



UNESCO Chair Report

*Promoting Media Literacy and Combating
Misinformation in the Digital Age.*

Chair: Aleksei Kloos

Deputy Chair: Ojiro Yahagi

Personal Statements

Chair – ALEKSEI KLOOS

Dear Delegates,

Thank you for joining MUNISS' 17th session! It is my absolute pleasure to be your chair at UNESCO this year. Allow me to introduce myself very briefly.

My name is Aleksei, and I'm currently 15, turning 16 in late April, just after MUNISS. I am the Vice President of the Model United Nations club of my school, the Franconian International School, and I have been to 5 conferences in total: two of which were in Germany, two internally hosted, and one abroad, but this is my first time chairing, so this is also a new experience for me.



Funnily enough, last year, for MUNISS' 16th session, I was a delegate myself in the very committee I'm very grateful to chair: UNESCO, so I've truly come full circle this year. Last time I was here, I saw amazing, fruitful, and engaging debates, and I would love nothing more than to continue that again this year.

UNESCO is a fantastic committee for intermediate delegates, and together with my Deputy Chair, Ojiro Yahagi, we will ensure that this is a welcoming place for constructive discussions about topics that are still relevant today whilst balancing having fun and being productive. I am very much looking forward to seeing you all in April and for the debates that will ensue. Until then, best of luck with your position papers, and hope that this guide will be of use to you all.

Deputy Chair – OJIRO YAHAGI

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 17th session of MUNISS! I will be chairing you for this conference as deputy chair and looking forward to seeing you all then. Let me introduce myself briefly before you get into the debate topics.

My name is Ojiro. I'm 16 years old and I have been to 2 conferences, one being the last MUNISS hosted last year and the other one was FAMUN recently hosted in the Netherlands. I've been part of both conferences as a delegate, just like you, and this is my first time chairing an official conference.

I am very much aware of how important chairs can be to have a flowing, meaningful debate between delegates so I will put my full effort into providing you with such an environment. The main chair, Aleksei Kloos, and I promise you to have both a constructive and enjoyable committee. I can't wait to see you all in April at ISS, but till then, get ready to have the most exciting debate you've ever experienced.



Introduction

Media literacy is the ability to not only identify different types of media, but to understand the message it is trying to convey (“What is media literacy”) and also take into account potential biases to ultimately understand the author’s purpose of creating this media. The way that we gather and share information through differing mediums has evolved significantly over time; most notably after the invention of internet, our media expanded from physical, such as books and articles in newspapers, to digital too. We now possess advanced technology to gather and share information at an almost instantaneous rate, and we are exposed to this information for around eight hours. This is almost double the amount we are exposed to traditional, non-digital media (Guttman). With every introduction of a new form of media, it is crucial it is crucial for everyone who interacts with any media available today to have media literacy.

The ease of posting information online has increased since the expansion of digital media. Around 7 million blog posts are published per day and blogs are not the only digital media people can publish(Minaev). The information posted on the internet can often spread widely and can influence to a large extent as there were 4.2 billion active social media users in 2021 and this number keeps rising (Minaev).

It should be noted, that with this increase differing kinds of media, especially those born-digital, are not only restricted to journalists and publishers, but in fact allow for most regular members of society to also spread their opinions, and what they believe are facts (that may not necessarily be true), hence, misinformation. Misinformation can be defined simply as the spreading false information (rumours, insults, and pranks) (Donovan), and whilst not limited to only digital media, it becomes most prominent because of the accessibility to post and views this content, as well as the speed in which one can access it.

The spread of misinformation online is a global problem that requires international collaboration to come to definitive, proactive solutions(Arechar, 1502-13). To prevent the world from being engulfed in waves of mass confusion prompted by misinformation, recently highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to determine whether information is factual or not is a paramount skill for any media consumer to possess.



Glossary

Media literacy: The ability to critically understand and analyze the messages presented by different media sources (“What is media literacy”)

Media: plural of medium (“What Is Media?”)

Medium: mean communication to transfer data such as news, music, movies (“What Is Media?”)

Internet: a system architecture that has revolutionized mass communication, mass media, and commerce by allowing various computer networks around the world to interconnect (Khan and Dennis)

Misinformation: Spreading false information (rumors, insults, and pranks) (Donovan)



Issue Explanation

The spread of misinformation in social media has become a severe threat to our society (Muhammed and Saji). There are three main topics often misinformation is found, which are health, politics, and disaster events. They all differ in the characteristics of the misinformation. Out of all digital media, social media has been one of the main media to spread misinformation and influence people (Muhammed and Saji), which has been a topic of current discourse regarding certain platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. This is due to the ease of access, speed of distribution, and the difficulty of correcting the misinformation spread (“Fighting misinformation”).

In the period when Covid-19 was a completely unknown virus and the whole world was in confusion, misinformation had been spreading immensely. There has been information that didn't recognize the threat to world health by Covid-19 and conspiracy theories claiming that vaccines can alter human DNA⁸. According to WHO, taking action based on misinformation can claim human lives⁸. Research suggested that there were around 6000 people hospitalized in the first three months of 2020 due to the coronavirus misinformation⁸. It is claimed by researchers that at least 800 people have lost their lives possibly because of misinformation regarding Covid-19⁸. This kind of result is not rare in the digital age. The uncertainty in society, such as the new coronavirus, will bring scepticism and distrust, which in turn foster fear, anxiety, finger-pointing, stigma, violent aggression, and dismissal of proven public health measures⁸. This can result in loss of human life as seen in the case of Covid-19.

Another major field where misinformation is spread in digital media is politics. It has been shown in the past few years how influential misinformation can be when spread online, as highlighted by a voter's choice in the elections of the United States (“Misinformation Is a Threat”), as many false stories online suggest that a presidential candidate had done something that is scandalous, morally false, or simply untrue. It is not only in the US where the impact of misinformation on politics is evident. In Brazil, it is said that far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro, who won the presidential election in 2018, has benefitted from the disinformation campaign on Whatsapp, a media used by almost half of Brazilians for political news (“Misinformation Is a Threat”). According to one study, 56 percent of the most-shared political images in the lead-up to the election were misleading (“Misinformation Is a Threat”). Although Jair Bolsonaro might have won the election without this misinformation, such tactics can lead to destabilized governments and could be a threat to democracy.



History of the Topic

Media literacy has most notably evolved alongside media itself, as with every change and introduction of a new medium to the public, there also comes many more factors to take into account when applying media literacy skills. Some of the earliest discussions on media literacy emerged during the mid 20th century when the TV was introduced, and many concerns were raised on the influence of TV on any given individual. Later, in the 20th century, we began to see how media began to expand and diversify, especially with the creation of the Internet, and much of media literacy began to expand towards including digital mediums, which meant including skills of navigating online content, as well as evaluating sources and underlying messages.

With more and more digital-born mediums becoming increasingly popular, a bigger emphasis was drawn on media literacy in education, yet, the rise of social media brought on an onset of new challenges, particularly the rapid spread of misinformation and manipulation of content or information, which further prompted enhanced media literacy efforts.

Misinformation has been a predominant, recurring issue in world history and politics, leading to drastic actions taken by certain individuals or groups. Some notable examples from the 21st century highlight that despite all attempts to control and mitigate the effects of misinformation, it is still a pressing issue.

On December 16, 2016, in an event dubbed “The Pizzagate Shooting”, Edgar Maddison Welch brought an assault rifle to a pizzeria in Washington, falsely believing he was saving children trapped in a sex-slave ring (Haag). He claims that he had investigated an online report that claimed there were children held within that pizzeria that were being abused, also alleging that the entire scheme was led by Hillary Clinton (Haag). This theory was naturally refuted by the police of Washington. Still, the fact that this theory spread so widely, and led to what could have been a potentially horrific event only goes to show how necessary media literacy is. If Welch were to have been more media literate at the time, he would have been able to understand that this ‘report’, lest it even be called one, was baseless and nonsensical.

On March 19, 2019, a mass attack was carried out in France, after crowds believed that a Romanis had abducted countless others (Guy). Essentially, a rumour of white vans driving around the Paris suburbs of Nanterre and Colombes kidnapping young women (Guy) was spread. The French police have reported that despite this rumour, no such kidnapping has been confirmed, having listed Facebook and Snapchat as the main mediums for this rumour to spread. WhatsApp has also been responsible for spreading rumours resulting in the death of dozens, killed throughout 6 weeks (Guy). Yet again, this highlights the dangers of media illiteracy, especially when coupled with advanced software that can spread this misinformation rapidly.

Still ever-presently looming in the background, the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially at its peak in 2019 and 2020 proved that misinformation was still a large issue. During this time, it is important to note that many people were forced to switch to using devices for most of their daily activities, which includes people who are not particularly ‘tech-savvy’, computer, or media literate. This led to a swathe of



misinformation spreading about COVID at the height of the lockdowns, with four studies finding that 51% of total misinformation regarding health posted on social media was about vaccines, and around 28.8% was about Covid-19 ("Infodemics and Misinformation"). Some baseless claims suggested that the vaccine could alter human DNA, most discrediting the threat of Coronavirus, which lead to around 6000 people being hospitalised within the first 3 months of 2020 due to this misinformation⁹.



Any Previous Attempts

The publication of the Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Development Guidelines by UNESCO ("Global Standards") marked a turning point in promoting critical thinking through digital literacy worldwide, yet, its impact is varied globally due to the differing applications of this curricula. It essentially details a standardised programme of the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) curriculum through responsible media consumption as well as production. Its successes were highlighted through its implementation by many educational institutions across the world, and though its strides were undoubtedly monumental, continual efforts are still needed to ensure complete widespread integration and its effectiveness.

The Global Media and Information Literacy Week in 2022 contained a series of workshops, seminars, and online resources to provide tools that help determine credible information with misinformation. Seeking to reach a broader audience, it contained multiple partnerships with educational institutions, non-government organisations (NGOs), as well as governments themselves. Whilst its successes are debatable, as they can only be measured qualitatively through generally enhanced media skills and awareness, it brought together a variety of representatives to discuss the online and offline challenges and think about the solution ("Global Media").

'Stop the Spread' was a multi-platform campaign (Website, apps, TV, etc.) launched by the BBC during the peak of Covid-19, particularly in May and June of 2020 aimed to raise public awareness of the amount of misinformation around Covid-19⁹. Essentially, it called for people to double-check their information to minimize the damage and spread of false information.

Whilst there are not many explicit resolutions or broader frameworks already dedicated to media literacy and combating misinformation, many resolutions that focus on human rights, freedom of expression, as well as access to information do provide a basis of sorts for addressing these issues internationally. For instance, Resolution 70/161 in December 2015 emphasised the importance of the promotion of access to information, and in part, promotes information literacy. What is more common, though, are projects and programmes initiated by other institutions within the UN to combat these issues.



Media Contribution

Media is the key to this topic as we are discussing the solution regarding how we interact with these media. Media is the place where misinformation is spread across the user. No one can measure the impact of misinformation in our society and it cannot be underestimated. Specific measures of solution must be taken to foster the understanding of media literacy throughout society so that no such misinformation can spread immensely. Having such influence in the current world, the media itself can contribute to this issue. Past widespread misinformation was often corrected by the official government and police but the impact has been minimal. In this way, the media holds a key role in this topic.

WHO has been taking a very cautious stance on the misinformation, especially health-related spread online. Their review states that incorrect interpretation of health information results in worse mental health, an increase in vaccine hesitancy, and delay of health provision of healthcare ("Infodemics and Misinformation"). The authors of the review suggested possible solutions to develop legal policies, create and promote awareness campaigns, improve health-related content in mass media, and increase people's digital and health literacy("Infodemics and Misinformation"). The review states that "Promoting and disseminating trustworthy health information is crucial for governments, health authorities, researchers, and clinicians to outweigh false or misleading health information disseminated in social media," ("Infodemics and Misinformation"). WHO believes this issue to be alarming for world health but also believes it to be countered by raising awareness and publishing correct information from trusted sources.

Northwestern, an institute for policy research, believes fact-checking is a very limited tool to reduce misinformation as it stands on trust in the source information is checked with ("Fake News, Big Lies"). The authors recommend scientists and journalists to make clear what they do. They claim that the general public often underestimates the role of journalism and reminding the power it has can decrease the risk of believing misinformations. The author encourages people to spend time looking at different sources on the same topic ("Fake News, Big Lies").



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