



FORUM: The Sixth Committee of the General Assembly

QUESTION OF: Ensuring the fundamental right to free information by combatting the growing danger of misinformation spread through propaganda, press and social media

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INTRODUCTION:

The increase of misinformation has become a pressing issue in the modern information landscape. Advances in communication technology and the rise of social media have made it easier for false information to spread rapidly, often with far-reaching consequences.

Misinformation can manipulate public opinion, influence elections, and even incite violence. To ensure the fundamental right to free information while combatting misinformation, policymakers, civil society, and technology companies should work together to develop and implement a holistic strategy that balances free speech rights with the need to protect the public from the dangers of misinformation.

This strategy should be guided by transparency, accountability, and a commitment to upholding democratic values.

BACKGROUND:

The right to free information is preserved in international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19). Many national constitutions also protect this right. A robust and informed public is essential for the functioning of a democracy. Free access to accurate information allows citizens to make informed decisions, hold leaders accountable, and participate meaningfully in civic life.

Misinformation encompasses a range of false or misleading information, including disinformation (deliberate falsehoods) and misinformation (false information spread without intent to deceive). It can manifest as conspiracy theories, hoaxes, fake news, or biased reporting and spread through various channels, including social media platforms, traditional media outlets, and word-of-mouth. Social media, in particular, has accelerated the dissemination of false information due to its reach and virality. Misinformation can erode trust in institutions, create divisions within society, and undermine the democratic process. It can also have public health consequences, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic when false information about the virus and vaccines led to real-world harm.

DEFINITIONS OF KEYTERMS:

Misinformation: False or misleading information that is spread, often unintentionally, without the intent to deceive.

Disinformation: False information that is deliberately created and disseminated with the intent to deceive or manipulate public opinion.

Fact-Checking: The process of verifying the accuracy of claims, statements, or information to determine whether they are true or false.

Media Literacy: The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and critically interpret media content, including news and information, to discern its credibility and accuracy.

Filter Bubble: A concept related to personalized content algorithms that show individuals information and content that aligns with their past online behavior, preferences, and interests, thereby creating a "bubble" of information tailored to their views.

Social Media Responsibility: The ethical and moral obligation of social media platforms to take measures to curb the spread of misinformation and harmful content on their platforms.

Censorship: The suppression or restriction of speech, information, or content by a government or authority, often for political, moral, or security reasons.

Digital Literacy: The ability to use digital technology effectively, including understanding how information is created, shared, and manipulated online.

Ethical Journalism: Journalism that adheres to ethical principles, such as accuracy, fairness, impartiality, and accountability, in reporting and storytelling.

Collaborative Journalism: A practice where multiple media organizations or journalists work together to investigate and report on complex issues, including misinformation.

POTENTIAL ISSUES:

Misinformation poses a significant threat to the fundamental right to free information, democracy, and public safety. Effective countermeasures require a multi-faceted approach that includes media literacy education, fact-checking initiatives, regulatory measures, social media responsibility, and collaborative efforts.

- Balancing the right to free speech with the need to prevent harm from misinformation requires a nuanced legal framework that respects individual rights while addressing societal risks.
- Misinformation can infiltrate traditional media through biased reporting, sensationalism, or the influence of powerful interest groups. Journalistic standards and ethics are sometimes compromised.
- Propaganda, when used to disseminate false or misleading information, can manipulate public opinion and sow discord. State actors and political groups often employ propaganda to advance their agendas.

POSSIBLE COUNTERMEASURES:

Media Literacy Education; Promoting media literacy helps individuals critically assess information sources, discern fact from fiction, and understand the motives behind misinformation.

Fact-Checking Initiatives; Independent fact-checking organizations play a crucial role in verifying information and correcting false claims in a timely manner.

Regulatory Measures; Governments can enact laws and regulations that address the spread of misinformation, while carefully balancing free speech rights.

Social Media Responsibility; Social media platforms should adopt stricter content moderation policies, limit the spread of false information, and promote authoritative sources.

Collaborative Efforts; Multi-stakeholder collaborations involving governments, tech companies, civil society, and academia can work together to combat misinformation effectively.

USEFUL SOURCES

The United Nations - [UN](#)

World Health Organization - [WHO](#)

Pew Research Center - [Pew Research Center](#)

The Poynter Institute - [Poynter Institute](#)

Misinformation Review - [Misinformation Review](#)

Harvard's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy - [Shorenstein Center](#)

The Reuters Institute/University of Oxford - [The Reuters Institute](#)

MediaWell - [MediaWell](#)