

17 May: World Telecommunication and Information Society Day

Fighting Disinformation Through Technology and Education

A selection of works on disinformation

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Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

WHO's Director-General

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Introduction

The Rise of the Information Society: Harnessing the Potential of ICTs

Digital Future Society. May, 2022

The rapid pace of technological development has changed the way we live, work, communicate and educate our children. In fact, it is affecting almost every area of the economy, society and culture. Today, 17th May 2022, we celebrate World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD). Its purpose is “to help raise awareness of the possibilities that the use of the Internet and other Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) can bring to societies and economies across the world”. (Source: UN).

Towards Equal and Universal Access to Knowledge

Information Society is a term for “a society in which the creation, distribution, and manipulation of information has become the most significant economic and cultural activity”, as opposed to “societies in which the economic underpinning is primarily Industrial or Agrarian.” (Source: TechTarget). While information can generate knowledge, it is not knowledge in itself. The concept of knowledge societies encompasses much broader social, ethical and political dimensions. According to UNESCO, knowledge societies are about capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development. They require an empowering social vision that encompasses plurality, inclusion, solidarity and participation. (Source: International Bureau of Education).

Major Challenges for the Development of Knowledge Societies

ICTs have enormous potential when it comes to creating a competitive economy, a sustainable future, and a democratic and open society. In a 2005 report, Towards Knowledge Societies, UNESCO argues that the spread of new technologies and the emergence of the internet have created fresh opportunities to achieve genuine knowledge societies. (Source: UNESCO). However, much of the global population still lacks access to ICTs. Furthermore, the current excess of information we’re seeing as a result of the internet and social media does not necessarily equal greater knowledge for those that do have access. Without the education that allows us to distinguish between “useful” and “useless” information, what we’re seeing is just “a mass of indistinct data.” We outline these two key challenges below.

1. Access: The Digital Divide

Almost half the world's population, 3.7 billion people, the majority of them women, and most in developing countries, are still offline. (Source: United Nations). As the world becomes increasingly digital, it threatens to exclude those that remain disconnected. Likewise, the capacity for individuals to take advantage of ICTs varies hugely within developed countries. The pandemic highlighted that socioeconomic level, education, and place of residence can all have a significant impact, as those without Internet access were unable to benefit from remote education, work, or health services. Unless adequate steps are taken now to improve access (through local infrastructure, affordable devices, education, digital inclusion etc.) the "digital divide" is likely to exacerbate existing socioeconomic inequalities between nations and communities.

2. Quality: The Proliferation of Disinformation

Over the past decade we have seen ICTs become vehicles for the spread of disinformation, hate speech and violent extremism. Far from disappearing, disinformation is on the rise. The conflict in Ukraine has shown us that wars are now being waged in the digital as well as physical space, facilitated by ICTs. Cyber attacks, disinformation campaigns and fake news are affecting security and stability in Ukraine, Russia and across Europe.

Social media supports the ability to disseminate all kinds of content, whether false, unverified, erroneous, manipulated, invented or out of context. Its ephemeral nature, the brevity of messages and the short attention span of users, are all conducive to lowering the quality and credibility of information. Furthermore, the viralization of information through social networks means that disinformation can reach a vast number of people in a matter of seconds. Some citizens are equipped to understand these new dynamics, but many struggle to identify disinformation for lack of context.

“The system of globalised information has reached a point of entropy and now produces only disbelief. It is not so much that lies have become the norm and the truth is prohibited or disregarded, but rather that lies and the truth now cannot usually be told apart”.

Aurélie Filippetti and Christian Salmon

Faster than the Future, Digital Future Society

Disinformation has the potential to deepen distrust in institutions, resulting in weaker democracies and disempowered citizens. Today, voters go to social media to inform themselves and political actors can leverage this to manipulate public opinion. Humans naturally tend to favour information that strengthens prior ideological positions, deepening political identities and leading to polarisation. With elections now linked to the instability of online media, we're witnessing the disintegration of democratic deliberation.

What Can We Do to Strengthen Democratic Institutions?

Knowledge is the foundation of a democratic society. It stimulates active citizenship, lifelong learning and social change. The fight against disinformation and the strengthening of democratic institutions are part of Goal 16 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, aimed at promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies. In order to achieve this goal, administrations, companies, technological platforms, verification agencies and citizens must join forces to leverage technology and education against disinformation.

“We must promote a critical spirit, attacking it at the root. We must work from the beginning to incorporate digital literacy into the educational system, teaching how to filter sources, instil critical thinking and know how to determine when information is -or is not- truthful.”

Cristina Colom, Director

Digital Future Society (Source: [Ethic](#))

A strong democracy requires high-quality independent media, pluralistic opinion and the ability to negotiate public consensus. Media literacy must become a key priority for governments and organisations. It helps people think critically, recognize points of view, and identify disinformation. In short, it is an essential tool to empower citizens in the digital age.

Link:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/the-rise-of-the-information-society-harnessing-the-potential-of-icts/>

Fighting disinformation through technology and education

Ethic, March 2022

Technology is crucial in the fight against misinformation, but equally essential is the involvement of administrations, companies, technology platforms, verification agencies and, of course, citizens themselves.

Thanks to technology, anyone with a smartphone or an internet connection has the ability to obtain information without limits or territorial barriers. However, despite the fact that we have increased access to content, news and direct sources, **paradoxically, our society is more misinformed than ever before** in the history of mankind.

A major challenge for any democratic society, disinformation is further exacerbated by the ability to disseminate all manner of content, whether it is false, unsubstantiated, erroneous, manipulated or fabricated. This capacity to make inaccurate information, photos or data go viral in a matter of seconds through social networks or messaging apps demonstrates that we are dealing with a tool that has an extremely powerful capacity for dissemination.

If we are to solve this problem, we must encourage a critical spirit, attacking it at the root. We must work from the outset to mainstream digital literacy in the education system, teaching students to filter sources, instilling **critical thinking** and making sure they know how to determine when information is - or is not - truthful.

If we are to solve the problema of disinformation, we must encourage a critical spirit, attacking it at the root

Far from going away, disinformation is on the rise. The conflict in Ukraine, a dramatic event in its own right, shows us how today's wars are being fought on a new battlefield in the digital space. What we are witnessing is a hybrid war facilitated by new technologies which directly affects a country's security and stability through attacks in cyberspace, disinformation campaigns and the dissemination of fake news, among other practices.

In fact, during the first three weeks alone, fact-checking identified more than 1,600 hoaxes: manipulated or decontextualised photographs from both sides; images from other wars claiming to be current scenarios in Ukraine; waves of fake videos circulated for the most part via YouTube and TikTok; there was even a story by Russian President Vladimir Putin claiming - without any evidence whatsoever - that what was going on in the Donbas region was an act of genocide.

We realise that technology has been used as a tool to generate polarisation, spread hate speech and manipulate public opinion, but that does not mean that we should demonise it: here at the Digital Future Society, we believe that it can (and should) also be part of the solution to counteract disinformation, especially in view of the speed at which such content is spread.

In democratic societies, digital verification agencies have been set up and are playing an increasingly important role in determining to what extent any given content is truthful. This role is also being played by the technological tools themselves, which can help to debunk misinformation. We must join forces in order to have a truthful, healthy and robust information ecosystem. During the Deconstructing Disinformation event, organised by the Digital Future Society during the Mobile World Congress 2022, the European Commission outlined its action plan for the fight against disinformation, which was in fact initially drawn up in 2015 in the wake of Russia's offensive to occupy Crimea. Other speakers from Spain's most important verification agencies also addressed the need to use technology to speed up, optimise and verify the disinformation process, although they also stressed the need to involve the world of education from an early age in order to filter sources and biases, thus enabling the development of true critical thinking from then on. This is also the vision of the Digital Future Society: technology, yes; education, yes as well. But if we are to tackle this complex challenge, we need to join forces: we need administrations, companies, technology platforms and verification agencies to get involved, but we **also need the citizens themselves to get involved**. This is an essential step towards creating a fairer, more equitable and sustainable digital society.

Author:

Cristina Colom

Digital Future Society Director

Link:

<https://ethic.es/2022/03/combater-la-desinformacion-a-traves-de-la-tecnologia-y-la-educacion/>

Introduction of the report **Dealing with disinformation: Strategies for digital citizen empowerment**

Digital Future Society, March 2020

Disinformation is old news

The dissemination of false or misleading information is by no means a new tactic. It has been a popular political strategy used throughout history and its roots date back to ancient times, when soon-to-be Emperor of Rome Octavian spread propaganda to discredit his rival, Antony. Other notable instances, such as during the 1899 Boer War or the establishment of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda in 1933 Germany, demonstrate how the logic of disinformation is deeply entrenched in politics and primarily seeks emotional appeal, especially during moments of crisis.

While disinformation is not new, the methods, strategies and technologies for its success have evolved significantly over time. The method used in ancient Rome — the spread of slogans on coins — was updated centuries later with the invention of the printing press, which increased the reach of information and reshaped the logic of its production, consumption and distribution. Approximately four centuries later, these dynamics experienced another shift when broadcasting began to serve as the basis for communications and radio and television became the most widely-used mass communication channels.

With the increased sophistication of telecommunications, disinformation has now gone digital. The widespread use of the internet in the 1990s fuelled exponential growth in amounts and flows of information, considered revolutionary and emancipating at the time. The very notion of citizen empowerment took on a new meaning with what was thought to be a promising tool for power redistribution. According to scholar Manuel Castells, the internet is the basis of a network society and works intrinsically to incorporate ever more people and resources. It follows that empowerment can come from the possibility to access those resources and influence information flows for decision-making. Even marginalised groups can use the internet to gain influence in the digital public sphere and shape realities according to their ideas and strategies.

The evolution of the internet itself has had important consequences for citizen empowerment. For example, its diffusion dynamics have shifted from broadcasting to socialcasting, where users become “prosumers” that not only consume but also produce information. The development of social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube facilitate content production and empowers marginalised voices to occupy once exclusive arenas. Nevertheless, content production differs greatly from news production, which implies investigative methodologies and fact-checking processes. As journalism also goes digital, it becomes even easier for ill-informed actors to influence public debates through the production of misleading content.

Another important element to consider is the business models of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In the context of citizen empowerment and disinformation, two factors are relevant: the rewarding of inflammatory or polarising content and the attention economy principle. Social media algorithms prioritise and amplify content that generates more clicks. In the attention economy where time and attention are scarce resources, people need stronger incentives to continue using a service or product. For this reason, platforms are designed to fuel continuous use, not only by rewarding clicks but also through features such as the infinite scroll.

Disinformation involves different stakeholders who essentially strive for distinct — and in many cases opposing — goals. While malicious parties conduct disinformation campaigns to manipulate public discourse, democratic governments and civil society organisations strive to maintain democratic values in the public sphere. Media actors, from independent to mainstream players, are also key stakeholders, as are platforms. Finding common ground between a plurality of actors requires an inclusive multi-stakeholder approach.

This poses one of the biggest challenges to tackling disinformation since information is an empowering tool for citizens, who engage in public interest issues based on the amount of knowledge they possess. In that sense, social media plays an important role in facilitating access to information and to advocacy, stimulating increased participation and activism. For instance, social media platforms are gaining traction in elections, with some studies suggesting their power in spreading electoral propaganda exceeds that of television in countries like Brazil.

When it comes to strategies to mitigate disinformation, there is no silver bullet. On one hand, a diverse set of stakeholders is fundamental in order to gain a holistic understanding of the scenario and citizens' needs. On the other, different strategies can be developed by each or a combination of stakeholders such as fact-checking, media and digital literacy programmes, technological tools and modifications on platforms and public policies.

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Link:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/report/dealing-with-disinformation/>

Post-truth, fake news and alternative facts

Chapter 3, *Faster than the future* (extract). Digital Future Society, February, 2020

By Aurélie Filippetti and Christian Salmon

The two words “fake news” point to everything bad about our democracies. The expression may seem diagnostic, yet it act as a tremendous screen and something that has become a powerful diversion and an-alibi for a state censorship that has obscured the systemic causes of why public expression has fallen into disrepute and its history since the nineteen-nineties.

The term “fake news” was used so much in 2017 that it was officially declared word(s) of the year by the Collins English Dictionary and the American Dialect Society. 2017, however, is not so much the year of “fake news” as the year in which Donald Trump turned it into a weapon against his detractors. He used the term to spread his lies —or “truthful hyperboles” as his ghostwriter calls them— prolifically on the sites of his supporters. With the expression “fake news”, Trump made use of social media’s power to disseminate to set the media on fire. “Every word, twisted in the hands of the spirits”, wrote Franz Kafka, “becomes a spear turned against the speaker”.

Although the mainstream media like to assume the role of news watchdogs, their own credibility is scant.

It is through an act of belief that we trust some and disbelieve other news. Factcheckers are the dupes of fake as they are concerned less with championing pure, indivisible truth than with regaining the margins of credibility that opinion stubbornly denies them. The farce of fake news therefore carries on with their knowing involvement.

Observers of the mainstream media and fact-checkers are unlikely to understand the meaning of such a reversal. What is at stake is not the struggle of truth against lies but the ability to tell them apart. It is not a question of restoring the truth as if there existed a reality devoid of fiction, a truth without ideology, like *The Truth* coming out of her well in Gérôme’s painting, fully naked and armed with her whip to chastise humankind.

Fake news can obviously be dismissed as a manifestation of what was previously known as disinformation —now in the age of social media—, or posited as a symptom of the transmutation of the democratic system by neoliberal reason, the impact of which is the shutting down of all forms of democratic deliberation.

This dismantlement has not happened overnight but rather in a period of over thirty years and was made possible by the exceptional conjunction of two revolutions: 1. In the sphere of capitalism through the financialisation and globalisation of markets; 2. In the sphere of information and communication technologies through the explosion of the Internet and the emergence of social media. In the nineteen-nineties, neoliberal political regimes took advantage of these exceptional circumstances to gain ground by thwarting criticism of the independent media and by making light of opposition or traditional checks and balances.

From the nineteen-nineties, politics entered the age of enactments. There emerged a never-ending spiral that chained encryption to decryption, hope to disappointment, and image to its deconstruction. Spin was only intended to change perceptions. Audiences, however, were no longer so easily fooled. The Watergate affair had seen to that.

The explosion of the Internet and twenty-four hour news yielded a veritable growth of anecdotes and stories, some more believable than others. Suspicion was the rule.

For a long time image and vision prevailed, yet from Nixon to Reagan images became less believable and their credibility diminished as they multiplied and scattered: seeing was no longer enough, one had to believe a story. This was the first stage in the spiral of discredit: from simple spin to the story, from image to the story, and from delusion to belief.

New digital media appeared in the mid nineteen-nineties. CNN was no longer the only news channel but was joined on the cable network by new channels such as Fox News. Internet became a means of mass communication and television, which is still by far the main source of information for Americans, was gradually absorbed by leisure industry giants such as Disney, Viacom and Time Warner. They would play a dominant role in the packaging of information and coverage of news and scandals. The new system of continuous information favoured an anecdotal version of events, a black and white representation of current affairs, and led to a thitherto unprecedented blurring of reality and fiction.

While the Bush administration did not invent this new media environment, often referred to by the neologism "infotainment", it was the first administration to take office after its emergence and it made brilliant use thereof. Frank Rich, New York Times columnist, noted that *"the chronicle of how a government told and sold its story is also, inevitably, a chronicle of an American culture that was an all- to-easy mark for the flimflam. The synergistic intersection between that culture and the Bush administration's narrative is a significant piece of the puzzle. Only an overheated 24/7 infotainment culture that had trivialized the very idea of reality (and with it, what once was known as "news") could be so successfully manipulated by those in power"*.

It was to counter this discredit that the Obama campaign launched its core message: the hope of a change that one could believe in. Obama was entrusted with a task to which he was apparently abandoned by Washington politicians in desperation: to bring repute to the presidential office, something would require more than just fancy rhetoric. Obama's campaign was both a technological and a narrative success. It managed to fulfil four different functions: storyline, framing, timing and networking, or a kind of a magic square. The age of radio with Roosevelt and the era of television with Kennedy were succeeded by Obama as the first candidate of the digital age.

Suspicion has now invaded the economy of discourse. The narrator has been discredited. The plot has been exposed. The term “fake news” not only refers to the proliferation of “fake news” on social media, but is also the object of suspicion itself.

All sources are flawed, all authors —whether political, scientific or religious— are discredited. This is an inexorable process: just as monetary inflation undermines confidence in currency, the proliferation of stories has ruined trust in narratives. The deviation of official accounts from people’s experience, particularly during the 2008 crisis, destroyed the credibility of all official accounts. Faster exchanges on social media and the shortening of messages encourage the logic of confrontation rather than of the story. Noise on social media has given rise to the buzz-maker in place of the mythmaker.

The system of globalized information has reached a point of entropy and now produces only disbelief. It is not so much that lies have become the norm and the truth is prohibited or disregarded, but rather that lies and the truth now cannot usually be told apart. Public debate no longer opposes content or information, but rather the ghosts that seek to convince us they are real. The collapse of confidence in language is no longer due only to the strategic effects of manipulation, but also to the appearance of a new discursive regime that keeps all discourse in belief mode. As Evgeny Morozov states: “an economy ruled by online advertising has produced its own theory of truth: truth is whatever produces most eyeballs”.

No one is spared. All sources of discourse are flawed, all “authors” —whether media, political, or even scientific (climate scepticism)— are discredited. We are all carried away by the spiral of discredit. Just as inflation ruins confidence in currency, data proliferation has ruined the credibility of all narrators.

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Writer and researcher, member of the Center for Research in Arts and Language (EHESS). Columnist in *Le Monde* and later in *Mediapart*, he is the author of fifteen essays and stories that include the best seller *Storytelling, bewitching the modern mind* (Verse) translated into fifteen languages and *the Age of Shock* (Fayard 2019).

Link:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/fasterthanthefuture/>

Deconstructing Disinformation. Speech of Manuel Szapiro, Head of the Commission's Regional Office in Barcelona, European Commission

MWC22, March 2022

Digital Future Society organized a debate to reflect on the evolution of the popularization of false information in the digital age, with the European Commission and the main organizations that work to detect and stop disinformation: *Newtral*, *Efe Verifica* and *Verificat*. During the session, the two pilot projects of the *Tech Against Disinformation* call will be announced.

[...] I would like to start by asking what disinformation is. I'm sure there are several definitions. The one we are giving in the Commission is that disinformation, for the sake of dialogue, is verifiably false or misleading information which is generated, presented and disseminated to intentionally deceive the public. So disinformation, put schematically, is manipulation of information with malicious intent. It is meant to hamper citizens' ability to make informed judgement and decisions. It erodes trust in public institutions and in the media. It also undermines our democratic fabric and also puts our elections at risk and impairs our freedom of expression. In a nutshell, it puts our democracy at risk and also our citizens' security in danger.

We have, for instance, seen that the pandemic and the infodemic have gone, unfortunately, hand in hand, and that disinformation can, as a result, very well affect the health, our health with a spreading of fake news on the mere existence of the virus or the benefits of vaccines, with a host of conspiracy theories attached to it.

Disinformation is also a growing concern for EU citizens. According to a 2018 Eurobarometer survey, 83% of Europeans consider that disinformation is a threat to democracy. 63% of younger Europeans, aged 15 to 24, say they come across fake news on a weekly basis, at least from what they can tell, and 51% of Europeans think that they have been exposed to disinformation online.

Now, speaking about online and the social media, the spread of disinformation is not new, of course. It is, however, very much facilitated by two core attributes, which are those of the attention economy on the one side and human psychology on the other side. Social media algorithms promote attractive, targeted content, irrespective, as you mentioned before with some striking examples, as to whether it is or not verified information. And on the human side, we know that there is ample evidence that what is predominantly novel and also negative sells better. If it bleeds, it leads, the journalist saying goes. Therefore, it has been proven that false narratives featuring emotional outrage produce way more engagement than evidence-based messages.

We have a recent study by the European Commission Joint Research Centre, which also shows that the spread of disinformation is shaped to a large extent by the network structure of social media that in turn affects entrenchment of attitudes and the segregation of bubbles or cliques of like-minded individuals.

Now, coming back to the issue of democracy. Disinformation, of course, plays against democracy. As we know, competition between political systems is mounting. For the first time in 20 years, we now have autocracies in the majority in the world, covering 54% of the global population. 20th century political philosopher Hannah Arendt is quoted to have said that the ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazis, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction no longer exists. Free media, academia and civil society must be able to play their role in stimulating open debate, free from malign interference, either foreign or domestic or both, as we see right now.

The European Commission presented in December 2020 a European Democracy Action Plan under the leadership of our Vice President for Transparency and Values, Věra Jourová, with three main pillars, which I will not expand here for sake of time. We can come back to them later. First, the promotion of free and fair elections. Second, the strengthening of media freedom, which is actually key to the third pillar, which is precisely countering disinformation heads on.

As stated also by the High Representative and Vice President Josep Borrell, we need to take decisive actions. We have a duty to our citizens to make them aware of false information, to expose the actors that are spreading it, and to step up our existing work in this area. So how do we do it? I've done a typology, I think, in four action paths which I consider relevant, from the European Commission. The first one is monitoring and debunking, and we will hear from the panel experts in this particular area with whom we want to continue to cooperate from the European Commission. Second one is joining efforts precisely. Third one is the legislation, which is important as well, and the fourth one is empowering citizens. [...]

Speaker:

Manuel Szapiro

Head of the Commission's Regional Office in Barcelona, European Commission

Link:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/videos/deconstructing-disinformation-dfs-at-the-mwc-barcelona-2022/>

Gear up against disinformation, with Carmela Ríos

Digital Future Society. June, 2021

Carmela Ríos is a professor and consultant at various universities and institutions in different areas that deal with social media: from Information factchecking to journalism on mobile devices and social media, through the latter as a working tool for journalism. In addition, she is a reference for her dissemination work on Twitter on how the polarization and misinformation emerging from social media impact politics. Previously, Ríos worked as a written and tv journalist for more than 20 years.

How does disinformation impact our life?

Disinformation is very much present in our lives; as a matter of fact, it is one of the focuses of my personal life and my work. It is a wide phenomenon that impacts the private sphere, as we all have witnessed in certain WhatsApp groups where, suddenly, the mood gets tense. We are caught off-guard by relatives or friends who are more openly radical than ever and especially unreceptive if they are told that they are sharing some false piece of information.

As long as the platforms business model is based on advertising and data extraction, can we expect them to counter misinformation?

Technological platforms have a historical responsibility when it comes to deactivating the mechanisms that, within their structures, produce and magnify disinformation and hate campaigns and change the perception of reality by millions of people around the world. Nobody was aware of the critical role those technological platforms would have in the emergence of disorderly and dangerous political environments, but now we know it. We need business models that have no tolerance with practices that turn social networks and other platforms into a kind of "Wild West" where might is right.

Lately the media have focused on the attack on the Capitol and Covid19 as cases of disinformation campaigns but, which disinformation campaigns are we specially not aware of today?

There are many examples, but I would highlight those identical "wild card" campaigns that arise in different parts of the world. Disinformation campaigns before an electoral process designed to arouse suspicions about postal voting such as the latter being controlled by the government. These tactics seek to discourage voting and have been displayed in the 2020 US elections as well as the Catalan and Madrid regional elections of this same year.

A study carried out by the University of Utah in the United States concludes that most Americans are not capable of detecting fake news, even if they believe they are. Do you think this is a global phenomena? How can technology help us detect fake news?

Indeed, a large part of the world's population is exposed to increasing rations of misinformation. Some studies even say that from next year on, Americans will receive more false than true information each day.

There is hope in the use of technology as dozens of organizations, universities and foundations around the world develop products that help detect or alert about hoaxes. Botometer, by the University of Indiana, helps identify whether the activity of a Twitter account is real or automated. The Maldita Hemeroteca bot for WhatsApp was granted European Press Prize in the Innovation category.

Facebook detected and deleted 4,500 million fake user profiles during the first 9 months of 2020. How critical are fake profiles to disinformation?

There is a worrying lack of knowledge about the extent of the phenomenon of disinformation and all the actors involved in it, such as fake user profiles.

Links:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/qanda/gear-up-against-disinformation-with-carmela-rios/>

The media and public authorities have a lot of work ahead so that we can achieve general awareness.

Users have no training nor tools to tell the nature of the profiles that spread the news, memes or rumors that end up on their mobiles. Fake profiles will always exist, but they will be less harmful to the extent that citizens know how to detect them and understand that they are being deceived.

How do you spot fake news?

I'm an information verification teacher. I did my training six years ago and I have been using verification tools since. Without these methods you can not be a journalist today.

The influence of social media on democracies, with Harvard researcher Laura Manley

Digital Future Society. September, 2020

Laura Manley is the Director of the Technology and Public Purpose (TAPP) Project at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. She leads a team of researchers, fellows, and affiliates to ensure emerging technologies are developed in ways that protect the public good. The TAPP Project was founded in 2018 by former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter to uphold public purpose in a world where recent technological innovations pose new and unforeseen risks to society. TAPP leverages a network of experts from Harvard University, MIT, and the Greater Boston Area, along with leaders in technology, government, business, and civil society.

Facebook has admitted to having played a role in the Rohingya genocide. According to The New York Times, “The campaign [...] included hundreds of military personnel who created troll accounts and news and celebrity pages on Facebook”. How are social media platforms impacting democracy around the world?

Social media companies have a profoundly negative effect on democracies. Democracies depend on the demos—the people—accessing, understanding, and using information to make decisions about the society they want to live in. But as countless behavioural science studies show, we simply aren't wired to act in a perfectly rational way: we respond most strongly to information that scares us, outrages us, and conforms to our existing biases and beliefs. Social media companies are incentivised and [designed](#) to exploit these natural human tendencies for profit. Social media companies become valuable by having users spend a lot of time on their sites; users spend more time on their sites when they are scared, outraged, or constantly seeing content that reinforces their preexisting beliefs—whether it is true or not.

How does this impact trust in the institutions?

The results are predictable. When users see information targeted to them, they view

contrary information as lies. When social media platforms enable politicians to pay them to [spread lies](#)—as Facebook does with its political advertisement policy—they sow distrust and discord. Training users to distrust politicians, and by extension the governments they serve in, hollows out faith in governing institutions. To be sure, social media networks do allow marginalised, dispersed individuals to connect with one another and to create virtual communities that are difficult, dangerous, or impossible to create in real life. They have been used to coordinate and spread positive social movements around the world, from democratic movements in Africa and the Middle East to the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. But on balance, it is hard to argue that social media platforms have furthered the cause of democracy, in democracies or in non-democracies.

Are social media platforms making enough effort to tackle this issue?

They aren't—not even close. Because they have grown so big, it isn't even clear that they could if they were serious about it. Facebook also harms democracies by allowing extremist content and conspiracy theories to flourish on its site. Look at “[Facebook's Top 10](#)” – their daily top performing posts. Mark Zuckerberg talks about free speech while creating a powerful vector to allow

the spread of hateful, dangerous, and false content available to a third of the world's population. Facebook was a vital vector for Russia to spread disinformation to interfere in the 2016 presidential election; something like 100 Russian operatives may have reached 150 million Americans with content designed to inflame, distract, and misinform. Other countries are likely to try to do the same in the run-up to this year's election, but Facebook has not [acted powerfully enough](#) to prevent it from happening again. One of its actions, the creation of its Oversight Board, won't occur until after the election. Facebook makes decisions that have deadly consequences; it doesn't always act like it understands the stakes of bad decisions. When it comes to fixing its many issues, it may be too big to succeed.

Social media platforms have assumed the role of news distribution sources, but have largely rejected the affiliated gatekeeper role of fact-checking the content they allow on their sites. Should they be held accountable for their content, specifically when it comes to hate speech, harassment and incitement of violence?

Yes, social media companies should be held accountable for the content they deliver to users. Social media networks are conduits of news to their users; according to the Pew Research Center, [62% of adults](#) in the United States report getting news from social media. Other conduits of news, such as newspapers, can be held accountable for publishing false information. Social media networks should be held to a similar standard. Predictably, social media companies would rather be viewed as [platforms](#) that host information than as publishers—a view that protects them from liability. But the algorithms that social media companies use to serve up content are rulesets that 'publish' information to users. Social media is a relatively new technology, and legislators have not yet developed regulations specific to the sector.

Instead, social media platforms have been viewed through the lens of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, passed in 1996, which says an "interactive computer service" can't be treated as the publisher or speaker of third-party content. This protects websites from lawsuits if a user posts something illegal, although there are exceptions for copyright violations, sex work-related material, and violations of federal criminal law.

Should platforms be regulated or even governed?

Of course! Regulation is why the food you eat and the water you drink are safe; why you can generally trust your local news outlet to give you fact-based information about your community; and why kids don't see countless advertisements for cigarettes and sugary cereals while they watch Sesame Street. Right now, users spent nearly 150 minutes per day on social networking sites. Social networking is expected to [reach 3.43 billion monthly active users in 2023](#)—about a third of the world's estimated population. Given the unparalleled reach and influence that these platforms have on our global society, it is unfathomable that they would, could, or should remain completely untouched by regulation or governance.

Are antitrust rulings justified?

In recent years, Facebook has increasingly been viewed as a monopolist taking improper action to maintain its competitive position and economic power—putting it in a position to be potentially broken up. However, judicial antitrust rulings in recent decades have relied on the consumer welfare standard—are consumers being harmed by higher prices? —to adjudicate antitrust claims. For users, Facebook's price is zero, complicating this approach. Big Tech, as it is today, is our generation's Standard Oil. It will eventually need government intervention to protect the general public.

As we've seen throughout history, it is possible to create new legislation that is responsive to Big Tech's unique factors and can protect consumers, promote competition, and prevent companies from becoming too

powerful. You can read more about our work on Big Tech and Democracy in our recent [report](#) and learn more about the TAPP Project at BelferCenter.org/TAPP.

Links:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/qanda/the-influence-of-social-media-on-democracies-by-harvard-researcher-laura-manley/>

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/videos/dfs-voices-how-has-social-media-impacted-political-campaigning/>

Why do we speak of infodemics, by Whitney Phillips

Digital Future Society. April, 2020

Whitney Phillips is assistant professor of communication and rhetorical studies at Syracuse University. She researches and teaches class on media literacy, mis- and disinformation, political communication, and digital ethics. She's the author of several books including "You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polluted Information", coauthored with Ryan Milner. Phillips's book "This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things" won the Association of Internet Researchers 2015 Nancy Baym best book award. She is regularly featured as an expert commentator in US and global news outlets, and her work on the ethics of journalistic amplification has been profiled by the Columbia Journalism Review, Niemen Journalism Lab, and Knight Commission on Trust, Media, and Democracy.

You recently said that curbing rumors is as important as curbing germs in the fight against coronavirus. Why is that?

There are, of course, some obvious and important differences between viral spread in an epidemiological sense and viral spread in an informational sense. But when false and misleading information cascades unchecked across social media, it can be as harmful as the virus itself—not because the information infects people, but because that information can impact how people protect themselves (or not) from the virus. Those dangers are twofold. First of all, so much confusing, conflicting, unverified information online can send people into an absolute panic, triggering them to behave in harmful ways offline. Toilet paper hoarding is one example. The same deluge of online rumors can make other people shut down entirely, maybe because the stress is too much, or because the volume is too loud. Either way, those people won't have access to the information they need to keep themselves and their families safe. That possibility speaks to the second danger of false and misleading COVID-19 information: that true information could be drowned out

in a sea of unconfirmed rumor—again risking the possibility that the public won't know what they need to know, threatening the health of the entire community.

What are rumors and why do we share them?

Rumors can include all kinds of information, from second-hand accounts of hospital conditions to stories about neighbors who have fallen ill to details about state assistance. They're anything that people have heard from other people, and can map onto or overlap with [legends](#). The trickiest thing about rumors is that sometimes they turn out to be true! So, just because something is a rumor doesn't necessarily mean it's false. It means, at the time the information is spread, it's not confirmed. It could be right. It could be wrong. Not knowing one way or the other, yet spreading the information anyway, can inadvertently trigger the two dangers described above. As for why people spread them, sometimes people share rumors for malicious or underhanded reasons—but very often, particularly in times of crisis (Kate Starbird breaks this history down [here](#)),

people spread rumors because they're desperately trying to help their friends and neighbors make sense of traumatic and confusing circumstances, particularly when official information is lacking or difficult to find (or trust).

Is the drive to do so bigger in the digital world than it was before?

People have always shared rumors. As Kate Starbird (linked above) explains, rumors function as "collective sensemaking" efforts. Digital spaces make it much easier to spread rumors, not just because of tools designed specifically for sharing, but because of tools designed specifically for archiving and searching. Before social media, the rumors you encountered were "your" rumors, typically confined to a specific location or affinity group. Now, we can encounter anybody's rumor with just a few clicks. So, logistically, there are just more rumors to sift through online. Beyond that, not knowing where a rumor originated, or what the poster's intentions were (since by the time we encounter the rumor, it could have passed through ten million hands), makes assessing information increasingly difficult. So the impulse to share rumors isn't new. But the consequences and complications definitely are.

Which are the consequences of sharing information which is not true?

The consequences of sharing false information can vary greatly depending on the circumstance. In the case of a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, those consequences can be dire, even deadly. For instance, the insistence among some groups in the U.S. that the coronavirus is a "hoax"—or at the very least isn't as bad as everyone on television is saying—undermines physical distancing efforts, which is the only chance

we have to flatten the curve. People who have heard the virus isn't that bad, or that only old people with pre-existing conditions will die from it, or whatever other falsehood about the virus, are the most likely to engage in dangerous behaviors like continuing to visit with friends or not taking the proper precautions when going to the grocery store. That doesn't just put that person at risk, but all the people they come into contact with over the next 14 days. The careful physical distancing of some can be unraveled by the physical proximity of others; any information that encourages people to take those risks poses an immediate, widespread threat to public health.

What are the intentions behind misinformation?

Misinformation is false information shared unintentionally. That's very different from disinformation, which is false information shared deliberately. In other words, people who spread misinformation aren't trying to share false information. It's important to recognize that there's no ill-intent (the people who share misinformation aren't villains). At the same time, the distinction between mis- and disinformation doesn't really matter! The false information still spreads regardless, and in the worst cases, can be intercepted and weaponized by people who do seek to sow chaos and confusion. That's why I like to use the term "polluted information" rather than trying to parse motivations. What matters most is the fact that the information spreads, and the impact it has on the information landscape. Why someone spreads the information matters, of course, but is something we often can't know as a story pings back and forth between audiences. So the better questions to ask are: what does this information do, and why has it been allowed to do it?

Can misinformation cause health issues?

Certainly related to COVID-19, polluted information can lead to further epidemiological spread. Again, information doesn't infect people in the same way the actual virus does, but it can create the conditions for the virus to infect more people. The health effects of polluted information are more widespread than that, however; around the globe, people find themselves gripped with significant trauma and mental health struggles. Much of that stems from the effects of the virus itself, and all its social and economic ramifications—but polluted information about the virus contributes to those mental health concerns as well. Anxiety, depression, panic, trauma: all are amplified by the COVID-19 infodemic. And all can lower immunity! Which is even more reason to take polluted information seriously; it can make you emotionally and physically sick.

You've also said that a communitarian focused approach could help navigating the current information crisis. Could you give us some details about that?

Communitarianism is an ethical approach that seeks to secure the health, safety, and future for the collective. This ethos is built into public health models; you wash your hands not just to protect yourself from germs, but to avoid spreading your germs to other people. Unfortunately,

communitarianism is not built into public discourse models. Particularly in the US, there's much more emphasis on a person's right to say whatever they want without censorship. It's important to protect individual rights, of course, but it's equally important to protect the health of the collective—for one thing, when the group is doing well, the individual is much more likely to do well also! We need to apply what's already common sense within a public health context to how we respond to information online. The healthier our shared information spaces, the healthier we will be as individuals, feeding back into the overall health of the community.

Can you give us some tips to discern false information from true information?

This can be extremely difficult to do! In times of crisis, stories are still unfolding; details have yet to be confirmed; information is often woefully incomplete. The things that look true at breakfast might be disproven by lunch. The most important tip is for people to remember that just because they think they're helping, doesn't mean they actually are. We can all contribute to the infodemic, regardless of our motivations. The goal is to cultivate the healthiest online communities possible—and the way we do that is to think about the well-being and safety of all the other people we share our spaces with. We thrive together and we suffer together. Our relationship to information should reflect those connections.

Link:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/qanda/whitney-phillips-on-the-covid-19-infodemics/>

The civic hacker that became Digital Minister of Taiwan. Interview with Audrey Tang, Digital Minister for Taiwan

Digital Future Society. April, 2020

Audrey Tang is a civic hacker and Taiwan's Digital Minister in charge of Social Innovation. She is known for revitalizing global open source communities such as Perl and Haskell. Audrey served on Taiwan National Development Council's open data committee and K-12 curriculum committee; and led the country's first e-Rulemaking project. Prior to joining the cabinet, Audrey was a consultant with Apple on computational linguistics, with Oxford University Press on crowd lexicography, and with Socialtext on social interaction design.

You describe yourself as a civic hacker and a “conservative anarchist”. Can you tell us what that means and why you identify with these terms?

Yes. A civic hacker is not a cybersecurity hacker. In cybersecurity, we have white hat hackers who will get into the vulnerabilities and security flaws of the system and tell you how to repair it, or there are black hat hackers that use those flaws for personal gain and benefits. We're not exploiting those loopholes in democracy for personal gain. Rather, we're about building new tools in a democracy that can better reflect the collective will and rough consensus of the entire citizenship and entire society. That is what civic hacker means.

Conservative, for me, means conserving the various different cultures in Taiwan. In Taiwan, we have 20 different national languages, many indigenous people and waves of immigrants and people from all over the world. Taiwan is a very cosmopolitan country. What we have in Taiwan is instead of one culture dominating the other in the name of progress and actually making other cultures lose their diversity and inclusion, we have put a lot of emphasis on conserving views from different cultures.

What is social innovation and what led you into this particular area?

Social innovation means very simply **innovation that is open to participation**

from society, and at the same time good for society. Whereas the civic technologist focuses on SDGs 16, which is about institution and democracy, social innovators can be found in every other sustainable goal as well, from climate change to zero poverty and hunger, and things like that.

What draws me to social innovation is that it's a much more inclusive term than participatory climate action, civic tech for democracy, and so on. These are all good, but it's actually only through working across silos of innovators that we can truly see that a lot of the patterns that we discover, for example, crowdfunding and crowdsourcing, apply to the entire swathe of social innovation scenarios regardless which sector it originates from.

Let's now speak about Taiwan and radical transparency. In the 1990s Taiwan remained controlled by martial law, and yet today it sits among Asia's most progressive and principled democracies. Taiwan boasts one of the region's most transparent public administrations. What led to this massive shift in paradigm for Taiwan?

Definitely, I will say it was personal computers and then the Internet. Taiwan was one of the main manufacturing places for personal computers. When I was young, everybody had very early access to personal computers, because it was all made in Taiwan.

I would say that in Taiwan, the people who innovate with technology and people who innovate with bureaucracy are the same people.

We are the first generation of people who can innovate in both regards. That gives a civic spirit so that people feel that we own democracy because it is relatively new to us, it's only 30 years old.

We have so much to learn from you, really. Taiwan also ranks among the world's top 10 digital governments using emerging technologies to inspire greater public engagement with government. What key lesson can be drawn from Taiwan government experiments in open, technologically driven governance?

There are two key lessons. The first is that the government should trust citizens without requiring the citizens to trust back. By saying this, we mean transparency as in making the state transparent to citizens, but we must never ask citizens to be transparent to the state, because that would be authoritarianism. We need to be very careful about our use of the words like transparency and define it always in a way that the government trusts citizens first.

The other lesson I would like to share is that we're always bringing technology to people, rather than asking people to come to technology. This way people are getting more included into the democratic process instead of just forcing people to speak the language of bureaucracy, or maybe traveling to Taipei to deliver a five minute speech in a public hearing. If you're asking people to come to technology you're actually excluding more and more people.

How important is it that the private and public sector innovate together?

In Taiwan, we say that the social sector has the most legitimacy. We try not to say "third sector," because it somehow sounds like they have a bronze medal or something like that, so we say social sector. The private sector has plenty of room to innovate, for example, to make more precise measurements, to have better transaction rates on the blockchain technology that underlies this shared ledger. The private sector always conforms to the social norm, just as the public sector does, and when we both conform to the social norm, we naturally become partners.

There is less of this public-private tension, between the state owning something and the private sector owning something, because whatever we do, we're doing this for the common goals that we share.

Your guiding principle of 'radical transparency' seeks to inspire greater democratic participation and empowerment of citizens through digital infrastructure – to inform, collaborate, and humanise interactions between the government and its people. Are governments and cities ready for greater input from citizens?

Yeah. I think all governments are ready for more input. What they are not ready for is more noise. The main thing that people worry about is that if you open a comment board, then the astroturfers and trolls will dominate the day and all you get is noise and you get no signal from it. A lot of the design decisions can basically make a toxic society unintentionally, but if you design with the intention of pro-social conversations that look to reflect people's true feelings and true, authentic social preferences rather than positions or ideologies, then you can get useful signals just by cross moderating and assistive intelligence.

Let's now speak a bit about emerging technology and cybersecurity. What is Taiwan currently doing to foster innovation and technology?

In Taiwan, what we are doing is making sure that everybody has access to innovation and technology. We put a lot of emphasis on education, and we just rolled out a new curriculum last year that focuses on digital competence rather than literacy. When we empower all the different schools in Taiwan, a lot of people ask me, what about people in rural places, in places without a lot of teachers that are specialized in such skills. The answer is that we make use of what we call co-teaching. We have a rural teacher that takes care of the learning incentive, the inspiring of those teacher-student relationships in a day-to-day fashion. They may not be experts in, for example, digital rights or things like that, but they can connect them to a larger municipal classroom, and so the two classes sit virtually in the same room through wall-sized projections and immersive reality.

5G connectivity, AI and Blockchain will create huge opportunities worldwide. What are the biggest social and environmental challenges that can be solved by data, connectivity and emerging technology?

I think it is social distrust. As I said, the previous generation of antisocial media really created different silos in society that tend to reinforce existing ideologies that exclude certain people. We are dealing with a more fragmented global society now. Most people are holding very different views across different countries, or even within a country across different cultures. A trans-cultural vision of society where people understand how they can step into other cultural shoes and describe their own upbringing using these cultural languages rather than writing them off, I think that is one of the main societal challenges.

We can see it, for example, whenever there is an emergency that happens that makes society panic or fear about a certain thing. For example, just recently, early February this year in Taiwan, there is massive speculation on the price of surgical masks. We're not alone. Everywhere in East Asia from Hong Kong, through Singapore, through Japan, there is a social norm where people, because they don't want to infect their community, puts on surgical masks just on the slightest flu-like symptoms.

It's a different social norm compared to European cities, but it is true in Asian society. In Taiwan, there's a lot of uncertainty and doubt about the accessibility of the surgical mask. Within 48 hours, our team of national health insurers designed – and I personally coded – a mask map. Everybody can see where the nearby pharmacies are or the stock level is, and refresh every 30 seconds, so that you can go into a pharmacy, present your NHI card, and get a pair of masks immediately, and you can refresh your phone. There are more than 100 different applications based on this real-time open data, and you see its stock deplete by two.

You trust the pharmacists more, because you know that they're tapping into the right shared open data pool. The pharmacists trust the government more, because they know that the distribution is fair and equal. The government trusts the citizens more, because then there is no way to speculate if you know that there is going to be more masks supplied at lower prices as the days goes on.

There's very little speculation and no panic when it comes to masks distribution in Taiwan. That shows the power of the connectivity and the radical transparency that people can really reflect on the current real set of data that describes the society and what the society cares about.

Instead of accusing each other to pollute the data stream through speculation and things like that, people devote their energy into making this commonsense of the sensing of the current fear, uncertainty, and doubt, into a creative energy. This is just one of the recent examples of how a social fear can be mitigated through radical transparency and open data.

As governments around the world expand their digital resources, they also inevitably become bigger targets for hackers. How can honest governments stay ahead of the ‘bad guys’ and preserve public trust?

I think the most important thing is to make sure that the white hat hackers become a preferred career for people interested in cybersecurity. In Taiwan, we allocate three to five percent of all new government ministerial initiatives on cybersecurity alone, penetration testing, advanced cyber threat hunting, designing for the cybersecurity defense in depth, and things like that, to make sure that people who are interested in cybersecurity decide to work with the government, and get paid handsomely. It is this culture of cherishing the white hat hacker and making sure that it is a career choice that people feel proud entering into, can we truly empower the general citizenry to have awareness on cybersecurity, rather than over-relying on a handful of experts.

How do you feel education will transform worldwide with the rise of digital learning?

I think mainly, digital learning enables us to see the different cultures as collaborators, rather than as others or aliens. If all you learn is with people with a very similar cultural upbringing. It's very easy to develop us versus them behavior or thinking that talks about the social needs internally but cares less about these global phenomena. It's only through establishing global norms about transparency, about accountability, about access to data, and things like that can we truly solve global-scale issues.

Altogether, I think this makes a digital culture that is shared among all the digital natives, no matter which original culture they came from. That in turn provides a much more collaborative nature to the younger citizenry, so they're more prepared to network with their very different cultural counterparts across different time zones to tackle global challenges.

Do you think the digital gender divide is likely to disappear over the next few years or do you see it widening?

It will disappear in some places, and it will widen in other places. As I said, technology is just an amplifier. In some corners of the world with a good balance and a good mechanism design, that is participatory, we will see more and more divides just dissipate without people even caring about the particular mechanism that enabled it to happen, because it will be just the social norm. This is what Taiwan is. In other places where the gender divides are widening, it is not because of the Internet. Rather, it is because the Internet served as an amplifier to propagate the social norm that women are only fit for something or the men are only fit for something. You probably have to start in a more inclusive and equal fashion in your philosophy, in your language, in your mechanism design, and the Internet amplifies that part.

You once said, “I’ve been shutting reality off and lived almost exclusively on the net for many years, because my brain knows for sure that I am a woman, but the social expectations demand otherwise”. In what ways did the net provide a safe haven for you? To what extent do you think the internet has helped us grow as a society, to become more open and understanding, particularly when it comes to gender and identity?

One of the core promises of the Internet is that there is no minority on the Internet.

There are only communities. In traditional cultural thinking, we would call them subcultures, as if they are somehow smaller parts of the society. On the Internet, those subcultures are actually the core of the Internet communities. There really is no mainstream culture of the Internet. What does that even mean?

This kind of value-based community reinforces the idea that we are people that can contribute to the society, as opposed to a society that says you can contribute but only if you're dressed in some way, or if you speak in some way, or things like that. It's less about contribution. It's more about social conformity in the face-to-face reality. Our culture is now the mainstream when it comes to politics, because the top politicians demonstrate their use of Internet memes, and cat pictures, and things like that. It's like a gradual coming out of the subcultures.

Let's speak now about the future. What emerging technology do you predict will be the most significant disruptor of digital government within the next decade?

One of the most important disruptions will be the people realizing that collective intelligence is not only good for discovering and defining social problems, but also for developing and delivering solutions as well.

With the democratization of the materials as well as the knowhow of building, and also a renewed understanding about circular economy, people are equipped then to join the production process without relying on a central, massive, scalable factory of conversation with the existing private sector.

If we only empower the small and median enterprises, we'll never get sufficient goods that feeds everybody in the citizenry. That is going to change because of democratization and access to the knowhow and the change from a linear economy mindset into a circular economy mindset.

And to close, what one piece of advice would you give to young people starting a career in innovation communication technology today?

I would say, to quote Leonard Cohen, he said, *"There is a crack in everything, and that is how the light gets in"*. Basically, be imperfect. Publish your drafts, making sure there is plenty of typo, because Ward Cunningham once observed that if you deliver something, it's perfect... If you ask a question, and the question is so meticulously worded, nobody will answer you. If you provide a draft of a bad answer, all the experts come out and correct your mistake. That means that the currency of collaboration is actually mistakes, the cracks in everything.

If you dare to make mistakes, if you publish all your immature thoughts, and have a taste of getting people who complain about it, who correct you, and start networking with them as best friends, then you can make the innovation network work with your contribution in no time. If you want to spend years perfecting your contribution, not only it risks getting outdated by the time you're ready for it, it actually prevents other people from participating in your creative work. The earlier in a creative work that you can start a network of drafts, the better. The later, the more perfectionist you are, the less the innovation community can do with you.

Link:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/interviews/the-civic-hacker-that-became-digital-minister-of-taiwan-interview-with-audrey-tang/>

Fact-checking: Disinformation vs democracy with Alberto Barrón-Cedeño

Digital Future Society Voices, July 2021

[...] If a human being is educated, she or she can spot very quickly if something is plagiarized or if something is fake. It is impossible for a human being to keep track of all the information available. We need automated systems to identify interesting documents, documents which seem to be fake or documents which seem to have been re-used from another document. And then just filtering out interesting elements and giving them to the user to say, look, please pay attention to this case or to this document because there's something fishy here.

A phenomenon that we are observing nowadays, probably the last five or six years, has been the creation of information bubbles. People tend to follow other users who are aligned with their point of view. If I keep consuming the same contents which have been analysed or created from the same point of view, I'm just going to reinforce my own point of view. And that's very dangerous for democracy because it's not going to be about finding agreements anymore. It is about convincing everybody else that I'm right. [...]

Speaker:

Alberto Barrón-Cedeño

Senior Assistant Professor at Alma Mater Studiorum, at the Università di Bologna

Link to full video:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/videos/dfsvoices-fact-checking-disinformation-vs-democracy/>

Fight against disinformation with Cristina Tardáguila

Digital Future Society Voices, June 2021

[...] The main challenge we have today is misinformation. It is a collective global issue, which puts lives at risk and can even destroy democracies. It is about time that we work together and think about solutions, because disinformation is not going to go away any time soon. We need journalists, data verifiers, but also social media platforms, teachers any citizen interested, in maintaining the truth, and each one of them has a role. It is very, very important that next generations leave school understanding what the difference is between real news and fake news.

The International Fact-Checking Network brings together more than 90 organizations that specialize in data verification around the world. It is a community that stays connected and that, collectively, fights so that there are more fact-checkers in the world, so that there is less disinformation, so that the platforms mobilize in this fight, so that politicians and disinformers in general understand that they also have to share this fight with us. [...]

Speaker:

Cristina Tardáguila

Journalist and founder of Agência Lupa, the main platform to combat disinformation in Brazil.

Link to full video:

<https://digitalfuturesociety.com/videos/31656/>

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Philippine presidential election

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- [Hundreds of Facebook Pages Removed as Philippines Vote Nears](#)
- [Last Week Tonight with John Oliver – Philippines election \(a partir del minute 11:55\)](#)
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