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Disinformation: a collective, human and technological phenomenon and the different ways to combat it

The World Economic Forum released the Global Risks Report 2024[3], which identifies potential risks for humanity for the next decade, considering technological acceleration, uncertainties regarding exclusionary economic processes, the complex environmental situation, in addition to conflicts. The vector for building the results of the survey carried out with 1,400 experts in September 2023 had four main structural forces that bring together and trigger a necessary management of systemic risks in the global scenario, namely: 1. Trajectories related to global warming and consequences related to earth systems (**climate change**); 2. Changes in the size, growth and structure of populations around the world (**demographic bifurcation**); 3. Development paths for frontier technologies (**technological acceleration**); 4. Material evolution in the concentration and sources of geopolitical power (**geostrategic shifts**).

In this scenario and linked to the process of technological acceleration, the phenomenon of disinformation comes first among the most serious global risks for the next two years, ranking fifth when considering the ten years ahead. The concern that spreads throughout multiple dimensions of life in society, including environmental and scientific issues, has as its main core, between 2024 and 2025, the political electoral scenario in several countries. The main concerns focus on the indiscriminate use of artificial "intelligence" in disinformation narratives that have been upgraded and now have greater impact in society. The risks involve greater manipulation and control of public opinion, in addition to the potentialization of a process of massive alienation, thinking with Freud (2020, p.50) for whom "a group is extraordinarily credulous and open to influence, it has no critical faculty, and the improbable does not exist for it. It thinks in images, which call one another up by association [...]".

The current mediatization processes constitute a central axis for thinking about misinformation in 21st century societies. The multiplication of screens and content are intertwined with practices and discourses in hybrid and convergent ecosystems. Thus, it is pertinent to systematize some structural issues that function as anchor points of the contemporary scenario. Firstly, disinformation processes are part of the convergence of new and old cultural industries that are the product of creative work and are characterized by a twofold

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[3] Available at:< https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/ >. Access: 11 Jan ,2024.

constitutive character: they participate in a particular type of reproduction of capital that, in turn, sets the conditions for immanent processes of symbolic reproduction. Secondly, they are developed in a global and concentrated ecosystem in which various types of platforms - TV, radio, newspapers, cinema, social networks, digital media and streaming sites, among others -, contents and uses converge on multiple screens. Lastly, these hybrid ecosystems have brought up a culture of connectivity that runs through our daily practices both in the consumption of information, as well as in access to entertainment and in the development of socialization, activities that, not without conflict, are constitutive of our identities and ways of knowing and conceiving reality.

The constitutive hybridity of the development of social life in convergent scenarios prevents differentiation between online and offline experiences, which is why the modern information diet is nourished by contributions from traditional and digital media combined with disintermediated communication processes in a context of information abundance. High-choice media environments, such as the current one, a product of digitalization, the multiplication of the supply of information and platforms, have some fundamental features that are part of the academic and social concern: 1) relative decline in the supply of political information compared to soft news; 2) a decrease in the quality of information resulting from the crisis in the business models of traditional media; 3) increase in media concentration that could affect diversity and pluralism; 4) growing processes of political fragmentation and polarization; 5) relativism regarding evidence and supremacy of opinion and beliefs; and 6) consolidation of increasingly inequitable societies regarding access and consumption of political information (Van Aelst et al., 2017).

In the current context, the process of disinformation has the power to further deepen social and political divisions through ideological polarization that ends up structuring a social and political *disagreement* based on the exploration of affections, which summons up values, beliefs and structure of opinions. In Rancière's words (2018, p.11), there are numerous "reasons for an X to understand and not to understand an Y: because, although they clearly understand what the other one says, they do not *see* the object the other one talks about; or else because they understand and must understand, see, and want to make seen an object that is different under the same word, another reason in the same argument".

The increase in disinformation over the last decade has been centered on digital platforms and their social networks, which since the beginning of the 21st century have been improving their business models through the use of behavioral psychology and analytical psychometrics, aiming to increase profits, although the discourse of such techno-market structures is based on making life easier for each user.

The emergence of computational technologies that work with artificial neural networks, algorithms and Machine Learning systems and/or with Deep Learning that try to simulate the functions of the human brain, as well as speech and movement actions, among others; on the one hand, it has been seen by the most technological enthusiasts as a disruptive process favorable to the world, while on the other, it has caused great concerns among researchers in several countries, as mentioned in the *Global Risks Report 2024*.

The researchers' assessment is that misinformation and the dissemination of hate speech enhanced by the use of artificial "intelligence", with free and boosted circulation on digital platforms/social networks/messaging applications, can intervene in the destinies of nations, causing great damage to the democratic world as seen in the United States in 2016, in England also in 2016, in Brazil in 2018 and finally, in Argentina in 2023, in addition to other even more complex environments, such as in African countries.

The use of marketing strategies made available by the platforms' business models, and which are structured in algorithmic architectures that direct the gaze, capture attention and capitalize on human experience to be transformed into data, by that we call the intentional market for the construction of ignorance (Rêgo and Barbosa, 2020), has reverberated a hatred of democracy identified by Rancière (2005) at the beginning of this century, and which, as highlighted by Rêgo and Barbosa (2020), already had deep roots in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany since the 1980.

In this sense, it is more than plausible and understandable that the phenomenon of disinformation appears at the top rank of risks and concerns of the World Economic Forum, given the force with which it can affect not only societies, governments and democracies, but it can and has already caused great damage to the environment, as we have seen in Brazil by miners' and farmers' actions in the Amazon region, since the market of misinformation and denialism works in favor of deforestation and the intermittent exploitation of natural resources, spreading hatred towards indigenous peoples and positioning them as enemies of progress.

But the tentacles of disinformation do not stop there, they extend as propagators of scientific denialism and maintain a large and profitable web that involves anti-vaccine movements in several countries (Rêgo and Leal, 2023). Denialism is also historical and factual and goes hand by hand with misinformation and hate.

In recent years we have seen the power of disinformation in intervening in the public debate and influencing societies to the extent to citizens beinge exposed to viruses, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, when many who refused vaccines ended up dead from SARS-Cov-2.

As cited in the World Economic Forum, "freedoms related to the Internet, the press and access to broader information sources that are already in decline are at risk of tipping over into a broader repression of information flows across a wider range of countries.". (GRR, 2024, sp.).

COUNTERING

The fight against misinformation invites us to revisit the concepts of diversity and pluralism as a theoretical framework that ensures the minimum conditions necessary for the virtuous exercise of public deliberation. While diversity refers to the characteristics of industrialized cultural goods, pluralism, which is

associated with democratic exercise, refers to the existence of a multiplicity of voices sufficient for the different sectors and points of view to be represented (García Leiva & Albornoz, 2017). In other words, diversity is descriptive of a state of affairs while pluralism is normative.

Both definitions are intertwined with the definition of information quality. Although it is an ambiguous concept, given the number of areas involved, there are some operationalizable conceptualizations to think about modernity. One of the pioneers in its definition was Schultz (2000), who identified three dimensions for analysis: the existence of adequate resources for journalistic work; a legal system that ensures healthy levels of quality; and systematic professional standards. For Gutierrez Coba (2013), information quality includes variables linked to information structures, journalists and legislation in relation to informative work and freedom of expression. According to the author, digitalization has had a full impact on all these variables, fostering scenarios of increasing misinformation that are associated with the lack of quality of the circulating information.

Therefore, the processes of combating the phenomenon of disinformation involve multiple dimensions and must be agreed between active civil society and governments.

On the one hand, public policies for the immediate promotion of media education, scientific dissemination and popularization of science that must be activated at the same time as a legislative effort for the regulation of digital platforms which, as technomarket structures that profit from disinformation and speech and hate, must be held responsible for the disinformative content and the hate they recommend, boost and, mainly, monetize on.

On the other hand, the legal scope must have the strength to punish creators of harmful and illegal content that are qualified as potential risks to democracy and social life. Obviously, with protection mechanisms for the ordinary user wh is often involved in a web of lies.

In addition to these actions, we must bear in mind attitudes and laws that can hold mass media accountable, whose large corporations have monopolized information in most countries, and are also often responsible for the surrounding disinformation in the social environment, and even responsible for the monopoly of speech (SODRÉ, 1972) and public opinion.

On the other hand, governments, mainly in the global south, must promote their own technologies with the purpose of developing regional platforms (MOROZOV, 2023) in order to encourage greater competition, aiming to destabilize harmful practices seen in techno-market structures that monopolize trade of human experiences and fuel misinformation and hate. In this field, government support for science and technology is essential.

Civil society, in turn, has been a focus of great resistance to and combating disinformation with the creation of networks and non-governmental organizations that act continuously on several fronts. In Brazil,

initiatives such as the National Network to Combat Disinformation *(Rede Nacional de Combate à Desinformação – RNCD)*[4],, the Articulation Room against Disinformation (*Sala de Articulação contra Desinformação – SAD)*[5] and the Coalition for Rights in the Web *(Coalização Direitos na Rede-CDR)* [6] are examples of articulations that have sought to both combat and interfere in the predatory actions of platforms and the media market. misinformation.

Other important initiatives that we can highlight at a global level are the Center for Countering Digital Hate - CCDH[7] in the United States and the Global Coalition for Tech-Justice[8] created in 2023 and which brings together numerous networks from several countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that the proposal we made for the 33rd edition of the IRIE- International Review of Information Ethics, which focused on investigations on the fight against disinformation, aimed to understand research that works on themes related to the various dimensions that involve countering the phenomenon and of which the research is part, as a converging point that can guide and catalyze changes, in addition to being a guiding environment for managing the risks that disinformation can cause on a global scale.

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[4] https://rncd.org/

[5] https://contradesinformacao.com/

[6] https://direitosnarede.org.br/

[7] https://counterhate.com/

[8] https://yearofdemocracy.org/

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