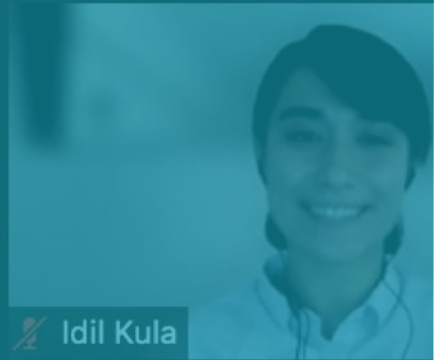


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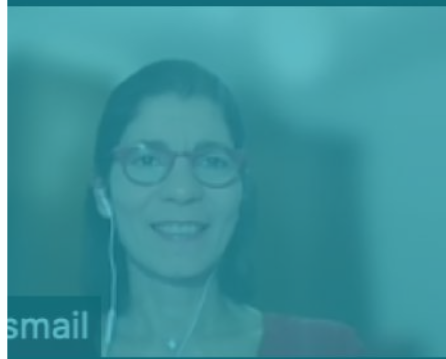
Content, Media and Literacy Policy Paper



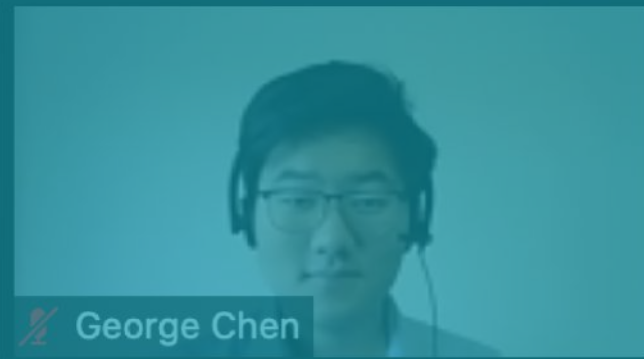
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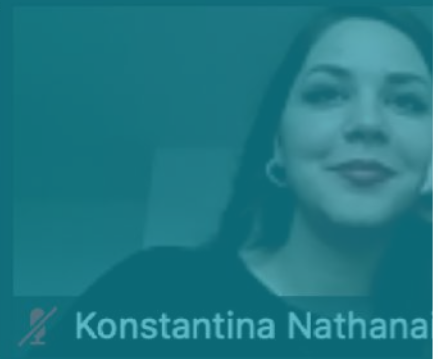
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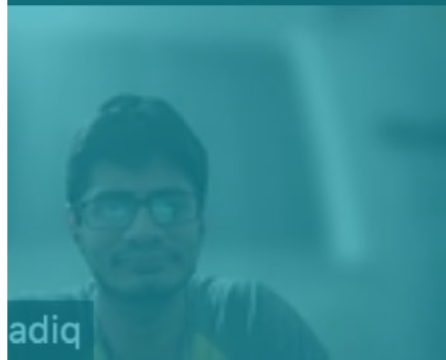
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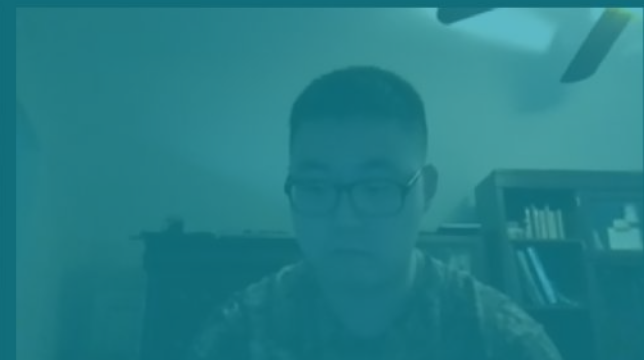
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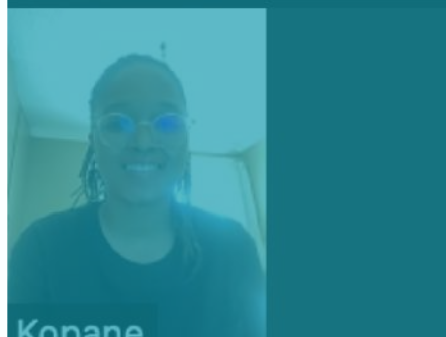
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Content, Media and Literacy

Gustavo Souza, Rebecca Marighella, Pedro Peres, Sofie Schönborn,

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Introduction

With the introduction of the Internet, the practice of communication has been greatly altered. Not only does it serve as a tool to make younger voices heard, it also facilitates youth participation in governance. Galvanisation of youth voices, united global action and inspired change-makers—all are possible realities with the Internet. However, this brings new challenges, from content moderation to media governance, and of course, digital literacy.

As a global group of young people with representatives from across Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, we acknowledge the inherent complexity of regulating content and media in the digital ecosystem, as well as the importance of a strong foundation in digital literacy skills for the average modern citizen. We would like to emphasize that discussions in these areas need youth perspective and that such topics concern a responsibility shared among all stakeholders of the Internet.

Current status of policy debates and processes

When it comes to Internet Governance, literacy is a prevention measure. Today, digital literacy could be easily explained as a “vaccine” against disinformation. Possessing digital literacy does not immunise one to occurrences of disinformation, but works to greatly reduce the potential of being involved in such an event. Since 2011, UNESCO has been publishing orientations about media and information literacy.¹ It seems reasonable to assume that if the international community had been focused on media and information literacy for the last 10 years, we would probably not be facing the many global disinformation challenges we are today. Social media differs significantly from television, but it is still a form of media, and general principles, like checking for independent sources and updated information, can be applied in many contexts.

footnotes

¹ Media and information literacy: policy and strategy guidelines. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225606>

NGOs like SaferNet have been creating interesting initiatives on Instagram to promote digital literacy in Brazil. This includes selecting young people in all geographic regions of the country and funding them to produce educational content in a language familiar to less experienced young peers. Promoting youth engagement is important because when young women suffer violence on the internet, they are often afraid of being shamed and punished by their parents. Policy makers should have in mind that young people often feel more comfortable asking for counseling from friends around the same age. Empowering young people to deepen their knowledge about digital literacy and offer support can be an effective approach.

We have concerns about freedom of expression as a human right, especially concerning authoritarian governments, but we acknowledge freedoms have limitations. Some countries can be extremely lenient to hate speech and consider, for example, white supremacist discourse as a legitimate exercise. On the other side, authoritarian governments are going to control information and communication technologies, independently of any existing law, and they are a threat to activists. But in democracies committed to human rights—which includes minority groups, not merely the groups in power—we should be aware that media platforms are



businesses and they can serve non-democratic interests for profit. That's exactly what we have been seeing over and over during the last decade on social media platforms.

In reality, this goes beyond a mere market regulation problem. In that sense, we have interesting examples. Germany—where nazi/facism-related propaganda is forbidden by law, or in Brazil where hate speech based on race, sexuality and gender identity is an imprescriptible and unbailable crime. Besides hate speech, a new challenge has emerged with disinformation for hire. According to *The New York Times*, social media influencers have reportedly received offers from unknown clients to spread disinformation with pre-written scripts about COVID-19 vaccines.²

Moreover, in this international context we are concerned about the lighthouse effect some regulations in democratic countries might have over autocratic regimes by encouraging the adoption of similar measures. The German Network Enforcement Act (2017, also: NetzDG) has been under scrutiny over the last few years for possibly conflicting with human rights conventions and freedom of expression.³ It introduces compliance rules on large commercial social network providers to delete “obviously illegal” content within 24 hours and block or delete access to any illegal content within seven days. We built a few reflections about this in our blog post.⁴

Lessons and positions resulting from the workshop stage

In the context of Internet governance, content remains a challenge that persists over time. This is because, on the Internet, content often evolves in its form, while media and literacy do not usually keep up with its transformation. Hence, reflecting on issues posed by content, media and literacy remains a timely topic that must constantly be revised.

footnotes

² “Influencers Say They Were Urged to Criticize Pfizer Vaccine” <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/26/business/pfizer-vaccine-disinformation-influencers.html>>

³ Human Rights Watch (2018). Germany: Flawed Social Media Law. Available online: Germany: Flawed Social Media Law | Human Rights Watch (hrw.org) (last accessed: 15-11-2021)

⁴ <https://yigf.de/news/content-media-and-literacy-across-the-globe/>

During the workshops, our discussion encompassed concerns about opportunities and challenges content may pose, the need to distinguish between the emerging media and their models, but also the urgency of finding effective stakeholders to tackle content issues like disinformation. From this discussion, it has emerged that state and non-state actors can, at times, share content that caters to their interests. In some cases, the involvement of multiple stakeholders such as NGOs and civil society can have a positive impact on content, media, and literacy, leaving room for conversation, advocacy, and for discussions that ultimately improve regulations. However, this often coincides with the level of freedom of content expression in different nations. This means that in some countries, state or non-state actors may commit unlawful interventions to criminalize specific content, which can comprise of falsifying information, spreading misinformation for biased political purpose, or spreading state-led co-opting narratives, which results in the replication of disproportionate power dynamics present within a society offline that translates into the online community.



Left, Pamela Maassay, member of Parliament at the East African Legislative Assembly, Tanzania; right, Svea Windwehr, Senior Analyst for Governmental Affairs and Public Policy at Google Germany

Discussion with policy makers

The third YouthxPolicyMakers roundtable led us to reflect on the responsibilities of stakeholders involved in content and media governance, as well as in strengthening digital literacy. Who should be responsible to ensure rights-preserving policies, counter misinformation-

campaigns by individuals or governments and provide literacy campaigns? Besides this, the discussion allowed us to reflect on big tech business models and the ability of companies to gain economically from hateful content. Other issues, for example, the mental health of content moderators and the use of artificial intelligence to moderate content, along with algorithmic discrimination, are clearly relevant.

Positions or demands

We want to bring the attention of policy makers to the relevance of rights-based content moderation, media and literacy initiatives for young and future generations. We need to bring interested and affected actors together and create transparent multistakeholder processes on regional, national and international levels to share best practices and ideas across cultural spheres and contexts.

We, YouthxPolicyMakers, declared our firm commitment to expanding global efforts to support moderation and regulations for the information that is made available to the public internet users via online media content in this regard:

MODERATION. The need for content moderation emerges in a world of complex distribution of power and governance over content shared online. Furthermore, cultural differences make content and media moderation a sensitive and multifaceted topic: what is sensitive or unlawful in one country or social group may be natural or permissible in another. Content must be considered in context. Finally, we see critical digital literacy initiatives as an important priority through which generations of young and old alike can safely enjoy their rights granted by international conventions and national law.

FAIRNESS. All heads of state must recognise that a fairly universal Internet online content moderation and regulation should be one of the fundamental principles of Internet governance, because what content is consumed by society becomes a facilitator of socioeconomic development and a necessary foundation of a fair society.

ACCOUNTABILITY. We need to address how media businesses, including social media influencers and platforms, should be held accountable for dealing with information. In the case of social media, although not in the role of a traditional newspaper editor, such platforms should have real investments in content moderation. We know this is not a common practice because Facebook concentrates its content moderation policy in the USA, but most of its users are outside of the country.

COOPERATION. We urge the United Nations General Assembly to consider adopting binding resolutions that "declare online content controls must be treated with a feeling of urgency." And we believe it is past time for the assembly to begin addressing governmental responsibilities by providing tools and direction on how to fairly control internet content. In that sense, offering opportunities to include young people are important demands to promote digital literacy initiatives.

