



IGF 2018 Messages - MEDIA AND CONTENT

Overarching message

The intersection of media with the Internet and technology has revolutionized the sharing of knowledge -- impacting cultures, economies, political systems, and various social aspects of everyday life. In recent years, varied content channeled through different media increasingly influenced people's opinions, decisions and nature of engagement with society. However, in today's digital context, with its rapid changes, wide-spread implications and capacity to increase power divides, it is ever more important to consider and address the negative impacts of media and changing digital content.

Media culture and power

- The Internet and technology has changed the ways in which we distribute and consume media. This has led to, and has potential for further, ambiguous impacts which should be evaluated vis-à-vis medias' relationships to power sources.
- These impacts need to be addressed by governments, businesses and media organisations collectively (for reasons of probity, effectiveness and to contribute towards global peace and security) and include: content versus propaganda; 'fake news' versus truth; media freedoms versus limits on freedom of expression (to stop 'fake news'); and the ability of social media platforms to distribute misinformation versus their role as a tool for human engagement.
- Regulation is called for in some cases, while rejected in others, as possible 'slippery path' for inappropriate control over the media and related digital systems. However, it was noted that there exist two 'extremes' in the world: one a completely 'hands off' approach by governments that leaves private provider accountable for the appropriate administration of media products; the other a purely State-run system that oversees and investigates 'fake news'. Comments related to these comparisons were in the context of finding a 'balance' between the two systems.

Information disorders

- Terminology for discussing the Internet, media and culture is increasingly important. 'Fake news' is a potent but inherently political and, in itself, potentially misleading term - it is often used as a response to discredit accurate information.
- Breaking down the various 'types' of non-truthful information is an essential starting point for considering how to address the issue – because different kinds of misleading information, or "information disorders" (e.g., misinformation, disinformation, malinformation), will require different tactical responses.
- Precise terminology can also properly address the scope of what the 'fake' information can be or cause, given that the range can be as broad as rumor or propaganda to cyber hybrid threats; or radicalization, extremism and hate-speech to other forms of intimidation.
- Some journalist and media organisations are taking steps to mitigate the spread of misinformation. One example from NGO field is Reporters Without Borders (RWB) which advocates for standard-setting in sectors related to the sharing of journalistic-style information, but stresses that this needs to be in relation to processes (which concern the quality of the product) rather than content (which is a subjective, potentially political matter). Process

examples include requirements to identify the source producing the content. The application of such standards could be voluntary, and thus avoid potential pitfalls and issues related to legislation. RWB is also calling for methods for applying the ethics and codes of conduct to processes related to new forms of media, just as they are for traditional journalistic mediums. Algorithms that aggregate content should also operate under such standards, rather than purely interest-based / financial-incentive driven systems.

- Constant monitoring of “information disorder” trends is needed, and responses could be recalibrated accordingly. New smart initiatives, driven by multi-stakeholder collaborations, are encouraged, especially those that avoid disengagement of the State in policing but minimize regulatory intervention and keep the private sector accountable.
- Governments, media and social media enterprises as well as individuals have to think about and learn how to live in what some call “the post-truth era”. Other initiatives involve building networks and online communities, strengthening digital citizenship via Media and Information literacies, and digital debates. The latter will have the role in mitigating the distortions and asymmetries revealed by information disorders.

‘Fake news’

- ‘Fake news’ is a broad term with varied views on its definition, but civilian awareness is growing in response to it, at global, regional and local levels.
- It is often equated with the concept of ‘post-truth politics’ and is most easily understandable through the spread of false information in a political context. These political falsehoods are often in-line with pejorative narratives that feed into broader discontent, or forms of misanthropy.
- Digital literacy advancement can help audiences become more discerning with respect to the information that they receive through social media and messaging applications.
- ‘Big data’ and the use of data needs to be monitored, and potentially regulated, with respect to its ability to feed into and be used for the dissemination of ‘fake news’.
- As noted above, discourses around ‘fake news’ also need to consider the rights and responsibilities of various actors (e.g., journalists, politicians) and the mediums themselves (e.g., should the source or platform be accountable for a minor untruth or joke that gains an unintended momentum through social media?)
- Governments are exploring or implementing different methods to control ‘fake news’, including self-regulatory processes, legislative measures, possible criminalization, producing guidelines to avoid engaging in the spreading of false information, partnering with stakeholders to tackle particular issues, implementing digital literacy programmes, and raising public awareness.
- Private sector representatives also described product solutions and policies that are used to address issues related to ‘fake news’. These can include policies on hate speech and offensive content removal, providing more information to users about how content is managed, using independent fact-checkers to quickly check suspect content, the withholding of advertising revenue from websites that engage in ‘contentious’ behavior, and the use of algorithms that prioritise authoritativeness and authenticity in content (over relevance).
- Civil society representatives cautioned against inappropriate implementation of ‘fake news’ legislation, as it could be used to monitor or stifle other forms of public debate or speech for political purposes.
- The importance of strengthening media institutions is important for combatting ‘fake news’. This should include effective and clear policies on freedom of information, freedom of expression, and data protection, and as well as supporting journalists’ work and personal safety.

Elections and political processes

- The ability of ‘fake news’ to affect electoral or democratic processes is an issue that needs to be addressed, just as any other risk to the probity of these processes would or should be.
- ‘Fake news’ and misinformation is just one concern with respect to elections and political processes. Others include the misuse of personal data, such as using personal information to identify individual political leanings and targeting them accordingly with bespoke/misleading

information; an inability to identify the sources of information; and, a lack of regulation/checking around the use of electronic voting systems.

- Issues around the use of information during election campaigns or political processes can be particularly potent - for example, the leaking of accurate or partially accurate information at certain times can have misleading impacts, or not leave time for appropriate fact-checking before elections or other events.
- People in vulnerable or underserved communities often only access the Internet through mobile devices. This can result in disproportionate targeting of those groups through social media messaging that is designed to be more easily received on mobile devices, and with less capacity to search for counter-narratives.

Local content and multilingualism

- The production of local content has the potential to build trust in the media. Its smaller scale and focus can result in more immediate and accurate judgments of the content and its validity, and its audience more likely to be responsive.
- Multilingualism is an integral feature of local media content, and a way of protecting local communities' discourses. For instance, much of the media disseminated throughout parts of Africa is only in European rather than local languages, limiting the ability of many to fully understand the content.
- Local content in local languages is viewed as a way to promote and strengthen global South regions which, as yet, have not benefitted as much from the Internet and technology's media capacity as the Global North.
- Global and regional multilateral organisations are well-placed to engage in activities to strengthen local content production through fiscal, regulatory or treaty-based avenues.

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