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## **Participant Information Sheet**

*“Evaluating the Validity of the EMFA in Supporting Media Freedom and Pluralism on Platforms”*

### **About the researcher:**

My name is Natalie Jenkins, and I am a graduate student at University College Dublin. I am conducting this research for my thesis, *“Evaluating the Validity of the EMFA in Supporting Media Freedom and Pluralism on Platforms,”* as part of a Master of Science in Digital Policy in the school of Information and Communication Studies at University College Dublin. I would also like to note that, alongside my role as a researcher, I work as a journalist at Eesti Elu/Estonian Life newspaper. However, my professional role is entirely separate from my academic research.

### **What is this research about?**

This research examines the European Union’s (EU) new media regulation known as the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), which aims to support media freedom and pluralism. While the EMFA is a broad piece of regulation, this study focuses specifically on its relevance in the digital environment, where digital platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, and X play a significant role in how news is produced, distributed, and consumed.

However, the EMFA’s understanding of these issues may not fully reflect the challenge journalists face in their day-to-day work, or the deeper structural challenges associated with news that circulates within these platforms.

This study therefore seeks to evaluate the EMFA’s validity in supporting media freedom and pluralism online by comparing the regulation’s understanding of “platformized” news with the challenges identified by journalists themselves. In doing so, the study aims to assess whether the EMFA is addressing the problems that matter the most in practice.

If you have any questions, you may contact the researcher (me) with questions at any time via email ([natalie.jenkins@ucdconnect.ie](mailto:natalie.jenkins@ucdconnect.ie)).

### **Why am I doing this research?**

Digital platforms have significantly undermined the conditions under which journalists produce and distribute news, undermining news visibility, editorial independence, and audience reach. These have exacerbated existing economic and legitimacy-related pressures within the industry.

The EMFA represents an important attempt by the EU to respond to some of these developments. However, more research is needed to understand how well its approach aligns with the realities journalists face in a platformized news environment. This study is intended to contribute to that understanding by examining whether the regulation is targeting the right problems by speaking to the individuals who face these challenges day-to-day.

### **How will your data be used?**

Collected data includes personal data and research data. Personal data includes your name, occupation, and contact information (email address). Research data includes audio recordings, email interview response, and audio transcripts (written recordings of everything that you say). The data collected in this study will be used solely for academic research purposes. It will help identify patterns in the challenges journalists experience when working in a platformized news environment.

All data (both research and personal) is carefully protected at all times throughout the project. All data will be anonymized before analysis, and any findings will be presented in a way that ensures individual participants cannot be identified. Upon completion of the thesis, all personal and research data will be permanently deleted.

The findings may be included in the thesis. The data is being collected solely for the purposes of this study and will not be made available for future research or to other researchers.

### **How will I protect your privacy?**

Throughout the study, the researcher will be solely responsible for storing and processing all data collected:

#### Consent forms and personal data

- Your digital consent form contains your name and signature. I will upload it as an encrypted file to a password-protected folder on my personal UCD-affiliated Google Drive account. Only I will have access to these files. They will be kept for a period of 6 months after the conclusion of the research, after which they will be permanently deleted, in line with UCD's data retention and research ethics policies.
- Any personal data that the researcher has about you (email, name, occupation) will be permanently destroyed immediately after data has been anonymized. It won't be possible to link your name or personal data to what you say or do in the interview, or

to use it in any reports of the research or in any publications that draw on the research.

#### Interview audio recordings

- The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. This means that I will record the audio portion of our conversation onto a recording device.
- After the interview is complete, these audio recordings will be stored as encrypted MP3 or WAV files in a password-protected folder on my school-affiliated Google Drive. Each recording will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your identity. Only I will be able to access this data.

#### Email interview exchanges

- The researcher will send you an encrypted text document containing the interview questions. It is asked that you please return your responses also as an encrypted file. After these responses have been anonymized, the emails will be permanently deleted from the researcher's inbox.
- Only the researcher has access to this email account, and it is only logged in on a secure password protected computer.

#### Interview transcripts

- The recordings will then be transcribed for the purpose of thematic analysis. This means I will write down everything that was said in the recording.
- Transcripts will be stored as encrypted text files, such as DOCX or PDF, in a separate password-protected folder on the same school-affiliated Google Drive. These files will also be identified only by pseudonym, at which point it will no longer be possible to attach any identity to them. This means that transcripts will be anonymous.
- Once the transcripts have been anonymized, the audio recordings will be permanently deleted.

Once the study is complete, anonymized data may be retained for up to 6 months in line with UCD's data retention and research ethics policies, after which it will be permanently deleted.

#### **What will happen if you decide to take part in this research study?**

This study consists of semi-structured interviews, consisting of 11 questions and lasting around 40 minutes online over Zoom. Alternatively, if you prefer to answer these questions over email, you can return your responses as an encrypted message to the researcher. The questions are the same for both modalities.

These questions explore your experiences working in your field and your use of digital platforms. They are meant to be exploratory and invite a dialogue on what you identify as the most important barriers to media freedom and pluralism in the context of using these platforms.

For the Zoom-based interviews, the call may be audio-only or video-based, depending on your preference. Only the audio will be recorded for analysis purposes.

Before the interview, please ensure that you have reviewed the participant information sheet and understand the terms of the consent form. At the start of the interview, the researcher will ask if you have reviewed and understand these documents.

To participate in the study, you must meet *all* of the following criteria:

- You are over 18 years of age;
- You are currently based and working in the European Union or Canada as a journalist, reporter, correspondent, or editor at any type of news outlet—including print, broadcast, or digital—in a freelance or employed capacity;
- You use digital platforms in your work and are interested in, or have views on, how these are affecting media freedom and pluralism in your experience;
- Can verbally communicate in English.

If you decide to take part in this study, please visit [emfavalidity.org/get-involved](http://emfavalidity.org/get-involved) and fill out the form. Once you have done this, I will reach out to you to further discuss the study, any questions you may have, and if you are willing, to coordinate an interview time. Please ensure that you send your completed consent form ahead of your interview.

### **What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this research study?**

There are no significant risks associated with this study. You may decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer. The study is also entirely voluntary. You may withdraw your answers at any time without penalty, and your data will be deleted as long as it has not already been anonymized and included in the final analysis.

There are no direct monetary benefits to participating in this study. Doing so may nonetheless encourage you to reflect on various strategies for improving the circulation and visibility of news-related content on the platforms you use.

### **What are the benefits to the researcher if I take part in this study?**

Participating in this study will provide the researcher with valuable insights to use towards the study's objectives. These will strengthen the quality of research and may contribute to future research on media policy and journalism.

### **Can I change my mind at any stage and withdraw from the study?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and your data will be deleted as long as it has not already been anonymized and included in the final analysis.

### **How will I find out what happens with this project?**

At the end of the study, a summary of findings can be shared with you upon request. You may also be informed if the research leads to further publications.

You may visit the website [emfavalidity.org](http://emfavalidity.org) to learn more about the study. Please also feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns ([natalie.jenkins@ucdconnect.ie](mailto:natalie.jenkins@ucdconnect.ie)).