

16Forum: Youth Assembly

Issue: Limiting online misinformation

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INTRODUCTION

Online social networks have many benefits as a medium for fast, widespread information dissemination. They provide fast access to large scale news data, sometimes even before the mass media, with which it is meant the means of communication that reach large numbers of people in a short time, such as television, newspapers, magazines, and radio. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, offer ground for generation and distribution of misinformation, and therefore online misinformation has been a huge problem in the last few years. While the ease of information propagation in social networks can be very beneficial, it can also have disruptive effects. The spread of misinformation becomes greater through social networks and social messaging, which begs the question of the extent of regulation and self-regulation of companies providing such services. In response, social media platforms have announced actions to limit the spread of false content. However, fabricated stories posing as serious journalism are not likely to go away as they have become a means for some writers to obtain their income and potentially influence the public. Individuals who encounter false information on social media may actively spread it further, by sharing or otherwise engaging with it. It is really important the fact that people post false information online are more likely to be distracted rather than biased. Noteworthy is also the fact that some politicians also play a great role in the spread of online misinformation in order to win more votes. However widespread the problem is, opportunities to glimpse misinformation in action are, unfortunately, rare. Lastly, there are



The figure describes the ratio of verified information (27.3%) and the amount of misinformation or inconclusive data countering that (72.7%).

publisher categories, which are trying to pass on their beliefs to other people and to these criminals, organizations, politicians, white nationalist groups.¹

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Online²

All actions, which are performed on the internet. Online actions include, but are not limited to, investments, applications, trades, advertisements, commerce and retail. Once online, users can create accounts and databases as well.

Misinformation³

False information, usually in the form of a video clip, a social media post, a real or an edited picture. Such false pieces of media can be spread inadvertently without the audience realising that the information is false or inaccurate.

Disinformation

Disinformation can be found in the same forms as misinformation, but it is created for political or economic purposes in order to deceive, mislead and influence the public. Disinformation can threaten our values and principles undermining our safety, security, communities and trust.

Fake news

It is used to describe inaccurate information or misleading content that is often sensational or emotive and it may include misinformation, disinformation or both, even though it is being reported in the news or in the social media,

Social media

Social media includes all the websites on the internet, which are used for organizational communication with external parties, such as customers, vendors, and the public at large and also for internal communication and social interaction within the enterprise.⁴

¹ "Anatomy of an Online Misinformation Network." PLOS, 27 Apr. 2018, www.journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0196087.

² "Online." Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus, www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/online.

³ Gebel, Meira. "Misinformation Vs. Disinformation: What to Know About Each Form of False Information, and How to Spot Them Online." Business Insider, 15 Jan. 2021, www.businessinsider.com/misinformation-vs-disinformation.

⁴ "SOCIAL MEDIA | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus, www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social-media.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Causes of online misinformation

People usually do not post online misinformation with the aim to provide false information to the public most of the time. People tend to blindly share and repost quotes, images and other pieces of media who carry mis- and/or disinformation. This happens because internet users may rarely use their critical thinking skills to tell right from wrong apart. In addition, many fail to fact-check the data they view on the internet, and therefore support whichever piece of news they have been exposed to most.

Effects of misinformation

Since information and communication technology is such a vital element in children's livelihood nowadays, young people are particularly vulnerable to believing whatever incorrect fact has been shared online. Young people spend a significant amount of their time watching television, playing online games, chatting, searching for people online who they can communicate with. Not only that, but pre-teens and teenagers are especially invested in broadening their worldview and quickly become interested in social sciences, such as politics. If they do not have the right tools and resources to differ correctness from lies and absurd statements, they are very likely to be led down the wrong path without them even registering it. Young people rely heavily on information circulated online for their knowledge of the world and how they perceive reality. Many parents do not have sufficient technical competence to keep up with their children's online activity or educate them about the risks they might face.

Awareness on the spread of online misinformation

As one-to-many communications developed in the 20th century, especially with the advent of radio and television, satirical news evolved, sometimes being mistaken and misinterpreted as the real thing in new consumers' minds. Finally, the arrival of the internet in the late 20th century, followed by social media in the 21st century, dramatically multiplied risks of misinformation.

The issue of online misinformation has gained more attention by both researchers and governments after the 2016 U.S presidential election. False information was then spread all around social media platforms. Therefore, it has been also stated that inaccurate news can increase the political polarization and partisan conflict during an election campaign and the

voters can be negatively influenced by the incorrect information. That can have, of course, an impact on the final results.

Online misinformation “actors”

There are two publisher categories. The first one includes all the organizations, which are trying to pass on their beliefs to other people. To this category, political and activist organizations are also included. It is common for various groups to spread misinformation online, not only to support their organization, and thus reduce all the other competitive organizations, but also to promote a specific narrative to the public.

To the abovementioned category, criminal organizations are included as well. It is clear that the criminal groups and terrorist formations are not using the media in the way that they should do, but in contrast disperse false information to accomplish their goals. A recent example is the ISIS terrorist organization that diffuses false information online in OSNs for propaganda purposes. Specifically, they create a very dangerous situation for recruitment purposes. This constitutes a notably hazardous condition for the population as there are several examples of individuals from European countries recruited by ISIS that ended-up perpetrating terrorist acts.

It is clear that in the last years the white supremacist and white nationalist groups have used the web in hopes to recruit new members. A notorious example is the “manosphere”, which is a free collection of blogs and forums dedicated to men’s rights, sexual strategy, and misogyny. Such groups can use the internet platform in order to draw people's attention to their causes or to present themselves as more serious.

The politicians also play a huge role in the spread of online misinformation. Throughout history, governments were always linked with the propagation of false information. Nowadays, bearing in mind that digital information has increased, governments share specific information on the Internet, which is not always trustworthy, so as to shape public opinion on specific topics. With the increase of digital information, governments exploit social media to shape public opinion on specific topics.

The pizzagate incident

One of the most well-known misinformation incidents of the last decades is named “Pizzagate”. Social media and the Web had played a critical role in the story's dissemination that went “viral” before and during the 2016 United States presidential election period. It all began in March 2016, when the personal email account of John Podesta, Clinton's campaign manager, was hacked due to a phishing scam. Because of that hacking incident, Podesta's emails were

revealed to the public in November 2016 by Wikileaks.org “a multi-national media organization and associated library”. Defenders of the Pizzagate story claimed the emails contained coded messages connected to child pornography. These codes also related several U.S. pizza restaurants and influential politicians of the Democratic Party with an alleged human trafficking and child molestation organization. One of those restaurants supposedly involved was the Comet Ping Pong restaurant and pizzeria in Washington, D.C. The result of this misinformation spread was the accusation of a man from North Carolina, who traveled to Comet Ping Pong to investigate the story by himself and fired a rifle inside the restaurant. In the span of a few weeks, a false rumor that Hillary Clinton and her top aides were involved in various crimes snowballed into a wild conspiracy theory that they were running a child-trafficking ring out of a Washington pizza parlor. The fast evolution of the false theory revealed how a powerful mix of fake news and social media led an armed North Carolina man to investigate the rumors about the pizza place.

COVID-19 vaccine misinformation

December 8th, 2020, the first COVID-19 vaccine was administered, an event which of course, led to widespread misinformation about its effects, safety, efficacy, ingredients, and purpose. Examples include claims that the covid vaccination contains “microchips” that can be used to track and control people, claims that the vaccine causes infertility or death, claims that the vaccine will alter human DNA and last but not least, claims that the pharmaceutical industry has fabricated the results of vaccine trials or covered up harmful side effects to boost its profits.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

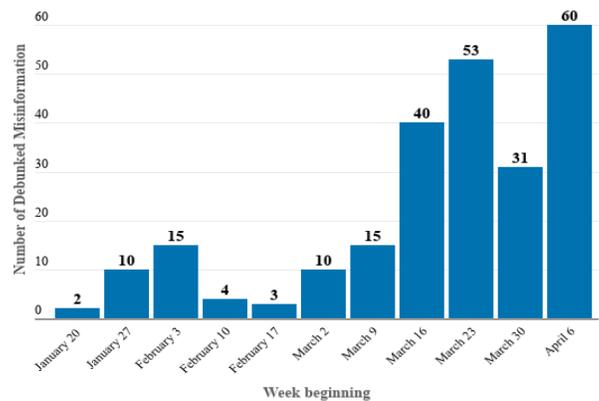
India

A study has taken place concerning the online misinformation in India by scholars from the University of Michigan, released on April 18, 2020, and it has indicated a rise in the number of debunked stories, particularly after the announcement of *Janata* curfew, which is a self quarantine request by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In his address to the nation on March 19, PM Modi requested all citizens to stay indoors, barring those in essential services. on Sunday, March 22, from 7 am to 9 pm and the countrywide lockdown two days later, to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Based on this study, in the third week of January 2020, the occurrences of online misinformation had increased from merely two to 60 by the first week of April 2020. Though fake stories around a cure for COVID-19 lessened in this period, false claims that affected people emotionally increased.

Greece

Increase In The Number of (Debunked) Misinformation
January to April 2020



Sources: Study on Misinformation (Released on April 18, 2020)



The figure describes the rise in (uncovered) misinformation from January to April of 2020. The acceleration in misinformation is clear to see.

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⁵ "THE EMERGING FAKE ERA." ANSHIKA PANDEY, 7 Oct. 2020, www.noytedao.blogspot.com/2020/10/the-emerging-fake-era.html.

Distributing misleading information on Greek media, social media, and the Internet is also not a new phenomenon. A recent study about propaganda on Greek media, which took place in 2018, elaborates further on the issue and concludes that there was always false information and false facts in Greece's national social media platforms and outlets.

Nigeria

Two years ago, a photo was released during the election campaign in social media, which showed the opposition leader shaking hands with Donald Trump. Consequently, serious harm was caused all over Africa, as the relations between Nigeria and USA aren't friendly since the 25th of December, 2009, when Obama Administration came up with a strong policy statement which included Nigeria on US terrorist watch list, as a young Nigerian Umar Farouk attempted a suicide attack on the USA.

USA

Online misinformation has also been a huge problem in the USA. According to a 2016 opinion poll, in the US only 32% of the population trusts the media. Among Republican supporters, the rate is only 14%⁶. They say that the media has a liberal bias and is suspicious; and that there is no trustworthy conservative media. In addition, the fact that conventional media charge fees to access their sites has created the niche for the free sites that post fake news. Online misinformation was the reason that led to violent unrest at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, which has gone beyond false claims and has reached the point of "radicalization". Before a pro-Trump mob stormed the U.S. Capitol, Donald Trump delivered a speech and posted it on social media, where he claimed that the media is the biggest problem that a society has, single biggest problem, the fake news. He also falsely stated that he had won the elections, and he won it by a landslide. People in fact believed him and they reposted on different platforms his speech. This consequently led to the misinformation of the citizens and that was a reason why the violent unrest took place at the Capitol.

Indonesia

The government of Indonesia enforced the so called Indonesian Ministerial Regulation 5/2020⁷. The regulation was first enforced November 24th, 2020, despite having undergone minimal

⁶ "19 Real Events Caused by Fake News in the US." Marubeni Corporation, www.marubeni.com/en/research/potomac/backnumber/19.html.

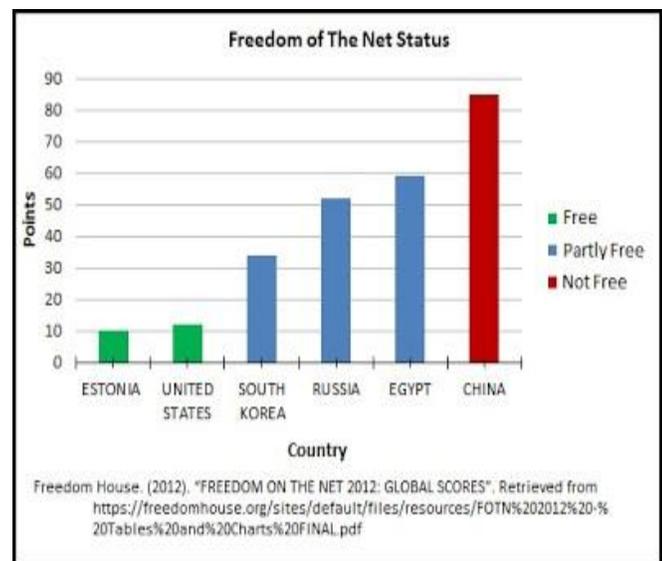
⁷ "Indonesia: Suspend, Revise New Internet Regulation." Human Rights Watch, 20 May 2021, www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/21/indonesia-suspend-revise-new-internet-regulation.

consultation, and it was kept hidden from the general public until a later point that year. The Regulation revokes Minister of Communications and Informatics ('MoCI') Regulation No. 36, which had been passed back in 2014.

The Regulation demanded digital sites and service platforms to allow the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology to access their data and systems for 'supervision' purposes by the deadline of May 24th. Those who failed to comply by the strict deadline would be blocked from Indonesia's network and would therefore be inaccessible to Indonesia's civilians. MR5/2020 has the right of governing social media, as well as various other platforms used for sharing content as well as communication services, digital stores and marketplaces, search engines, digital data processors, as well as internet banking systems. Furthermore, the regulation requires companies to appoint local contacts which will act on the Government's requests. The fact that there are such appointed persons makes companies prone to coming to terms with unnecessary and overboard censorship acting against them, which will lead to both irrational amounts of censorship, manipulation of citizens' privacy and most importantly, breaching people's access to reliable information.

China

Chinese social media is heavily censored through a system of intermediary liability in which the government relies on private companies to implement content controls. Outside of this system the Chinese authorities at times utilize public punishment to repress social media users. Under China's regulatory environment, individuals are subject to punishment such as fines and detention for their expressions online. China's constitution affords its citizens freedom of speech and press, but the opacity of Chinese media regulations allows authorities to crack down on news stories by claiming that they expose state secrets and endanger the country. Lastly, websites, such as Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and some Google services that the government deems potentially dangerous are fully blocked or temporarily "blacked out" during periods of controversy, such as the June 4 anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre or Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement protests in the fall of 2014. Freedom of the Net measures the level of freedom of the internet and digital



The chart shows the average net status freedom in 6 nations, The Republic of China being the only of which having no net status freedom at all.

⁸ "Censorship - Team 2 Unit 6." Google Sites, www.sites.google.com/site/cap104team2unit6/censorship.

media in all countries. The diagram above shows the levels of freedom in each country and namely, if there is free, partly free or not free freedom of the net status. Despite the fact that China has roughly 591 million internet users and about 91% of these users have social media, social networks are greatly controlled by the Chinese government. ⁹

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
April 21 st , 2008	The Indonesian Electronic Information and Transactions Law is enforced
December 25 th , 2009	The Obama administration enforces a strict policy, making relations between the US and Nigeria not particularly friendly
2016	During the US election (widespread amount of misinformation arousing in social media that Trump had won both the popular vote and the Electoral College, when in fact, Trump had only won the Electoral.)
2016	False claims were posted on social media, namely on Twitter and Facebook concerning the Brexit votes.

⁹ "Censorship - Team 2 Unit 6." Google Sites, sites.google.com/site/cap104team2unit6/censorship.

March – November 2016	The Pizzagate incident
20 October 2018	A post found on numerous right-wing Facebook groups, which claimed that caravan migrants behaved violently against law enforcement.
January 3 rd , 2019	Resolution 2255 is adopted
May 8 th , 2019	POFMA is passed by the Republic of Singapore
March 19 th , 2020	The Janata curfew is enforced in India
April 18 th , 2020	'Online Misinformation in India' Study of the University of Michigan
August 2020	UNICEF Resource Pack is published
November 24 th , 2020	The Indonesian Ministerial Regulation 5/2020 is passed
December 8 th , 2020	First COVID-vaccine is administrated
January 6, 2021	Capitol incident
March 25 th , 2021	Resolution A/RES/75/267 is passed by the UN GA
May 24 th , 2021	Administration deadline for Indonesian businesses according to Regulation 5/2020

24-31 st October annually	Global Media and Information Literacy Week
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RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS



Resolution 2255 (2019)¹¹The Parliamentary Assembly's Resolution, adopted on January 3rd, 2019, deeply focuses on means of combatting and responding to online misinformation. In the 3rd operative clause, the assembly underlines that disinformation, propaganda as well as simply forged data can simply be countered by the provision of the correct pieces of information. Furthermore, the Assembly calls upon the need for various media platforms, recognizing the public service media's role in opposing common disinformation and even propaganda.

Countering Online Misinformation Resource Pack (UNICEF)¹²

This resource pack was created from UNICEF ECARO (United Nations Children's Fund, Europe and Central Asia) in order

communication, behavior as well as policymakers, authorities, in order to misinformation. The Misinformation Resource to various types of reports, toolkits, journal the development of tactics and plans to limit misinformation. The pack also provides a summary of what the research indicates as potential solutions to tackle misinformation.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres speaks up about the misinformation surrounding the current COVID-19 Pandemic, and how important it is to stay faithful to stone-hard facts in this time

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to support advocacy, and social change experts health, and communication reduce online Countering Online Pack provides easy access resources, such as tools, articles, etc., that support

¹⁰ United Nations. "UN Tackles 'infodemic' of Misinformation and Cybercrime in COVID-19 Crisis." United Nations, www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-tackling-%E2%80%98infodemic%E2%80%99-misinformation-and-cybercrime-covid-19.

¹¹ "PACE - Resolution 2255 (2019) - Public Service Media in the Context of Disinformation and Propaganda." Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=25406&lang=en.

¹² UNICEF, www.unicef.org/eca/media/13636/file.

Resolution A/RES/75/267¹³

This resolution, adopted by the General Assembly of the UN on March 25th, 2021, suggests the creation of a Global Media and Information Literacy Week, which will take place from the 24th to the 31st of October annually. Throughout the week, all member states, as well as organizations, be they governmental or non-governmental, are urged to organize educational and awareness-raising activities, with the goal of tackling disinformation and misinformation. Furthermore, the resolution encourages UN Member States to involve the youth in the making of media and literacy policies and initiatives, while also include youth in the promotion process of said media and data literacy.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Indonesian Electronic Information and Transactions Law (Indonesian EIT)

On April 21st, 2008, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia enacted Law No. 11 of 2008, which was immediately enforced. The law is applicable to everyone, meaning it affects both individuals and legal entities, be they Indonesian citizens or not. The Law mainly focuses on the regulation of the use of digital documents as formal evidence, digital signatures, electronic transactions, protection of personal data and intellectual property, as well as punishments the Government of Indonesia may impose for actions against the regulations. Law No. 11 of 2008 identifies digital signatures as valid only if the signatory can be identified, the signatory has approved of the information related and alterations to the signature can be detected. The law states that electronic transactions must be made after an agreement between both parties, thereby eliminating the chances of there being disputes between the two sides.

Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA)¹⁴

The Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) was passed by the Parliament of the Republic of Singapore on May 8th, 2019. The Act means to prevent the spread of misinformation as well as disinformation in Singapore, including the actions of responding and countering the consequences, the most obvious of which being suppressing all means of support Singaporean online misinformation actors have (such as financing and promotion). In

¹³ "A/RES/75/267 - E - A/RES/75/267 -Desktop." ESubscription to United Nations Documents, www.undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/267

¹⁴ "Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act." POFMA Office, www.pofmaoffice.gov.sg/regulations/protection-from-online-falsehoods-and-manipulation-act/

addition to that, it enables measures to be taken against occurrences of misinformation to mostly improve transparency of online political displays, but other related issues as well.

Platforms partnerships

Facebook and other platforms have forged partnerships with community-based organizations that can detect and forewarn platforms of emerging misinformation campaigns, used artificial intelligence (AI) to detect and identify problematic online content, exchanged information with each other and with governments about known online misinformation threats.

Algorithm control

Lastly, some of the most popular social platforms such as Google and Facebook, along with Twitter, have tried under increasing pressure to control their algorithms in order to avoid the spread of online misinformation in the following years.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

One way that we could avoid the spread of online misinformation is the global awareness of people. Big organizations should inform people about the dangers concerning online misinformation. Everyone should be aware of the fake news and they also should apply critical thinking before reposting a photo or a quote from another user on any social media platform. Lastly, raising awareness can take place on a much greater scale than just not reposting a photo.

The schools also play a significant role in the solution of this problem. Teachers can be provided with training on media and information, where they will be trained in strategies for handling online misinformation and thus they will be able to inform the children about the critical and information skills which they should have.

Apart from that, another efficient solution would be if every country used advanced digital technologies in order to identify the sources and find which user created the misinformation online.

There should be stricter laws concerning online misinformation, which will be discussed through UN meetings, signed and passed from every country in the world and the creators of the posts will be hardly punished and also technical experts could work all together in order to confirm which websites have a history of posting fake news and which are worth trusting and on those sites stricter measures should be take, so as to avoid people spreading so fast false information.

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