Special Committee 1

Combating disinformation and misinformation

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Forum	Special Conference 1
Issue:	Combating disinformation and misinformation
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Introduction

"Misinformation is not like a plumbing problem you fix. It is a social condition, like crime, that you must constantly monitor and adjust to." -Tom Rosentiel

In this modern era, the risk of being misinformed is higher than ever. With the help of social media, modern technology and globalization, news is spread widely and quickly, causing rates of misinformation and disinformation or "fake news" to be remarkably high. As this is a commonly known issue worldwide, the United Nations and its organizations such as UNESCO have been working on ways to decrease and solve this modern problem. Although this particular issue is not a part of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is equally as important to the UN to solve this issue as it influences and affects the entire world. Disinformation such as propaganda, for example using the information to deliberately misguide an audience for political gain, has not only been present in the modern era but also in the past, especially during the past world wars. For example, during the Second World War the Nazi regime used the media and information to spread false information for a political gain.

Definition of Key Terms

Disinformation

Disinformation is verifiably false or misleading information created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public.

Misinformation

False information, which leads the public to be misinformed, not deliberately meaning the distributor of certain information is not aware of the fact that the information is false and unintentionally misinforms an audience.[1]

Mal-information

Information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organization or country'[2]

General Overview

Disinformation and misinformation also known as 'fake news' is being spread everyday throughout social media and shared by users that are unaware of the fact that the news being spread is false. This affects society in a huge way as the credibility of many news sources and journalists come into question. The repercussions of the spreading of fake news can be very detrimental. For example, according to Pew Research Center, "after fake news stories in June 2017 reported Ethereum's founder Vitalik Buterin had died in a car crash its market value was reported to have dropped by $4 billion."

With this being a known issue in today's society, many methods are being used to combat it. These methods are being taught to students and even adults. Some of the methods include: fact checking, critically thinking and finding different opinions/ perspectives on the topic to get an objective and clear overview. Although this seems to be a relatively new issue that has to be solved, this has been happening for many decades. It is now becoming prevalent due to the modern era and its technology which allows news to be spread at an incredibly high speed.

Major Parties Involved

[1] Dictionary Cambridge https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/misinformation
[2] UNESCO: Fight Fake news https://en.unesco.org/fightfakenews

UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization)

UNESCO has created many modules and a handbook, called Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training, on disinformation and journalism explaining the issue and finding ways to solve the widespread of disinformation by teaching the public many methods as stated before to ensure the information they are reading or being told is correct or as closest to the truth as possible. The methods that are being taught in the handbook include: researching other sources on the same information,critically thinking and questioning the information and fact checking the information by looking at the sources.

Just Security

"Just Security" is an American organization that works on finding solutions and sharing them to the public to solve the issue of the widespread of disinformation and misinformation. This organization claims that the issue is not the content of the news articles but the cybersecurity as it should be able to filter false misleading information from reliable information. This organization provides seven steps to combat disinformation and misinformation.

Australia

In Australia, many campaigns have been created to help educate and combat disinformation and misinformation, such as the "Stop and Consider" Campaign encouraging others to consider their news source and its reliability.

Bahrain legal consequences

In Bahrain, those who are caught deliberately spreading fake news are arrested.

Bangladesh legal prevention

In Bangladesh a bill was passed imprisoning those who spread propaganda in the country

France legal prevention

Emmanuel Macron, the current President of France, has presented a law which would be preventing the spread of misinformation regarding political elections

Timeline of Key Events

This timeline gives an idea of when the disinformation has become publicly known and the dates of when solutions where decided to be made.

Date	Description of event
1933-1945	Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels founded a Nazi newspaper 'The Attack', which deliberately spread propaganda during the Nazi regime and was one of the first newspapers to do so
December 2016	Donald Trump first tweets using the common known phrase 'Fake News'
October 2017	Germany passes a law, which forces social media to remove fake news
November 2017	'Fake News' was added to the Collins Dictionary
January 2018	UK government has set up a security unit to combat fake news

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet, 4 July 2018 (A/HRC/38/L.10/Rev.1)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution in July 2018 stating that the universal human rights have currently should also be recognized online when on the internet. As mentioned before, UNESCO has created handbooks, modules and conducted interviews to spread the awareness of disinformation and misinformation throughout the media and also to provide possible ways to combat the spread. In many countries, campaigns have been created to spread awareness as well and some countries such as Bahrain have taken it a step further and have passed laws allowing those who spread propaganda to be arrested and imprisoned. Since this issue is relatively new these methods to combat disinformation and misinformation are also relatively new.

Moreover, the European Union, has outlined an Action Plan that hopes to counter disinformation effectively in Europe and even beyond by focusing on four key areas. According to the European Commission, this plan works on the grounds of:

- improving detection, analysis and exposure of disinformation
- stronger cooperation and joint responses to threats
- enhancing collaboration with online platforms and industry to tackle disinformation
- raising awareness and improve societal resilience

Furthermore, the Code of Practice on disinformation is the first worldwide self-regulatory set of standards that aims to fight disinformation that is voluntarily signed by leading social networks, advertisers and platforms, in October of 2018. The signatories of the Code presented a detailed plan in order to take action in 5 areas:

- Disrupting advertising revenues of accounts and websites that have been caught spreading disinformation;
- Increasing transparency of political advertising and issue based advertising;
- Strives to tackle the issue concerning fake accounts and online robots;
- Encourages consumers to report disinformation and access different news sources;
- Empowering the research community to monitor online disinformation through privacy-compliant access to the platforms' data.

Possible Solutions

A possible solution would be to create seminars and workshops especially in schools for the younger generations, to spread the awareness of disinformation and misinformation but also to educate them on how to correctly filter false information from the truth. Another possible solution would be to create "cyber filters" to already filter the false information from the truth so that the possibility of disinformation and misinformation spreading is minimal.

The "cyber filters" would stop the spread of disinformation and misinformation and it would also be able to track the direct IP address of the creator/ writer of the information in question .An extreme possible solution could also be creating and passing a law which makes the spread and creation of disinformation and misinformation illegal, which would result in a sentence in prison.

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