

**Pressemitteilung****Universität Bayreuth****Christian Wißler**

02.08.2023

<http://idw-online.de/de/news818697>Forschungs- / Wissenstransfer, Kooperationen  
Gesellschaft, Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaften, Philosophie / Ethik, Recht, Wirtschaft  
überregional**New white paper calls on companies to take action against disinformation and hate speech**

**"A clear position against disinformation and hate speech! How companies take responsibility while also protecting their business" is the motto of a new whitepaper published by the Corporate Digital Responsibility Initiative of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection. Co-author is Prof. Dr. Dr. Alexander Brink, Chair of Business and Corporate Ethics at the University of Bayreuth. The white paper was published by the CDR Initiative, founded in 2018, and encourages companies of all sizes and industries to actively engage against disinformation and hate speech, suggesting concrete options for action.**

The declared aim of the CDR initiative is to make digital responsibility a matter of course for companies in all sectors. Its white paper is the first to focus on the unresolved problem of the deliberate spread of fake news and hate on the Internet. The publication forcefully identifies the destructive effects on society, business and politics and makes it clear that companies should not remain in a passive observer role, if only in their own business interests. The paper provides a systematic overview of possible approaches to actively combating disinformation and hate speech. Four large companies that are members of the CDR initiative are used as examples to show what successful engagement can look like in concrete terms.

"The spread of misleading messages for the purpose of deception and social division is increasingly threatening the commercial economy due to its scale and dynamics. At least indirectly, every company today is affected by this development. As our white paper makes clear, there are very different ways, varying in scope and intensity, in which companies can take action against disinformation and hate speech. In any case, an important first step is to become aware of this dark side of digitalization and to take a clear ethical stance in accordance with one's own set of values," explains Brink, who provides scientific support for the CDR initiative and advises the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection on issues of digital responsibility.

For many companies, it will make sense or even be necessary in the future to strengthen their own resistance to fake news and hate speech through internal strategies and measures. Numerous institutions offer information and practical support specifically tailored to companies. The white paper summarizes important sources of information and contact points in a "resource atlas". As surveys show, the public's expectations regarding corporate citizenship have also risen enormously in recent times. "When companies go beyond strengthening their own resilience and also take a clear position in their external communications, thereby promoting dialogue and solidarity, they make a valuable contribution to our society. In the long term, this contribution, which consolidates the reputation of companies in a democratically constituted community, can also bring them financial gains," says Brink.

The Bayreuth-based expert of Business Ethics points out that digital responsibility is not defined by ethical standards and moral appeals alone. Increasingly, the terms "disinformation" and "hate speech" are also finding their way into legislation, giving them concrete justiciable content. One example is the Digital Services Act, which will apply in all EU member states as of 17 February 2024. It is intended to create a secure digital space in which the fundamental rights of

all users of digital services are protected. At the same time, this European legal framework aims to ensure that there is a level playing field for companies in the digital world.

"Far too often, the digital space provides a breeding ground for disinformation and hate speech. The consequences are serious: those affected are exposed to stressful, sometimes life-threatening situations, and the lines of division in society are intensified. Companies are also called upon to take action against disinformation and hate speech. The companies active in the CDR initiative of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection have developed a handout with examples from their corporate practice to encourage other companies to also 'take a clear stance against disinformation and hate speech'," says Steffi Lemke, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection.

#### About the CDR Initiative

The Corporate Digital Responsibility Initiative was launched in May 2018 by the then Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection together with selected companies. In December 2021, responsibility passed to the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV). The initiative aims above all to motivate companies in the commercial sector to shape digitalization in a people- and value-oriented way. The members of the initiative stand out for their particular commitment to CDR and are constantly developing in this area.

Since spring 2023, the CDR initiative has maintained its own office. This is operated by Prof. Dr. Dr. Alexander Brink together with concern GmbH, a spin-off from the Bayreuth study programme Philosophy & Economics, and ConPolicy – The Institute for Consumer Policy.

#### wissenschaftliche Ansprechpartner:

Prof. Dr. Dr. Alexander Brink  
Business Ethics  
University of Bayreuth  
Phone: +49 (0)921 / 55-4122  
E-mail: alexander.brink@uni-bayreuth.de

#### URL zur Pressemitteilung:

<https://cdr-initiative.de/news/whitepaper-zu-desinformation-und-hate-speech-veroeffentlicht> Information and statements, with link to download whitepaper "Klare Kante gegen Desinformation und Hate Speech!" ("A clear position against disinformation and hate speech! How companies take responsibility while also protecting their business")