YOUNG PEOPLE AND INFORMATION

A Manifesto

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3CL

Introduction

This manifesto focuses on young people's relationship with online information. It provides a short overview of the state of play with the production, consumption and sharing of online information. It identifies issues that need to be addressed by people and institutions in a position to make positive change to the current situation. It proposes ideas and solutions to facilitate a culture of media and digital literacy[1], critical thinking and renewed trust in the Internet. It encourages young people to take a more activist approach, as responsible digital citizens, to secure and master the requisite skills to navigate the complexities of the digital age - and to apply pressure on those who are responsible for, or in a position to address, the many issues listed in this document.

The manifesto's point of departure is that young people's relationship with online information is complicated.

The internet, search engines, smartphones, affordable computers, online game consoles, other tech devices, and the proliferation of disruptive technologies provide people with unprecedented amounts of information at their fingertips. However, as so-called 'digital natives'[2], Generation Z's relationship with information is particularly complicated by a number of factors:

1. Accessibility: 24/7 access to the internet and online information via personalised media would have been unimaginable to generations prior to Generation Z. Social media in particular has had a profound impact on how young people access, produce, process and share information online. Ubiquitous access has had inevitable consequences - from how young people explore and navigate their sense of self to the very notion of how they conceptualise democracy.

2. Quality: it is patently obvious that online information is not 100% accurate or reliable. Much depends on the source of the information, and the agenda of those who produce it. Although tools are available to evaluate the reliability and accuracy of online sources, these are not widely used. Young people are not necessarily familiar with evaluation tools, and there is little instruction on how to leverage them.

3. Privacy: young people are told they have rights to privacy under regulations such as GDPR[3] and warned about the potential risks of sharing their personal information online. Yet they continue to place their blind trust in social media platforms[4] who may harvest their data and over which they then end up having little control. The relationship between users and these platforms continues to be overshadowed by a lack of transparency and 'lock-in'[5].

4. Responsibility: it is assumed that young people are aware of the consequences of relying on online information. They are expected to contribute to society as responsible citizens and make informed decisions. In practice, many are not aware of the background or the terms of service of the applications they rely on for information.

5. Discernment: as advanced users of media and technologies, young people are expected to be able to discern between facts, opinions, and the many shades of misleading information. In practice, when online, people tend to absorb or contribute information on the fly with little time for reflection. Instead, they depend on the curation of content creators they implicitly trust.

6. Wellbeing: being online has both positive and negative impacts on young people. Social media provides connectedness, community, and relationships, facilitating access to information and resources that may improve wellbeing. Conversely, social media may contribute to stress, insecurity and low self-esteem. One example is the perceived need to be 'always online', which compounds the pressure on young people to conform to social norms.

Objectives

The primer for this manifesto was an international conference in late 2022 in Malta[6]. The overall objectives of this document mirror the three primary themes of the conference, in that we need to:

1) **Address issues relating to media freedoms**, such as citizen journalism, the attention economy and platform surveillance;

2) **Combat misinformation and disinformation**, through a better understanding of the conflicting role of media, technology, education, and governance; and

3) **Understand online behaviour**, which has created issues relating to identity, online hate speech, woke culture, cancel culture and online influencers.

Content

The content in this document was developed by the 3CL Foundation after a review of the conference video footage, comments, and observations from delegates on Sli.do. We shared the first draft with a representative quorum of speakers and young delegates and then incorporated suggestions in this version.

This document has two sections. The first section tabulates the state of play with online information, and primarily uses the material from the conference, with some important updates. Inevitably, section one is more formal in approach and content than section two, which is the manifesto.

It is our intention to review the manifesto on an ongoing basis, and publish regular updates in a variety of formats, including summaries.

Purpose

We are publishing this document as a primer for much-needed input and discussions among young people, individuals, and institutions whom young people perceive as being able to address issues relating to online information - and implement improvements. Our hope is that it will be read by policymakers, regulators and people working for technology firms, think-tanks, technology companies and education institutions.

This group is the primary target readership for the manifesto. The 'burden of responsibility' for many of the changes requested in this manifesto primarily rests on these individuals and organisations.

The manifesto also calls for young people to take responsibility for the information they consume, create, and share online. This requires an understanding of how information is created, circulated, and shared online over popular media and social media. The document therefore also targets millennials and Generation Z - particularly those who are already able to influence the behaviour of others and mobilise where necessary.

We envisage this manifesto giving rise to a diversity of activities as a way of beginning to address the desires and demands of young people for a new, online "world order." The document covers perhaps an overwhelming

array of issues - almost a tidal wave of desire for change - that affect our daily interactions online.

We do not expect all of these issues and manifesto requests to resonate with everyone.

The manifesto is not meant to be prescriptive.

There is also a groundswell of optimism in these pages. Here are some of the ideas that we are considering as indicative start-up actions, programmes and projects that could arise from this manifesto:

» Series of podcasts on young people and information, hosted by young people.

» Facilitation of meetings and summits between student representatives and the OSCE, the EC, and the Council of Europe to develop joint action plans.

» Meetings between young people and policymakers in the Euro-Med region to discuss changes in curricula, which may include media and technology literacy.

» Targeted campaigns to inspire regulators in their negotiations with technology firms.

» Changes in curricula on media, digital and information literacies at all levels of education, but particularly at secondary and tertiary levels.

» Placements of young people with new and mainstream media organisations.

- » Training for citizen journalists.
- » Training for open knowledge editors in multilingual environments, especially through the world's largest platform in this context provided by the global Wikimedia Movement.
- » Books, pamphlets, posters, vlogs and videos addressing elements of the manifesto.
- » Conferences and workshops organised by young people for millennials and Generation Z in positions of influence.
- » Talks between Millennial, Generation Z and Generation X to identify alternative pathways to disinformation and fact-checking.
- » Incentive schemes to facilitate creation of ideas for solutions to disinformation.
- » Facilitation of EdTech activist groups in the Euro-Med zone.
- » Facilitation of networks of young people interested in digital and media literacy.

We want this document to stimulate discussion and inspire change, at local, national, and regional levels. If we start somewhere, with just a single, local-level project, perhaps with an intergenerational group in a single town or city, we are starting to make that change happen.

From the voices of the few can come change for many and for the generations to come.
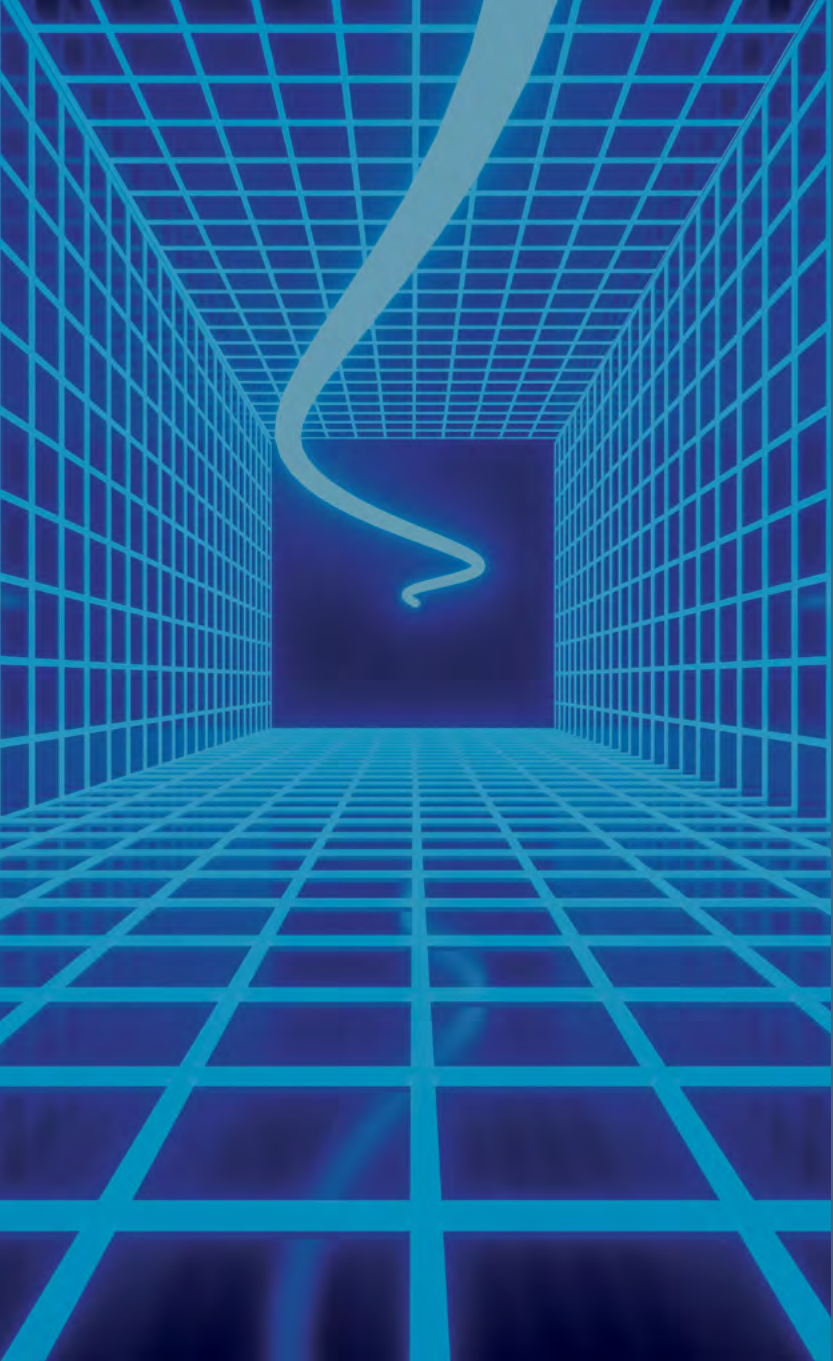
THE STATE OF PLAY WITH ONLINE INFORMATION

The issues we want to address

Truth is grounded in place, culture, and time. The internet makes place and culture both eternal and meaningless. And renders time asynchronous.[7]

Over the past decade, the internet has rapidly shifted from a cool and favourable status—being the solution—to being part of the problem, incapable of reversing its own destructive trends. We may have already passed the point of return.[8]

Information is data that has been processed, organized, or presented in a meaningful context so that it can be understood and used effectively. This can include facts, concepts, instructions, or other types of knowledge that can be communicated or stored in a variety of forms, such as text, images, or audio. Information can be true or false, and it can come from a variety of sources, including news outlets, social media, books, and personal experience.[9]

Addressing Media Freedoms

01 In the digital age, the meaning of journalism, journalist, and media has changed and continues to evolve.[10]

02 Social media platforms are media outlets, as opposed to agnostic carriers of data. All media are social.[11]

03 A professional journalist or an editor may no longer have privileged access to the news – or decide what constitutes a news story.

04 Citizens with access to a smartphone and the internet, in the right place at the right time, may claim to be acting as journalists, writers or editors.

05 Despite the best efforts of journalists to report objectively, news cannot be expected to be completely unbiased. Human emotions cannot be completely removed from news stories.

06 Journalism, including investigative journalism, remains tantamount to storytelling. Even the news has to be packaged as a story.

07 News stories and opinions are often conflated in pursuit of truths. In the reporting of a story, many perspectives may typically come into play.

08 There is an overall decline in public trust in journalism, with the possible exception of local news.

09 In the digital information age, journalists have to supplement core skills with new skills. Solid copywriting, investigative reporting and the ability to identify a story may not be enough. Journalists need to have some understanding of social media and big data and competences in fact-checking and with digital technologies such as artificial intelligence or AI[12]. This opens many questions on the type, quality, availability, and source of training that journalists require.

10 Statements about the need for journalists to secure training in ethics[13] may be reductive in the digital age. These are further complicated by culture: practices which appear to be acceptable in one particular cultural context may be refuted or condemned in another.

11 The shift of mainstream journalism from newspaper sales to free online news has been funded by new and more insidious forms of advertising. Despite the best intentions of editorial staff, motivations have shifted. If citizens demand quality news, they might have to pay for it.

12 The pressure to publish and share stories online is often at the expense of fact-checking. Productivity does not

We face constant surveillance and commercialisation. The early promise of web 2.0[15] to empower users has been diluted with the hegemonising of the online space by a handful of big-tech, for-profit, social media platforms.

17 Online media is highly permeable to the influence of the state and business. It has become difficult for many voices to be heard.

18 The utopian mantra that 'information wants to be free'[16] has been debunked. Free speech on 'free' social media platforms has not led to universal truths.

19 Social media platforms have failed to self-regulate. In keeping with the internet, profit trumps prudence.

20 Lawmakers may have admirable intentions in exploring democratic regulatory frameworks, but they need to understand the affordances of technologies before setting out to regulate social media platforms and generative AI systems[17].

21 Information and truth used to be currency. 21st century media is still expected to hold powerful individuals and institutions to account. There is something reminiscent of Greek theatre in the way social media is both a bastion of democracy and a constant reminder of its failings.

In keeping with the metaphor deus ex machina, AI chatbots and machine learning will likely exonerate wrongdoing in a post-truth era where individuals cannot discern fact from factoid.

22 Once someone else is thinking for us, we cease to think for ourselves. This stands for journalists as much as it does to people in power. It also applies to machine learning and the more subtle forms of AI permeating our lives. The more we rely on machine learning without understanding its programming and fundamental limitations, the less we will know about the world and ourselves.

23 Citizen journalists often 'learn by doing' rather than through formal training. Many career journalists also learned their trade in this way. Nevertheless, there is a case for teaching journalism standards as part of compulsory education insofar as every citizen with a mobile phone can potentially document and craft news.

24 Some citizen journalists operate more as influencers than career journalists, even if they are producing news stories. They need to create and nurture their own market and areas of influence. They are in the business of securing engagement, followers, clicks and revenue streams – sometimes at the expense of accuracy and quality.

25. Algorithms shape the media we see. Online power is vested in algorithms and the user behaviour harvested by platforms as online data.

26. The user weighting system[18] has changed with the advent of online media. Users trust people in their networks. In the online world, trust is vested in influence.

27. Silicon Valley platforms retain their power in the information space in the Western World – TikTok is an outlier. Despite the promise of decentralisation and self-sovereignty in Web 3.0, a handful of platforms operate as gatekeepers in what was once meant to be an open social media space. The same is likely to happen with fintech companies.

28. As long as media outlets remain dependent on advertising revenues, they will be vulnerable to the mis- and disinformation risks associated with social media platforms.

Combating Misinformation and Disinformation[19]

29 Misinformation and disinformation are not like a plumbing problem you can fix. They are symptoms of a social condition, like crime, which needs to be constantly monitored, and, where necessary, called out or 'adjusted to[20].'

30 The worst excesses of the post-truth society[21] have much to do with intent.

31 Content that would have been labelled misinformation and disinformation in the past is now believed and promoted as unassailable truth – not least, because it affirms confirmation bias.

32 Trust in online content has much to do with the policies and actions of social media platforms when dealing with disinformation.

33 Freedom of speech does not mean freedom to lie without consequences. Scrutinising the premise of freedom of speech, its limitations, and re-interpretations needs to be mainstreamed within informal and formal systems of learning.

34 Media organisations are often guilty of offering a platform to people who then proceed to supply disinformation.

Journalists need to fact-check false statements and challenge those who promulgate them, identifying hidden or political agendas in the process.

35 Platform surveillance is rife and technology companies and social media platforms remain opaque about the data they harvest. We patronise social platforms without reading their terms of service or understanding their marketing objectives. Without an understanding of the agendas and operations of social media platforms, it is difficult to hold them accountable.

36 Power is vested in the ownership of a platform. The owners of old and new media outlets increasingly operate like truth barons. Twitter's algorithm has contributed significantly to political polarisation. Consequences erode democracy with no oversight or accountability as conspiracy theories masquerade as fact, deceiving the public.

37 Imposter websites masquerade as local news sources. There is a lack of transparency in the goals of many influential websites and platforms for publishing or circulating partisan content. Social media is then used to amplify propaganda, misinformation and disinformation.

38 The problems we encounter with mass datafication are not technical problems,

but human problems that technology has contributed to scale.

39 Social media platforms may be equally technologies of freedom and oppression[22]. Despite legitimate concerns about ownership, platform surveillance and power, social media may also bring "underground" topics and first-hand citizen information to the surface. Platforms such as TikTok may be more impactful in delivering human stories than orthodox mainstream news outlets. They do this at an algorithmic price, since their datamining violates citizens' proprietary rights, including the right to privacy. Social media may expose users to issues that are omitted from mainstream media coverage.

40 Failure to take account of human rights means setting aside well-established, widely acknowledged parameters of liberty, fairness, and equality, as well as processes and accountability for their implementation.

41 Aspirations for a digital utopian future collide with dystopian concerns rooted in the oligarchic nature of the contemporary internet. While information technology today is founded on aspirations to do away with intermediaries, Big Tech platforms operate as de facto information gatekeepers. Open platforms operated through the ostensibly inclusive Wikimedia Movement continue to represent a viable alternative: the project to build a world

where everyone can share in the sum of all human knowledge without restriction.

42 Search engines shape the ideas we have about ourselves and the world around us. They may be effective at fighting bots generating and spreading misinformation and disinformation They may also contribute to fake news going viral.

43 AI offers publishers an opportunity to deliver more personalised information to help deal with channel fragmentation and information overload. But these new technologies also bring existential and ethical questions. News organisations that have not yet fully embraced digital will be at a severe disadvantage. The next few years will not be defined by how fast we adopt digital, but by how we transform our digital content to meet rapidly changing audience expectations.

44 Algorithms control what we consume online. They are designed to distribute content on engagement-based social media platforms while simultaneously datamining our devices. In the computer engineering world, protocol dictates if the deep learning level is 'explained' to enable humans to understand the 'black box', the efficiency of ML/AI will be reduced. Legitimate requests for transparency from citizens are not currently matched by the parameters of acceptability and 'explainability' from engineers.

45 Users need to secure a better understanding of how algorithms work. Algorithms push content to users by calculating the probability of user engagement. This is determined by an individual's past engagement statistics, as well as a wider user pool. The algorithmic suggestion model is used on all the primary social media platforms, including video sharing platforms, and contributes to the circulation of mis- and disinformation. One way of combating disinformation and ensuring that it is not 'upswept' into the mainstream by the algorithm is to resist reacting to it.

46 Despite mass adoption and global media hype, generative artificial intelligence[23] such as ChatGPT is not yet able to differentiate between truth and falsehood. Machine learning lacks consciousness and conscience. It is informed by the truths, biases and motives of its creators and users.

47 Algorithm-based content moderation is barely able to cope with the present volume of content it must filter. It also lacks ethical reasoning - the human rationale to distinguish bad from good in complex situations. Perhaps AI could be positioned as a second line of defence against harmful content, leaving moderation to a human task force.

48 Blockchain technology could radically

change information consumption patterns for the better. As an immutable decentralised ledger, blockchain remains subject to the 'garbage in-garbage out' problem. However, since information on the blockchain is indisputably original to the first iteration, it could secure a sense of public trust in an 'untampered with information' platform.

49 Understanding how disinformation architectures work may be demoralising and empowering in equal measures. Young people are constantly being reminded to be cautious about their online interactions, with a palpable weariness of warnings. Conversely, there is a need for young people to open up their networks and secure support when needed if they are to secure some control over their online identities.

50 It is consumerism, rather than concerns about disinformation, which continues to drive the expectation of government intervention and general efforts to regulate internet-related harms. Many sit back and await or even fear the response of the government towards the abuses happening in the digital realm. Activists are those willing to 'shake the tree' of platforms and lobby policymakers to shape regulation of the information space.

51 Institutional education remains dependent on a top-down, one-size-fits-all model. It

is efficient at institutionalising students into societal expectations and norms. It has failed to keep pace with cultural and technological progress. Media literacy among young people (aged 7-18) is a subject that is seldom adequately addressed in compulsory education. Children and youth learn about privacy, bullying and community via trial and error as they use powerful digital devices that surveil and sell to them.

52. The disruptive impact of technologies on society requires renewed investment in lifelong learning, with minimal formal institutional support. The onus is on citizens to acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding through various means, such as online courses, digital resources, and technology-enabled learning experiences.

53. We need a paradigm shift to provide young people with media and technology literacy skills across the educational spectrum. Improving education on how misinformation and disinformation spreads can both empower and demoralise young people. Knowing how things work online involves a fine balance between being wary of online harms and curious and open to the affordances of social networking.

54. Echo chambers and network silos lead to a reinforcement of existing beliefs

31

and biases. They create a false sense of consensus that makes it difficult for individuals to separate fact from fiction. In extreme cases, echo chambers can even lead to the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and harmful ideologies.

55 Discussions on the utility of technology are often reductive and vague. We need to focus on how, when and where technology steps in to take over our daily interactions and influence our decisions and lifestyles. Where social and emotional intelligence, for instance empathy and understanding, are required, we need human oversight.

56 Regulation of media and mis- and disinformation is very much rooted in socio-economic conditions and political culture. In some countries, regulation is tantamount to censorship and an outright violation of basic human rights. In certain advanced economies with high investment in digital technologies, there is a reluctance to regulate social media platforms as media organisations. Regulation is also perceived as stifling innovation. Attempts at high-profile, antitrust cases against large social media platforms have resulted in large fines, which are either promptly settled or challenged.

57 Regulation needs to extend to AI. Presently, the responsibility for 'trustworthy AI' falls on the developers

and deployers of AI and the policy makers in those nations that are attempting to govern AI.

58. There is geopolitics of deception at play. This may involve the manipulation of media outlets, the dissemination of fake news or conspiracy theories, and other forms of psychological warfare aimed at shaping perceptions and attitudes.

59. Large multinational platforms often limit access to content individual users living outside the country of origin of the platform - particularly in politically sensitive regions / predicaments. Some users turn to regional social media with more in-touch moderation teams, while others place their hopes in a decentralised anarcho-information space powered by collective blockchain development.

60. Misinformation may be exacerbated by negligence vis-a-vis the information consumption patterns of the public and the resulting confusion sowed by institutions and individuals in power. In the process, policymakers are less likely to be held accountable for corrupt deeds.

Understanding Online Behaviour

61 The attention economy, abetted by relentless technological innovation encouraging immediate gratification, has reduced the target audience's attention span.

62 Information is increasingly packaged in short video format. Younger audiences have shifted their patterns of media consumption and production towards short-form narrative structures.

63 Although many young people understand they are the product on social media, they remain locked in an addictive relationship with their social media platform of choice. Fear of missing out and peer pressure are among many reasons to explain why young people want to be part of the social contract orchestrated by big tech.

64 There is a generational divide that is getting wider with the advent of more pervasive technologies. The divide can only be bridged by a concerted effort by parents and their children to find a common ground for understanding online behaviour before decisions are made on trust in online information.

65 Some young people aspire to become social media influencers. Without metrics, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness

or longevity of influencers, and the quality of the information they share or endorse. Some large brands are taking to the metaverse and disintermediating influencers in the process. Some influencers with a huge following are becoming brands in their own right and fronting their own products and services. There is scant ethical oversight about their merchandise or the testimonials that promote them.

66 Influencers are cogs in the network society. Many are driven by volume of responses, with a view to profit, oftentimes in the absence of integrity. Individuals need to enhance their understanding of the influencer culture, including how the business model is conceptualised.

67 There is a risk of ambivalence to misinformation and disinformation on social media. Young people consider it to be more of a nuisance as opposed to a democratic crisis. The reasons for ambivalence as well as the propensity to share disinformation need to be researched.

68 Popular assumptions about the online information crisis need to be challenged. The information crisis is not just a social media problem. The internet is not necessarily rife with misinformation or news, but with memes and entertaining content. Falsehoods do not necessarily

THE INTERNET &

SOCIAL MEDIA

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spread faster online than the truth; how we define (mis)information influences our results and their practical implications. People may be more likely to be uninformed than misinformed[24].

69 Understanding online behaviour requires people who are digitally literate. Much has to do with the ability to think critically about the sources of information.

70 Age verification online is a massive failure: the checks and balances inserted by social media platforms in particular are vested in terms and conditions. These are circumvented by ticking a box, absolving the platform owners of any further responsibility. The negative impact of social media platforms on the behaviour and well-being of minors is well-documented (from cyber-bullying to eating disorders and online grooming), yet there appears to be a lack of concentrated effort to address this issue.

71 Some LGBTQ+, transgender and nonbinary people do not feel welcomed, seen, accepted and safe on social media.

72 The internet and social media continue to be a fertile breeding ground for extremism and discrimination.

73 The protections afforded by online anonymity to marginalised populations and threatened individuals need to be preserved.

74 Creators and spreaders of disinformation need to be made accountable for their actions. Negative comments, cyberbullying and trolling are all scaled up and amplified by social media. Disturbing content is accessible to anyone, irrespective of their age or education.

75 Cancel Culture used to be about the withdrawal of support for public figures or companies after they have done something considered objectionable or offensive. It was synonymous with holding those in positions of power accountable for their actions. Cancel culture has evolved from its original aspirations to a more inclusive and respectful society to a situation where young people are not spared the mistakes of their recent past. Public shaming and ostracism of young people online is a widespread practice.

76 Many young people have grown to be risk-averse for fear of retribution on social media. In the process, free speech and open dialogue are stifled and people discouraged from expressing their opinions or taking creative risks.

77 A low level of financial literacy obstructs the use of financial products. Yet fintech applications are already available to empower youth with a sound financial education through online videos divided by age group and subject.[25] In the fourth industrial revolution[26] - an era of growing

uncertainty, opportunities and risks - fintech has emerged as a new tool to spur financial literacy. The removal of some intermediaries and the use of smartphones is shortening the distance between the world of finance and young users.

UNDERSTANDING ONLINE BEHAVIOUR REQUIRES THE ABILITY TO THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

THE
MANIFESTO

WE ARE HUMAN.

WE ARE NOT DATA.

MEDIA FREEDOMS

01 We are human. We are not data.

02 We have a socio-technical existence, and it is not for sale or exploitation.

03 We recognise that there is no such thing as free media. The price of an internet connection is not the only price we are paying to speak freely. The price of harvesting personal data for the benefit of third parties is rarely quantifiable.

04 We have the right to express ourselves freely but responsibly, and access information online without fear of censorship, surveillance, or harassment. We believe in the safeguard of media freedoms, with a right to freedom of expression and to access information that is as free from bias as possible.

05 We believe journalism should be practised without fear or prejudice, irrespective of whether the journalist is employed by a mainstream media outlet, working as an independent investigative citizen journalist, or as a blogger. It is still possible for people on TikTok to do independent journalism.

06 We need to support citizen journalism and the role it plays in holding those in power accountable.

07 We have the right to participate in citizen journalism to have our voices heard. We may gather, write, distribute, and publish news and information through various forms of media channels without the permission of intermediaries - such as editors and journalists employed by mainstream media outlets.

08 We believe that good journalists require training - whether they are engaged by media outlets or operating as citizen journalists. Good training does not necessarily mean going to journalism school - many excellent resources are available online. However, we value the mentorship and support of experienced media practitioners.

09 We need to be aware of bias in media coverage and call it out when necessary.

10 We need to be aware of the limitations of our own echo-chambers when crafting or sharing news stories. We must widen our perspective by seeking reasoned opinions that may counter our own beliefs.

11 We request that media organisations, including community media, engage young people in decision-making processes. Young people are advanced users of social platforms and have some knowledge of emerging technologies. Generation Z may help mainstream media outlets and online social platforms mitigate the risks

of misinformation and disinformation from spreading on their online collateral.

12. We need better and more constructive conversations and discussions to take place among government, civil society and journalist organisations to find solutions for mis- and disinformation. Dialogue needs to be followed by decisive action – particularly if this requires regulation.

13. We need governments and policymakers that empower young people in helping resolve the disinformation crisis. This goes beyond token attempts at listening by those in power.

14. We believe that investigative journalism resists a culture of compliance to power regimes. The safety of those who perform journalism must be guaranteed. In small states in particular, the risks of personal repercussions or retribution are well documented.

15. We support efforts to foster positive and healthy online communities. We need to empower communities to speak for themselves. Young people can work alongside both mainstream and community media to create spaces for diverse voices and experiences.

16. We need alternative media with input from local news sources that serve their communities. It is crucial to the health of

democracy to reinvigorate and support local news through the public funding of journalism and/or the redistribution of funds from social media companies to news organisations.

17. We need a "new social contract" for digital media companies that asserts "public control over communication systems" and provides funding for the "public infrastructures that democracy requires, especially journalism that can focus on local issues and hold concentrated power (like Facebook and Twitter) to account."[27]

18. We must preserve the availability of open knowledge. Wherever possible, we need to defend open access from commercial and corporate interests and agendas

19. We understand that news is primarily about stories, and that journalists have an obligation to make news 'interesting.' If journalism is to survive in a polarised world, it must provide perspectives and solutions[28].

20. We need transparent media houses that work to mitigate the own internal biases which influence how they report and 'fact-check'.

21. We recognise that social media platforms have become the venue of choice for the consumption and sharing of news for many. News is increasingly about formats that can be consumed and shared quickly.

22. We believe that journalism should be oriented toward covering macro events from micro angles, such as community-based coverage. We need to resist the conformity frequently characteristic of modern corporate media. Journalism must be freed from profit-driven corporate models to encourage unfettered investigative work.

23. We recognise that flexibility must be built into news and media outlets, so they are ready to adapt to market changes.

24. We need trustworthy, fact-checking and investigative media that can shine the light on mis- and disinformation. We also need access to justice and the rule of law. We need to apply human rights law to secure accountability in online grey spaces,

25. We need to become better news consumers. This involves creating healthy news environments that are easier for all to navigate and encounter high-quality sources. To make digital media literacy work, we need structural solutions that begin earlier in the communication process and reduce the barriers that currently exist to responsible news consumption.[29]

26. We want policymakers to learn from countries that have implemented legislation to protect journalists. Legal protections should work for both

mainstream media outlets and lone bloggers on their own platforms. In principle, regulation of news media should be 'light-touch' - even self-regulating to ensure investigative journalism is not inhibited. The corollary is that any self-regulation system still requires oversight.

MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

27 We need to speak truth to power. More than ever.

28 We have the right to access and share information freely but responsibly, without fear of censorship or reprisal. This includes the right to engage in citizen journalism and to use social media platforms as a means of self-expression and communication.

29 We believe that disinformation is a direct threat to democracy.

30 We believe that solutions need to be three-pronged - with education, media and technology operating in concert. Communities of practice from various disciplines and generations need to produce solutions to the complicated and complex issues associated with the information ecosystem.

31 We must invest in digital and media literacies as compulsory components in national curricula. We need to raise awareness among young people of the need to protect themselves from the various shortfalls of mis- and disinformation on social media platforms. For this to happen, we require educators with the requisite skillsets to engage with

the complexities of online information and help reform curricula.

32   We believe that policymakers and educators would benefit from including young people in policy and curricular change.

33   We need a decentralised internet that safeguards the autonomy of its diverse user base despite the business interests of platform providers. We need platform providers to shift value back from shareholders to users[30].

34   We want to see a range of fact-checking resources readily available to young people. Familiarity with the news industry provides the ability to fact-check, interpret and create content.

35   We recognise that ours is an attention economy, and need to better understand the ways platforms and media organisations manipulate our attention.

36   We support efforts to increase transparency and accountability in platform surveillance, and protect the privacy of individuals online.

37   We demand that social media companies do more to regain some semblance of trust in the information shared on their platforms.

38   We request that Big Tech platforms

promote connections and content that demonstrate digital responsibility[31], rather than deliver outrage and anger. We look forward to the emergence of a host of new networks and models to address this.

39   We need regulatory bodies, governments, and technology companies to take bigger, sustained steps to prevent the spread of false and misleading information.

40   We ask for human rights to provide the baseline for the governance of technology, and AI in particular. Alongside freedom of speech and the press, we advocate for freedom of conscience that embraces equality and empathy for all. We request that companies, governments, international organisations, civil society, and investors take effective practical steps to this end.[32]

41   We need to rebuild trust in digital technologies as innovative contributory factors to an open and democratic society. We recognise that this is not easy when social media platforms have demonstrated that they are permeable to the worst excesses of the post-truth society.

42   We must become critical consumers of information and seek out diverse perspectives and reliable sources.

43   We need to invest in lifelong learning. Compulsory and tertiary education alone will not resolve the information crisis.

HALF = BIG
TRUTH   LIE

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TRUTH   LIE

HALF = BIG
TRUTH   LIE

44. We need media and digital literacy skills among all age groups to identify and combat disinformation. We can start by making digital and media literacy and critical thinking courses available to people of all ages, starting with early school and compulsory education.[33]

45. We need to think before sharing content. We must ensure that our sources are reliable. We must become better at asking awkward and uncomfortable questions of online information. We need to have the skills to question the entire online information ecosystem; to ask questions about the ownership of media and social media platforms and their agendas. We must question information that elicits strong positive or negative emotions, contains extraordinary claims, speaks to our biases, or is inadequately sourced.

46. We must achieve universal access to the digital space. The digital divide[34] remains a significant deterrent to securing much-needed skills for tomorrow's workforce.

47. We need to achieve basic maths literacy. If we continue to navigate an online world where data sets seem too big for analysis, we cannot ask the right questions about the information we need.

48. We need to secure basic fintech literacy - some means of understanding financial technology and its applications. Besides learning how to use technologies, we need

to understand the broader implications and potential benefits and risks of fintech for consumers, businesses, and the financial industry as a whole.

49. We need a better understanding of machine learning, of how algorithms work, of how tools that augment human capabilities such as ChatGPT are being developed before we can decide on their impact on mis- and disinformation. ChatGPT is a symptom of the speed with which our relationship with information can change. We need to use these tools to make ourselves smarter - not lazier, or more devious.

50. We need algorithms that are 'trained' to provide us with the information we need.

51. We need investment in research to secure the practices and technologies that may address the problems the internet has created. AI ethics will become more complicated in the age of deepfakes. We need to support fact-checking and reduce the spread of disinformation.

52. We need to question how governments and states use social media to disseminate information. This should be a default position, irrespective of socio-economic and cultural contexts.

53. We want policy makers and users to secure a better understanding of algorithms and their impact on trustworthy information.

54 We need policymakers and regulators who understand that social media platforms cannot be regulated via professional codes of ethics such as those imposed on journalists working for mainstream media outlets. Governments should craft solutions through public consultation.

55 We support initiatives that address 'fake news,' including publicly-funded projects. In view of governments' extensive manipulation of online information, we need to be particularly vigilant of state-led efforts to regulate old and new media.

56 We request that regulatory bodies claiming to address mis- and disinformation are accountable to citizens. There need to be processes in place whereby monitoring, assessment and reporting methodologies, and new regulations are subject to ongoing monitoring by trusted third parties.

57 We ask governments to develop AI policies to sustain trust in this emerging technology. Governments that do this will help build trust in both AI and AI governance[35].

58 We believe that young people can secure improvements in the quality of online information through collective action, demos and lobbying - including 'naming and shaming.' Social media platforms should be ranked based on the risks they pose to users' well-being. Young people

WE MUST ACHIEVE **UNIVERSAL ACCESS** TO THE DIGITAL SPACE

can work in tandem with regulatory bodies to ensure platforms face sanctions if their systems are inadequate at preventing 'fake news.'

59   We believe that the 'one size fits all' education system for young people must be rebooted if it is to be fit for purpose. The classic model of patronisation needs to be replaced by a new democratic model which embeds the importance, diversity, and application of democratic ideals in the classroom.

60   We believe that children should be taught and trained to interpret news using the following principles: stop, question, check, decide and believe. Under-18s need to secure critical skills by applying these in situations which are relatable to their age group, and to the local context.

61   We need to understand how technology and business models of online platforms are working in symbiosis if we are to differentiate between truths and falsehoods. We are encouraged by the possibilities of decentralised technologies, including the blockchain. It is already possible to apply existing technologies to improve the search for truths - for instance, by putting news items on the blockchain. AI can be used for fact-checking, with AI tools and algorithms created to check and validate other algorithms.

62. We need to invest in technologies that support fact-checking and reduce the risk of disinformation. Governments, higher education institutions, and media organisations must work together to combat fake news.

63. We want platforms to make it as easy as possible for people to curate their news feeds. This should be readily-accessed functionality, not deceptively built into the platform.

64. We demand better and more transparent algorithms, although we are aware of the trade-off between transparency and accuracy. By stripping away the 'veil' on how algorithms work, we can start to determine what must be changed, regulated and controlled. We have reached a stage where platforms must be held accountable for their algorithmic models of content management. If necessary, we need ombudsmen councils which oversee their algorithmic practices.

65. We need better communication channels between platforms and their users to spot flaws and abuses in the AI, even perhaps allowing them to participate in these regulatory bodies. This is participatory governance.

66. We need to understand how to respond to blatant mis-or disinformation online, particularly if this is masquerading as

'news.' If the content violates policies, we need to report or flag the fact to a moderator, or a contact or a friend or relative who posted the content - as opposed to interacting with this content, which gives further 'value' to the algorithm.

67. We must pressure media organisations, publishers and social platforms to stop fake news going viral and go beyond current token efforts to placate regulators. They can introduce a 'doubtful' category where the content is not shared further until fact-checking is complete. False content could be prevented from being reshared, and correction notices sent to the users exposed to it.

68. We believe that governments have a role to play in advocating for responsible media. Yet fact-checking is also the individual responsibility of the citizen, with no one institution or person being able to do this alone. We need to recognise what we have lost by our over-reliance on digital technologies. We must explore any opportunity that facilitates meaningful face-to-face interaction. Inter-generational discussion would be a good start.

69. We must ensure that minors are not exposed to harmful content online. Companies have an obligation to facilitate networks of trust between parents, children, and their platforms to begin devising a framework to regulate the

behaviour of children online in any meaningful way. Third-party software is already available that may operate as a trusted intermediary between the child and the web, all with the approval and oversight of the parent.

70 We need legislation that puts the onus on social media platforms to develop tamper-free age verification of users. Platforms need to respect the fact that they have a duty of care for the well-being of all users, and minors in particular. We demand that industry works in symbiosis with lawmakers, policymakers and educators to transform social media platforms into a safe space for minors - particularly in the areas of consumer redress, product liability, and algorithmic accountability.

WE DEMAND BETTER AND MORE TRANSPARENT ALGORITHMS

ONLINE BEHAVIOUR

71. We need to become advocates for digital well-being. We need to prioritise our mental and emotional well-being online and take steps to manage our digital consumption and self-care. We need to take responsibility for our own online behaviour, including the impact of our actions on others.

72. We must engage in respectful and open-minded dialogue about online information issues, rather than attack those with different viewpoints under the guise of woke or cancel culture. We must avoid mob mentality and use inclusive language and empathy, particularly in online engagement of a social and political nature. We must be prepared to get out of our echo chambers and listen to different perspectives. We need to learn the importance of forgiveness and second chances, as opposed to capitalising on past mistakes and fuelling conflicts.

73. We believe in consent as the basis of online interactions. People should be able to hold, research and share their views freely, without being monitored, unless their views incite hate and violence.

74. We forbid technology platforms from selling our personal information without our explicit permission. They must provide an easy and standardised way for any of

us to control, audit, and maintain all our agreements with websites and suppliers. When we sign up to online platforms, we must read the small print of the user terms and conditions. That must begin with offsite (or all) tracking turned off by default. And for any of us to make sure it's turned off at scale, meaning across every site we encounter[36].

75. We must think carefully about the information we share online. As users, we need to read the small print of the terms and conditions of the platforms we use. We need to have greater awareness of our rights to set our own privacy settings[37].

76. We need communication platforms that are democratised from the bottom up to become socially-responsible. Online platforms (including specialist applications for fintech) need to make their products and services more inclusive to include overlooked groups such as the elderly and the disabled.

77. We request that social media platforms implement simple safeguards for users before they post content. For instance, a prompt such as 'Do you really want to post this?' would be useful.

78. We must protect young people from online predators and cyberbullying. We need to call out revenge porn, deepfake applications, and other behaviours online

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that target vulnerable individuals. We need to have personal accountability and legal measures in place as part of wider society demands on law enforcement to tackle sexual violence.

79 We have the right to safeguard our own online identity. This includes the use of pseudonyms or anonymity, particularly in situations where it is necessary to protect personal safety and privacy and when divulging personal information is at the risk of identity theft or political retribution.

80 We recognise that platform surveillance is counter to our right to privacy. We must raise awareness of the ways in which our online activity is being tracked and monitored by social media platforms and other entities – for the profit of others. We must encourage solutions that address the online privacy conundrum, including the rights of third parties to use, appropriate and repurpose our online content without our explicit permission.

81 We support efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity online, and to combat hate speech and online harassment. Violence against women must be regarded as a public health issue.

82 We need to apply pressure on both mainstream and alternative media platforms to become more inclusive, and more responsive to their misuse by bad

actors. We must redouble our efforts to make social media a safe and welcome space for LGBTQ+, transgender and nonbinary people.

83 We believe that policymakers should spend less time on social media and more time developing policies that safeguard the quality and veracity of information on social media.

84 We recognise the role of influencers in the dissemination of online information. We must question the authenticity, reliability and agendas of influencers before placing our trust in them as information intermediaries. We request transparency on the motivations behind content, particularly when it appears to be click-bait for the benefit of unknown third parties. Trust in influencers as sources of alternative information to verifiable sources should be based on the same system of checks and balances and standards required from mainstream media outlets and citizen journalists.

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Endnotes

[1] Media and digital literacies are the skills and knowledge needed to navigate and critically evaluate online information. This includes the ability to identify and question sources, detect bias and misinformation, and create and share content responsibly. Digital citizens must be able to make informed decisions and participate effectively in the digital world.

[2] Not all young people are necessarily digital natives, for a variety of reasons, including access to advanced technologies and the digital divide. Generation Z may also include people who are digital immigrants as opposed to being digital natives.

[3] The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a regulation in the European Union (EU) that governs the collection, use, and storage of personal data. It came into effect on May 25, 2018, and replaces the 1995 EU Data Protection Directive. GDPR applies to any company that processes personal data of EU citizens, regardless of where the company is located. It sets strict guidelines for obtaining and handling personal information, and gives individuals more control over their personal data. It also includes heavy fines for non-compliance.

[4] Social media is described as a platform, rather than a tool. See Carrigan and Fatsis (2021).

[5] 'Lock-in' refers to a situation where a user becomes so heavily invested in a particular platform

or technology that switching to an alternative becomes difficult or even impossible. This can be due to various reasons, such as user familiarity, emotional attachment, network effects, the learning curve or the high cost of transitioning to an alternative platform.

[6] See media collateral from the 'Young People and Information: It's Complicated' conference, held in Floriana, Malta on 10-11 November 2022 on: https://www.3cl.org/young-people-information-its-complicated-conference-in-malta-november-2022/

[7] Bugeja, M. (2022). In conversation with Alex Grech, prior to the conference, Young People and Information. It's Complicated.

[8] Lovink, G. (2022). Extinction Internet. Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam.

[9] ChatGPT response.

[10] Academics such as Jay Rosen have long called for a more decentralised model of journalism, in which a diverse group of voices and perspectives are given a platform to share their ideas and experiences. The digital age is synonymous with the use of new technologies, such as social media, in journalism to engage with audiences and gather information.

[11] See Lindner & Barnard (2020).

[12] Artificial intelligence (AI) is defined as 'system's ability to correctly interpret external data, to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation'. See Kaplan (2022).

[13] See https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/

resources/digital-media-ethics/

[14] See Zuboff (2022).

[15] There are different stages in the evolution of the Internet.
Web 1.0 is often referred to as the 'read only' web and covers the period from 1989 until about 2004. As a simple system with slow internet speeds, it enabled organisations to share brochures online with basic shopping carts. This was an online version of direct marketing and one major benefit that Web 1.0 introduced was removing barriers between customers and companies (known as disintermediation). Web 1.0 also presented new ways of keeping the broker in the middle, which is called re-intermediation, sometimes assuming that this intermediary layer could be (almost) eliminated.
Web 2.0 or the 'read/write web' was identified in 2004, offering two-way communication and interactive marketing. This shift focused on user-generated content, social media, and interactivity. Examples of Web 2.0 technologies include blogs, wikis, podcasts, social networking sites, and video-sharing platforms.
Web 3.0, also known as the Semantic Web, refers to a future version of the internet where machines can understand the meaning and context of information, making it easier to access and use. Web 3.0 technologies include natural language processing, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and the Internet of Things.
Web 4.0 is a hypothetical future version of the internet that is currently being developed. It is expected to include advanced technologies like virtual and augmented reality, brain-computer

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interfaces, and other futuristic innovations that we can only imagine at this point.

[16] Attributed to Stewart Brand. See https://digitopoly.org/2015/10/25/information-wants-to-be-free-the-history-of-that-quote/

[17] See https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/03/technology/artificial-intelligence-regulation-congress.html

[18] This refers to a system where the relevance or importance of a particular piece of information is determined based on the user's past behaviour or preferences. This may include factors such as the user's search history, the types of content they have interacted with in the past, and their demographic information. The goal of user weighting is to provide a more personalised experience for the user by showing them information that is more likely to be relevant or interesting to them. This can be done by adjusting the ranking or ordering of search results, or by showing different types of content to different users based on their preferences.

[19] Misinformation is false, misleading, or out-of-context content shared without an intent to deceive. Disinformation is purposefully false or misleading as content is shared with the specific intent to deceive and cause harm. Also see Altay et al., (2023).

[20] See https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2017/10/19/the-future-of-truth-and-misinformation-online/

[21] See Grech (2021).

[22] See Lipschultz (2022).

[23] Generative artificial intelligence (AI) describes algorithms (such as ChatGPT) that can be used to create new content, including audio, code, images, text, simulations, and videos. Recent breakthroughs in the field have the potential to drastically change the way we approach content creation.

[24] See Altay et.al (2023).

[25] See https://www.forbes.com/sites/esade/2022/11/02/how-fintech-can-foster-financial-inclusion-and-literacy/

[26] See https://www.weforum.org/focus/fourth-industrial-revolution

[27] See contribution of Zimdars, M. in The Social Media Debate.

[28] See https://alexandraborchardt.com/jay-rosen-journalists-have-to-become-more-explicitly-pro-democracy/

[29] See Zimdars, M. in The Social Media Debate.

[30] See https://locusmag.com/2023/03/commentary-cory-doctorow-end-to-end/

[31] See corporatedigitalresponsibility.net as an example of a framework for Big Techs and others to understand the interdependencies of the social, economic, and environmental impact of data and digital technologies on society.

[32] See https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/01/ai-governance-and-human-rights

[33] This is supported by recent research. See https://www.digigen.eu/results/the-impact-of-technological-transformation-on-the-digital-generation-policy-recommendations/

[34] See https://ourworldindata.org/internet

[35] See Aaronson (2023).

[36] See https://reality2.substack.com/p/the-dark-patterns-in-your-choice?

[37] Terms and conditions which are simpler, shorter and with minimum jargon will increase trust in the media platforms. All communication media must be capable of being understood by vulnerable groups, such as people with dementia and cognitive impairments. Some of the proposals for consumer rights policies for finance and fintech should be transferred to the wider internet.

The manifesto is a primer for much-needed input and discussions among young people, individuals and institutions whom young people perceive as being able to address issues relating to online information - and implement improvements. It should be read by policymakers, regulators and people working for technology firms, thinktanks, technology companies and education institutions. The manifesto also calls for young people to take responsibility for the information they consume, create, and share online.

From the voices of the few can come change for many and for the generations to come.