COMMITTEE: YA

QUESTION: How can we protect the free will and informed citizenship of young people, in the face of social media propaganda, addictive algorithms, and the lack of binding international laws?

PRESIDENTS : Octave NESME JACOLINO, Ishani PETITJEAN, Pablo Alonso OCOTITLA

PRESIDENT'S PRESENTATION

Hello dear delegates! My name is Octave Nesme-Jacolino and I am 17 years old. I am in the Spanish section at the International High School of Ferney-Voltaire. I love playing tennis, drawing, and listening to music. I have been part of the MUN program for two years, and at FerMUN 2025 I was a translator, then the next year I was in charge of Spanish translation.

This year we will focus on the violence generated by the digital space. It is essential to find responses and concrete solutions to these dangers that impact youth worldwide.

Our committee will debate an issue focusing on protecting young people's critical thinking in the face of social networks. Although they appeared almost thirty years ago, they still lack regulations, and it is up to us, dear delegates, to address this. I can't wait to start the conference and meet you in January. Finally, I wish you good luck in finding solutions for the protection of the population facing these new dangers.

KEY WORDS

Free will: According to Descartes, a 17th-century French philosopher, 'consists only in the fact that we can do the same thing or not do it,' that is, the ability to make choices freely using our will.

Enlightened citizenship: According to the French government, an enlightened citizen is "a citizen rich in knowledge and culture, because citizenship and education go hand in hand"; "a citizen with strong psychosocial skills, who respects others in their differences, who knows how to debate, who manages their emotions"; "a citizen open to the outside world"; "a citizen who understands how democracy and institutions work and who wants to engage in living together"; and "a citizen confident in their role in the community, a necessary condition for their future participation in living together."

Recommendation algorithm: According to ScienceDirect, it's a powerful tool used to improve system performance by filtering relevant information that meets users' needs — such as novelty and individuality — within a recommendation system that ranks each post according to the likelihood that a user will like it, comment on it, sharing or watching it all the way through. Social networks: According to the ITU, websites and apps that allow users to create, share, and interact with content, as well as connect with other people through social networking features. These platforms make communication, collaboration, and content sharing easier between individuals and groups around the world. Unlike a simple website or a traditional blog, a social network is based on a participatory and community-driven logic. Each member is not just a viewer but also becomes an actor in the content shared.

Addiction: According to the WHO, addiction is a chronic disease. It affects a person's brain and changes their behavior, leading them to act in ways that harm themselves. The person becomes unable to stop consuming a drug or engaging in a certain activity (gambling, compulsive shopping, online gaming) even while it becomes harmful
Attention economy: According to the ENS, it refers to all the business models through which companies try to capitalize on consumers' attention. These models mostly rely on advertising: it allows them to provide certain services that consumers enjoy for free or at a reduced price, and consumers indirectly pay for them by forming an audience for an advertiser. The attention economy didn't start with digital technology, but these technologies have features that make it easier.

Cognitive biases: According to Biaiscognitifs.com, these are automatic and often unconscious thought processes that shape our judgment and perception. These mental mechanisms help us make decisions quickly but can also lead us astray. They influence our choices, especially in situations where we face information overload or need to make quick decisions. These biases are cognitive shortcuts, essential for navigating a complex world, but sometimes misleading.

Disinformation: According to the United Nations, it refers to mechanisms mainly aimed at deceiving and is spread with the goal of causing serious harm by state or non-state actors; affecting a wide range of fundamental rights, undermining public policy responses, and amplifying tensions during emergencies or armed conflict. There is no universally accepted definition of disinformation. No single definition can stand on its own, given the varied and complex contexts in which disinformation can occur, such as elections, public health, armed conflicts, or climate change.

Propaganda: According to the EHNE, a systematic action carried out on public opinion to make it accept certain ideas or doctrines.

Clipping: According to Le Monde, a practice of sharing short excerpts from videos and longer content on social media to promote them and reach a wider audience.

Masculinism: According to the Dictionary of the French Academy, a movement that emerged in North America in the 1980s, which considers that the progress of feminism poses a threat to men and aims to defend their rights and place in society. Masculinism values the image of the virile, dominant man.

Troll farms: According to France Info, trolls are people often employed by states to spread fake news online and carry out propaganda operations. These people work physically in offices called 'farms' or 'troll factories'.

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

In the early 2000s, along with the arrival of the internet, new digital platforms began to appear: these are social networks. Facebook was created in 2004, two years later Twitter was launched, and in 2010 Instagram was unveiled to the public. Users can exchange freely on these platforms and share their beliefs with others. Indeed, this is the core of how a social network works: communicating and forming communities based on each person's interests, and inevitably, their political opinions.

Social networks therefore allow people to consult with each other and organize. The world then sees democratic upswings emerge, born from the pooling of individuals. For example, on January 14, 2011, Tunisians marched by the thousands in the capital to demand the departure of the president, who had been in power for twenty-three years. That evening, he fled to Saudi Arabia. Ben Ali is the first leader of an Arab country to leave power due to street pressure. This is the beginning of the Arab Spring. That same year, the Syrian people rose up against their dictator, Bashar al-Assad, and a civil war against the president's authoritarian regime then began. In Libya, following a social movement critical of the Libyan political system that came from social networks, Muammar Gaddafi, who had ruled the country for forty-two years, was captured by the people before being killed.

15 years later, the situation has changed a lot. Social media has become widespread, so much so that, according to We Are Social, the number of social media user accounts now stands at 5.24 billion, or 63.9% of the world's population. Everyone is connected, all the time, and producing content, true or not. So, it has never been so easy to access knowledge, and so hard to tell what's real or fake. Even though these platforms represent new ways of getting information, especially at the height of the pandemic when they were a crucial tool for accessing information in education and work, their setup allows misinformation, disinformation, and even hate speech to spread quickly. As Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, said: 'The fight against disinformation requires sustainable investments in strengthening society's resilience and medias and information.” Indeed, according to ID Crypt Global, 1.5 billion fake news stories are published every day on social media.

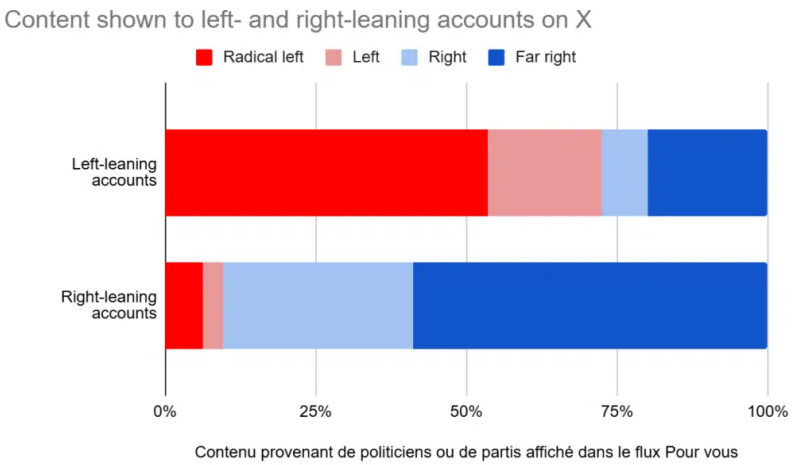
Under the pretext of freedom of expression, social networks rarely use fact-checking companies (responsible for verifying the truthfulness of certain posts). Moreover, in 2024, Mark Zuckerberg, owner of Meta, gave them up, accusing them of being politically biased, while openly getting closer to Donald Trump, a far-right politician.

Fake news is just one aspect of a systemic problem. In fact, it represents only a very small percentage compared to all the content on social networks. Even though it causes

damage, we shouldn't forget about polarization, hateful content, half-truths, and real information taken out of context.

Algorithms, on the other hand, as pointed out in the ARTE video 'Social Networks: A Danger to Democracy?', suggest content to users that might interest them. But since they rely on an attention economy, algorithms aren't, and can't be, neutral because of their function: they only show us what we want to see so that we stay on the platform as long as possible. They share content that makes us react, triggering stimuli that release dopamine, the pleasure hormone. But that feeling is short-lived, and that's where addiction comes from: we want to feel that pleasure again, so we keep scrolling. So it's normal that controversial content gets more visibility from the algorithm. Plus, some social media owners tweak their algorithms to spread their ideologies more effectively.

Elon Musk, owner of X, uses it as a political tool to promote his far-right ideals. This is what an investigation by the nonprofit organization People vs. Big Tech shows. Ava Lee, CEO of People vs. Big Tech, said: "We have discovered new evidence showing that two of the largest social platforms encourage their users to share far-right content, and to a lesser extent far-left content." On Elon Musk's social network, X, users receive official political posts. Users are therefore exposed to 59% far-right posts and 6% far-left posts. Conversely, left-leaning users get 54% posts from the radical left and 20% posts from the far-right. So there's a clear emphasis on far-right content. Moreover, the promotion of these extremist contents, no matter the side, it hurts the representation of so-called 'moderate' parties. So here we see the danger of moderators. The People vs. Big Tech team reached out to X to ask what they thought. X didn't respond.



Content shown to left- and right-leaning accounts on X, People vs. Big Tech, 2024

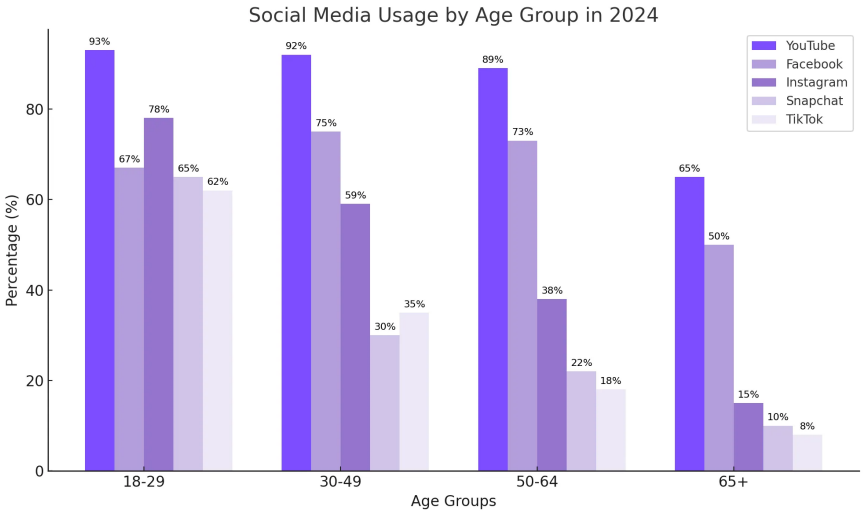
On top of being drowned in the same political speeches, users keep running into the same short-format videos thanks to clipping. Even though this practice used to be more of a community thing, it quickly grew into a full-blown business. In fact, thanks to artificial intelligence, many websites now offer to cut a long-format video into numerous vertical clips that fit social media. According to Le Monde, a thirty-minute video can result in between 400 and 500 clips.This practice creates artificial virality because the algorithm is bombarded with short formats that inevitably reach users. The original content becomes viral, not because more people have seen it, but because more videos have been made from the same content. Logically, views of the clips boost the popularity of the original. This practice aligns with an advertising principle, the rule of 7. You're supposed to expose someone to the same content 7 times for them to remember it. And that's exactly the idea behind clipping: overwhelming the user with the same videos.

According to Le Monde, clipping really blew up in 2016, when the male influencer Andrew Tate decided to create a network of clippers (people who practice clipping) to promote himself and his ideas. Numbering 20,000, they managed to make the influencer break through on social media, thanks to short videos aimed at making him seem charismatic. Last year, the same thing happened with the influencer Clavicular, also a male influencer, going from unknown to star influencer thanks to clipping. Between March and April 2026, he paid $700,000 to hire 1,500 clippers who produced 70,000 videos of him, racking up 2 billion cumulative views.

This trend also highlights one of the major dangers of social media: the radicalization of its users. Indeed, because of clipping and algorithms, social media spreads discriminatory and violent ideas without restrictions under the pretext of the famous freedom of speech. Masculinism is becoming increasingly popular among young people: 34% of them buy into masculinist rhetoric according to a study conducted among students from several high schools in Montreal. These ideas find an audience among young people, during a time of personal growth and first romantic relationships. Masculinism then becomes an easy answer for some young people's lack of success: men, superior to women, are involuntary singles (Incels) because women are mean. Moreover, this rhetoric is often paired with influencers' humor and casual language to create a sense of closeness with users. On one hand, a synthetic masculinity sold in thirty-second videos. On the other, decades of feminist struggle targeted. As a result, women's rights are slipping back around the world and femicides are on the rise.

Social media is hugely important in politics, especially during a presidential campaign. In fact, the campaign happens here, in addition to traditional media (TV, radio). The goal isn't

to target the same audience. While TV helps reach the older crowd, social media lets you connect with crucial voters: the young. Often inexperienced, forming their political opinions, or sometimes being apolitical, this part of the population is thrown into the deep end of the presidential race, for the first time for some, with no one to guide them. Their main source of information: social networks.



Social media usage by Age Group, Spocket, 2024

The stakes are therefore high for political parties betting on young people to make a difference. Besides the parties' own videos, young people are confronted with committed or volunteer video creators, clips of debates edited to favor a particular candidate, and influencers spreading their party's ideas, with the extremes being highlighted by the algorithm.

And when it's not citizens of the country trying to influence users, it's foreign countries. Indeed, social networks are a stage for many intrusions. 'Troll farms' and numerous fake profiles are created to flood the digital space with false information favoring one side. For example, according to the newspaper Le Parisien, candidates in the French presidential election were the targets of fake news against them spread by Storm-1516 and Matriochka, organizations linked to the Kremlin.

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According to the RTL radio station, these organizations have a well-oiled operation. They create fake content on social media, usually by copying the visual styles of existing media, NGOs, institutions, or even political parties. These are called "seeders." Next, the fake post is picked up by other accounts whose only goal is to boost the visibility of this content. Other accounts linked to this tactic push these posts on social media targeting public figures, media outlets, or NGOs, and fact-checkers, asking them to verify the false information while

overloading their verification capacity. The goal behind these operations seems to be the same: discredit presidential candidates who are openly opposed to Vladimir Putin's policies, or even promote other candidates who are more favorable to the Kremlin.

By capturing our attention, sometimes for hours thanks to their infinite scroll mechanisms, social media not only makes us addicted but also takes away our ability to think. Indeed, with the countless amount of information our brain receives, it's hard to judge each piece of content for its truthfulness or political message. So addiction turns into passive behavior, where we're just the container into which the flow of fake news and propaganda pours.

RELEVANT TREATIES AND MAJOR EVENTS

10/2018

Code of Good Practices on Disinformation (European Commission)

The Code of Good Practices on Disinformation is a unique tool through which stakeholders in the sector agreed — for the first time in 2018 — on self-regulation standards to fight disinformation. At the heart of the EU's strategy against disinformation, this Code has proven to be an effective tool for limiting the spread of disinformation online, especially during election periods, and for responding quickly to crises like the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

01/07/2015

EU Internet Referral Unit

The EU Internet Reporting Unit (EU IRU) is based at Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC). It detects, analyzes, and flags violent terrorist and extremist content that's publicly accessible online. Its goal is to limit access to this content, help identify the perpetrators of offenses, and bring those responsible to justice.

19/10/2022

Digital Services Act, European Commission

Sets rules for online services used daily by European citizens and says platforms have to take steps to protect minors on their services, especially by reducing the risks of exposure to age-inappropriate content like gambling or pornography. The Digital Services Act also completely bans targeted ads to kids.

06/2025

Africa Taskforce on Child Online Protection

Creation of a pan-African task force in collaboration with UNICEF and GSMA (an international association representing the interests of over 750 mobile operators and manufacturers from 220 countries worldwide) not only to raise awareness but also to work on setting common standards, training parents and teachers, designing technology tools suited to local realities, and including young people in this process so that strategies are not developed without their voices.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Impose mandatory age verification at the entrance of social networks, which would not only help limit young people's screen time, make access to inappropriate content more difficult, and drastically reduce the number of fake news they're exposed to.

Set up teams to fact-check information to prevent misinformation.

Create new social networks that are public and therefore controlled by the state, allowing them to act as they see fit and avoid algorithms that spread the ideas of the network owner.

Make social networks cooperate in managing algorithms to prevent the network owner from spreading their own ideas.

Impose penalties on social networks if they spread too much fake news.

Create a team to verify accounts to avoid troll farms.

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