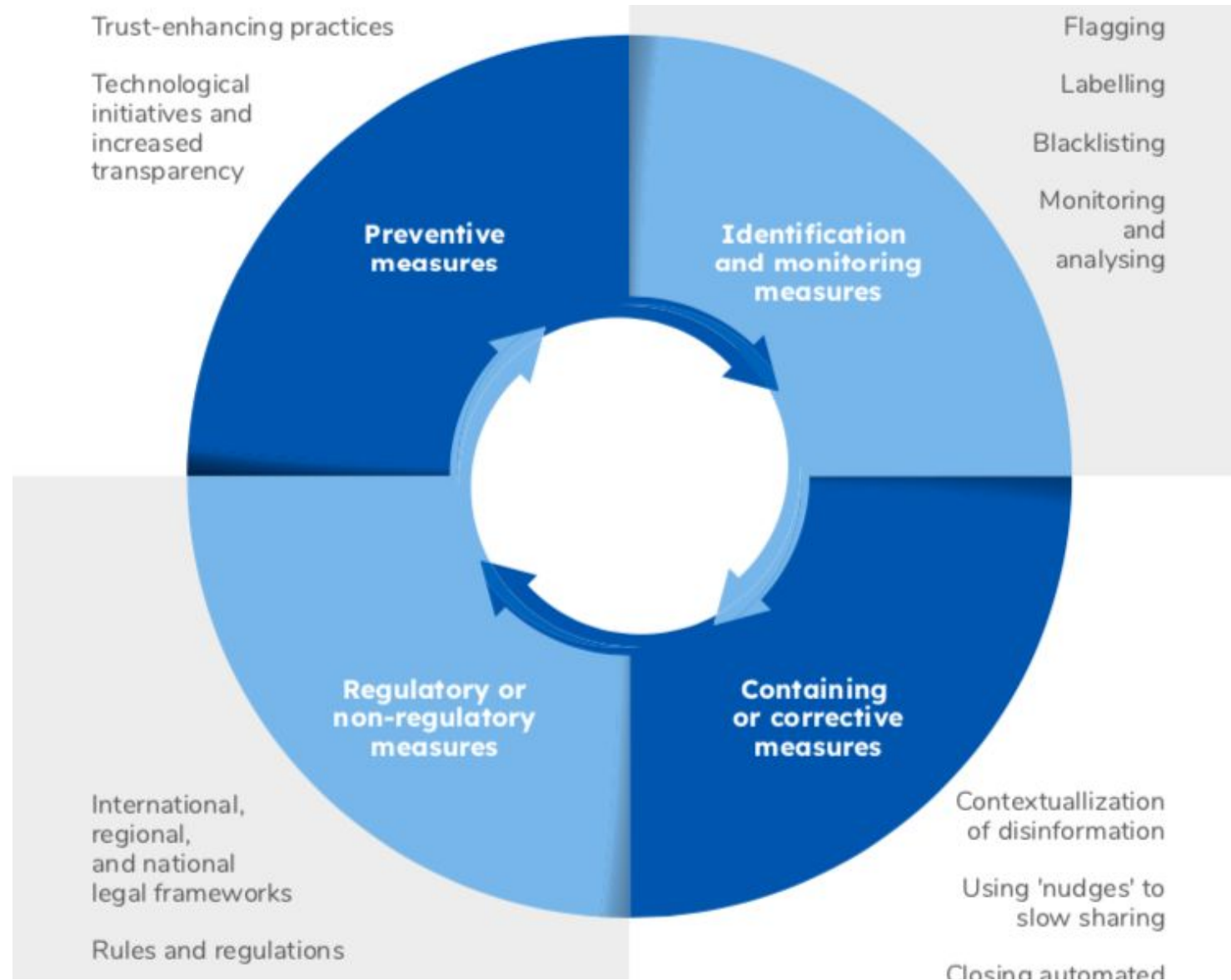
Responses to tackle disinformation

Preventive
measures

Identification,
fact-checking and
monitoring
measures

Regulatory and
non-regulatory
measures

Corrective measures
or containing
corrective measures





Recap Module 3

During this module we have addressed...

- Strategies and techniques to spread disinformation
- The main targets of disinformation within the electoral cycle
- The relevance of the ELECTORAL CALENDAR and its connection with the ELECTORAL CYCLE
- Why ELECTORAL OPERATIONAL PLANNING is critical for electoral processes AND TO TACKLE DIS MIS & MAL-INFO and...
- Which are the four categories that group some of the main RESPONSES to tackle this issue.

On the next module...

We will continue to examine in detail the four categories of responses to tackle dis-mis and malinformation during electoral processes, with particular focus on the PREVENTIVE ones.

Thank you very much!

