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CODE OF CONDUCT

Ethics in Media and Journalism

THE IMPACT OF MEDIA ON DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS:

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ACCESS
TO INFORMATION



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MEDIA RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGES OF DISINFORMATION IN PERIODS OF ELECTIONS



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Roger Stone, a political consultant and lobbyist, believes that “the general election is not an organizational exercise; it is a mass media exercise”. The increasing power of media, social media and social messaging has led to unprecedented lack in transparency and an oriented voting which needs to be controlled and well oriented to attain the positive impacts towards a deserved voting.

There are two rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that shall come together to determine results.

Article 21 states that:

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures”

And Article 19 stipulates that:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.



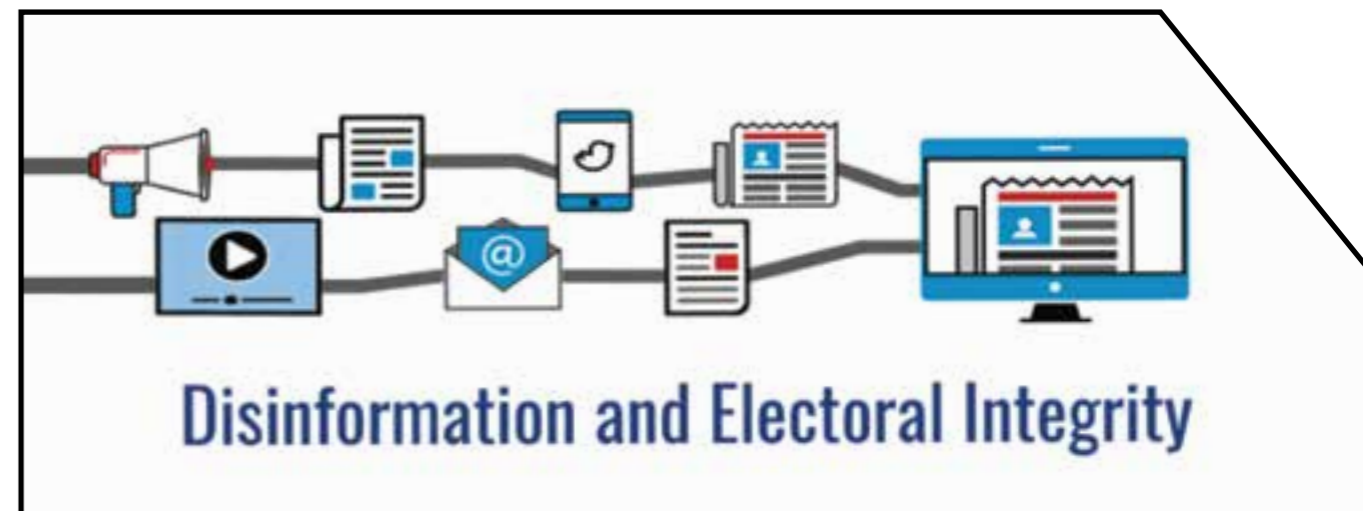
During the last decade, the deliberate spread of misinformation online, and on social media in particular, has generated extraordinary concern, in large part because of its potential effects on public opinion, freedom of expression, the safety of journalists and ultimately democratic decision-making.

What could be the responses of the media to the challenges of disinformation in periods of election?

At the beginning of the 21st century, the mode of managing affairs of states chosen by a great majority of countries on the planet is democracy. Democracy always resorts to elections as a mechanism par excellence for decision-making. Many journalists have focused attention in their reports on fake news circulating on social media sites during the election campaign. However, elections generally have their own characteristics which make them a potential form of insecurity, conflict and instability for the democratic system if they are not well managed!

We should address the issue of how to make the involvement of SF in the electoral process and in public demonstrations and riots more effective and as less as dangerous as possible.

Elections must be perceived as a process, which can evolve in a continuous manner, and conflicts or violence do not stem from the electoral process but from the poor management of the said process.



People's perception of the role of security forces is certainly one of the factors to be monitored closely especially if the past or current role of SF is not praiseworthy, and this reciprocal suspicion by the citizens towards the SF seriously complicate the involvement of the SF in the electoral process.

There is overwhelming evidence that female politicians and political activists are often targets of online threats, harassment and graphic sexual mocking aiming at delegitimizing and dissuading them from being politically active. The prevalence of gender-based abuse (insults, death threats...) in the digital space has significant consequences and constitutes a serious barrier for women who want to engage in politics. There are best practices and innovations that, if implemented, would significantly contribute to addressing this issue, from increased trainings to the development of civil society friendly AI-tools and gender-sensitive digital literacy policies and practices (yet they are largely not implemented).

Academic institutions, civil society groups and philanthropists who aim to protect and foster democratic values have a responsibility to look into the gender dimension of fake news and online violence against women in politics.

People are staying home during the pandemic and consuming a lot of fake news online.

Discussion with journalists and media representatives to gain in-depth knowledge of the challenges related to media and electoral processes from well-known international experts.

TRUST, MEDIA & DEMOCRACY

While “Disinformation” can increase confusion with voters, can affect the overall turnout of voters and can create advantages and disadvantages for particular candidates or a political party, “Misinformation” does not have any bad intention.

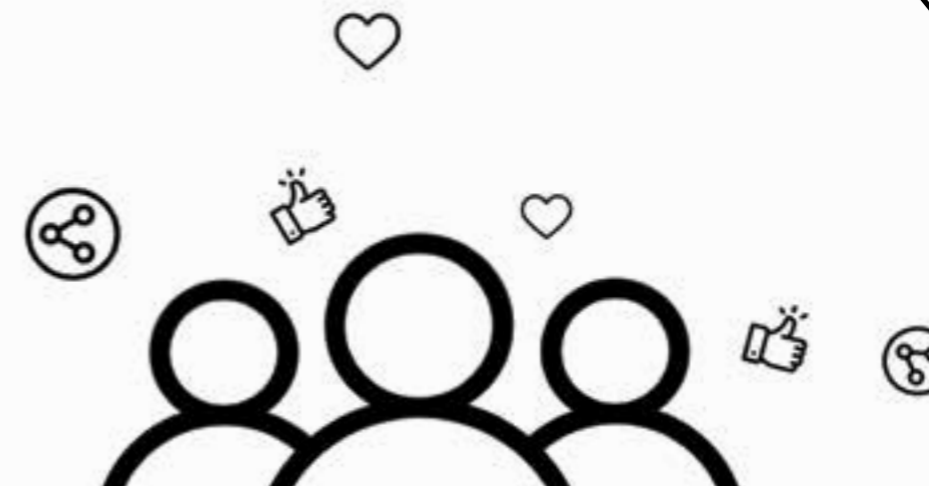
There are also growing concerns about the disruptive effect on public debate arising from the misuse of digital technologies.

Journalists and members of electoral management bodies interested in the implications of media manipulation and disinformation campaigns on public policy, journalism, social movements, technology and democracy, during elections should be aware on how social movements, political parties, governments, and other groups, including professional disinformation operators engage in active efforts to control public conversation, overturn democracy and disrupt society.

Therefore, they should be able:

- To define a manipulation campaign.
- To determine when manipulation is likely to occur.
- The types of media election issues that are most likely to be manipulated.
- Current/effective strategies used by stakeholders to combat media manipulation.

The UNESCO Office Montevideo and Regional Bureau for Science in Latin America and the Caribbean published in 2019 a communication on “Social Media and Elections” that includes important recommendations.



We can summarize them in the following questions and answers:

Do all democratic societies have the same experience in organizing elections?

Not all democracies have sufficient experience in organizing elections. Candidates always lie to gain the support of citizens and disinformation campaigns are not new to democracy. In a democratic society, those who are financially well supported cannot control the public debate by disproportionately having access to publicity and media.

Adequate regulation of political communications is crucial to ensure a just and equitable space for public dialogue and access to information.

- Voters should have access to information needed to exercise their right to vote.
- Voters should be able to freely engage in discussion and debate via platforms.
- Voters should understand the requirements for qualifying to vote and exercise that vote.



What are the principles that Election Regulators should take into consideration during elections?

Regulating political and electoral communications during elections should be based on some principles because it can both enhance and undermine freedom of expression rights:

1. Election regulators should understand the applicable rules and their impact on the electoral process and the agencies involved. They should rely on a multi-stakeholders' experience of internet governance.

Exp. 1: To check existing laws on data protection and campaigning regulations.

Exp. 2: To make the link with Security Service to avoid foreign interference in the election process.

2. Election regulators should define the scope of online platforms whose behaviour can come under their jurisdiction during an election, focusing more on the largest and most well used platforms.

Exp. 1: Regulations of international standard on human rights embodied in domestic laws to set some limitations on the freedom of expression without allowing State agents to use them to justify the violation of this right.



Exp. 2: Other forms of regulations could be in new ways of making social media platforms accountable and responsible for manipulating voters through their social media platforms.

3. Election regulators should encourage active campaigning which is a public good and a necessary part of an election.

Exp. 1: Social media platforms often provide a low-cost opportunities to engage democratically in a campaign.

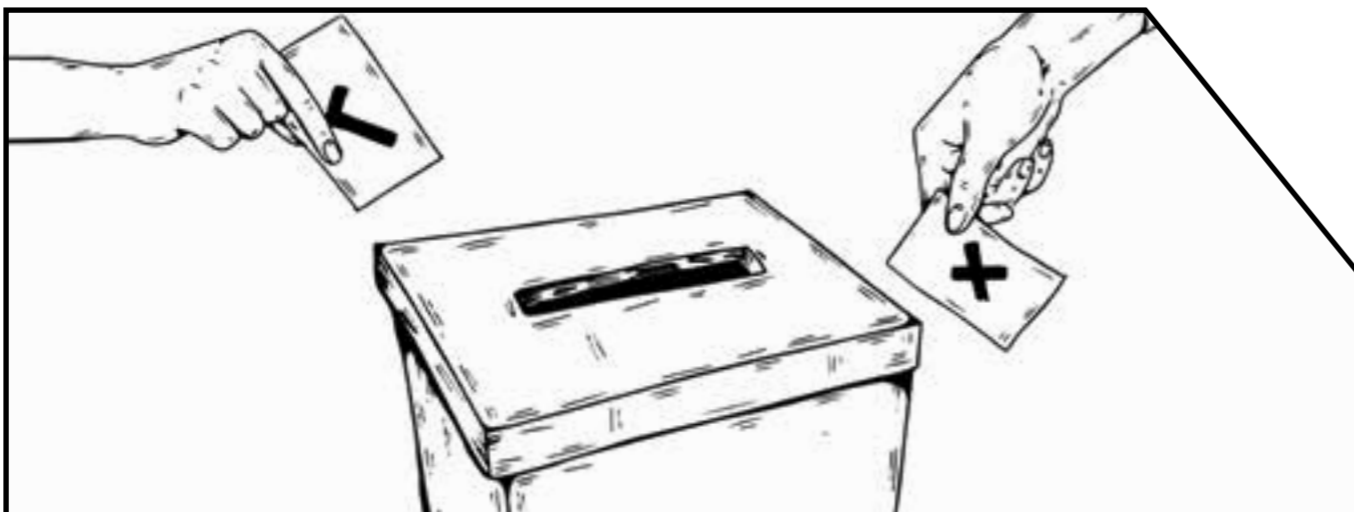
Exp. 2: No restrictions should be made on political parties and other actors to campaign during elections.

4. Election regulators should set out clearly the democratic and speech outcomes necessary to ensure a free and fair election and the freedom of expression by:

Exp. 1: Establishing a dialogue with social media companies, focusing on specific procedures and requiring transparency.

Exp. 2: Establishing a partnership with principal social media platforms prior to the election period itself supported by clear lines of accountability

5. Election regulators should play the role of an educator, educating voters about the dangers of social media use in elections, since social media have this problematic impact to become viral, offensive, anonymous, and exploited by misinformation and disinformation.



6. Election regulators should be clear about the outcomes they seek and be transparent about the result, by capturing this in a Code of Practice setting the standards for a free and fair election, prepared in consultation with many private and public stakeholders, including some of the following right of citizens to:

Exp. 1: Equal rights and opportunities to express their opinions

Exp. 2: Ability to question candidates. Ability to exercise their rights without fear of violence and intimidation.

Adding to this in return some commitments from the social media companies to respect those rights.



THE 6 PRINCIPLES

Respect for truth, freedom of expression, and the right to access to information are fundamental principles of media and journalism.

Journalists and reporters have a privileged role since they convey and transfer information, ideas and opinions. They have the public responsibility to inform citizens and make democracy alive. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They are accountable cause they inspect power, and this make them trustful persons. Journalists and Reporters should commit themselves to the following standard and principles:

HONESTY

To demonstrate respect for people as ends rather than as tools to be manipulated.

FAIRNESS

To strive for accuracy and truth.

ACCURACY

To determine the quality of news and reporting.

INDEPENDENCE

To improve accountability and reduce corruption.

INTEGRITY

To serve the public interest and to fight corruption.

RESPECT FOR THE RIGHT OF OTHERS

Especially the right to dignity and right to privacy.



The Lebanese American University (LAU) students enrolled in the POL213 Introduction to Human Rights course within the Honors Program have proposed the following conduct principles:

1. Although tempting, journalists shall respect an individual's personal privacy by ceasing to intrude or expose individuals to unauthorized disclosure of relevant information.
2. Journalists should report information to the public in an undeniably factual and in-context manner to prevent misinterpretations.
3. Journalists shall consider the major pillars while accessing and relaying information: transparency, accountability, and provision of the information.
4. Journalists shall refrain from engaging in any kind of coercive and illegal information retrieval.



5. Journalists shall not withhold information that could be useful in a police case.
6. Journalists shall amplify marginalized voices by promoting minorities' opinions.
7. Journalists shall prioritize compassion and solicitude when covering news regarding victims of a certain scenario such as trauma, injury, illness, death.
8. Journalists shall expose unethical conduct in the media fields which provide access to information.
9. Journalists shall not accept bribing in all its forms including sponsorship, advertising, and receiving money, especially when this bribing blocks the access of citizens to accurate information.
10. Journalists shall share the sources of the information given with the public.



11. Journalists shall acquire all information from legitimate and credible sources to maintain a status of professionalism and integrity.

12. Journalists shall relay information and ideas to the public via different means including orally, in writing or in print.

13. On-scene news reporters shall put an effort in choosing the right representative of the people to interview in case of violent disturbances caused by crowds.

LAU students' names:

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| - Elia-Luna Abdo | - Marianne El Khoury | - Rebecca Mansour |
| - Georges Al Kari | - Lara El Kossaifi | - Mohamad Mostafa Hareb |
| - Sarah Al Mallah | - Marie Belle El Rahi | - Guy Nafeh |
| - Margarita Aoun | - Elie Nehme | - Elie Nasr |
| - Jana Bahous | - Maria Ibrahim | - Mia Nour Noun |
| - Rawane Bahous | - Diane Kanbour | |
| - Chadi Chamoun | - Georges Koberianos | |
| - Nayda Dina | - Diana Mansour | |

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