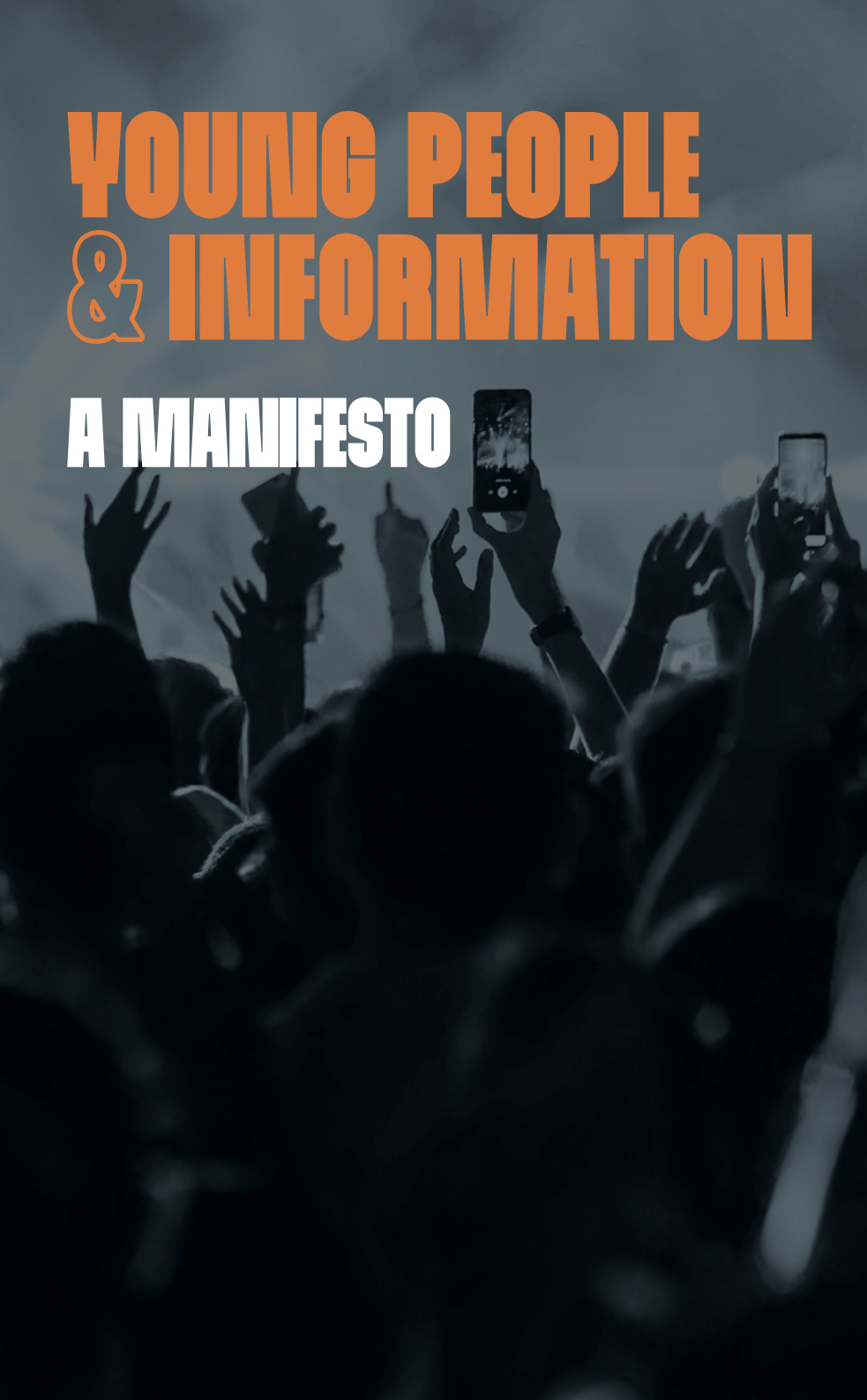
YOUNG PEOPLE & INFORMATION

A MANIFESTO



Young People & Information – A Manifesto
was developed by the 3CL Foundation
and edited by Alex Grech.

We are grateful to many people whose ideas and comments have helped shape the manifesto. They include: Elizabeth Ayling, Janette Ballard, Godfrey Baldacchino, Michael Bugeja, Mario Cacciottolo, Patrick Camilleri, Jacques Cordina, Martin Debattista, Karen Elliott, Ian Farrugia, Natalino Fenech, Alex Galea, Christine Garzia, Noah Giansiracusa, Jacob Grech, Athina Karatzogianni, Thilo Neidhoefer, Emma Pauncefort, Kirk Perris, Maria Pisani, Gary Plium, Toni Sant and Sophie Vella.

This second edition was supported by the Digital Literacies & Transversal Skills Directorate at the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation in Malta.

Design: JPA | FoundUnfound
Printing and Binding: Velprint

Second edition.
ISBN Print: 978-9918-0-0975-6
ISBN PDF: 978-9918-0-0976-3

Published by the 3CL Foundation, 2024.

Email: info@3CL.org
Web: www.3CL.org

Download this publication from:
https://www.3cl.org/manifesto

This publication is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial ShareAlike 4.0 Unported (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

YOUNG PEOPLE & INFORMATION

A MANIFESTO

Alex Grech

ACL

YOUNG PEOPLE & INFORMATI

INTROD

ION – A MANIFESTO

UCTION

This manifesto examines young people's complex relationship with online information.

It provides an overview of the state of information production, consumption and sharing.

It identifies issues that need to be addressed by those in a position to make positive changes.

It proposes ideas and solutions to facilitate a culture of media and information literacies[1], critical thinking and renewed trust in the Internet.

It encourages young people to take an activist approach, as responsible digital citizens, to embrace the skills needed to navigate the digital age and to apply pressure on those responsible for addressing the issues listed in this document.

Image: Alex Linch / Shutterstock.com

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

The internet, search engines, smartphones, affordable computers, online game consoles, other tech devices, and disruptive technologies provide unprecedented amounts of information. However, as 'digital natives'[2], young peoples' relationship with information is complicated by several factors.

Factors affecting young peoples' relationship with information

1— Accessibility:

24/7 internet access and disruptive technology have transformed how young people access, produce, process and share information online. Ubiquitous access has affected how young people explore their sense of self and conceptualise democracy.

2— Quality:

Online information varies in quality and reliability, often influenced by the source's agenda. Evaluation tools are available but are underutilised. Young people are often unfamiliar with these tools, and lack instruction on how to leverage them.

3— Privacy:

Despite legislation such as the EU's GDPR and Digital Services Act, young people continue to trust social media platforms[3] that may misuse their data. The relationship between users and these platforms is overshadowed by a lack of transparency and 'user lock-in'[4]. The widespread adoption of generative AI will make privacy and identity increasingly contentious issues.

4— Responsibility:

Young people are expected to be responsible digital citizens, making informed decisions about online information. In practice, many are unaware of the background or terms of service of the applications they rely on for information – or simply have other issues to contend with.

5— Discernment:

As advanced users of media and technologies, young people are expected to distinguish between facts, opinions, and misleading information. In practice, when online, people tend to absorb or contribute information quickly, with little time for reflection. They often rely on content curators and creators they implicitly trust.

6— Well-being:

Online presence impacts young people positively and negatively. Social media provides connectedness, community, and relationships, facilitating access to information and resources that may improve wellbeing. Social media is also associated with stress, insecurity, and low self-esteem. The perceived need to be 'always online' adds pressure to conform to social norms.

Objectives

The manifesto has three primary objectives:

1— Address issues relating to media freedoms[5]

such as citizen journalism, the attention economy and platform surveillance.

2— Combat misinformation and disinformation[6]

through a better understanding of the conflicting role of media, technology, education, and governance.

3— Understand online behaviour

which has created issues relating to identity, online hate speech, woke culture, cancel culture and online influencers.

Structure

This document has two sections, together with an online glossary, to explain more technical terms.

The first section 'The State of Play with Online Information' tabulates ongoing issues with online information, and is more formal and academic in approach.

If you are well-versed in the state of online information, you may choose to skip the first section and explore the second section, 'The Manifesto'.

You may also choose not to read this document sequentially. The overview of issues in the first section and the more action-oriented manifesto in the second, allow readers to engage with the content in a way that suits their interests and needs. This non-linear approach can be helpful for readers already familiar with the broader context of online information challenges.

If you are unfamiliar with some of the terms in the document, there is an online glossary at: *https://www.3cl.org/manifesto-glossary*

Purpose

The Manifesto is a primer for discussions among young people, individuals, and institutions perceived as capable of addressing online information issues and implementing improvements. We hope it will be read by policymakers, regulators and people working for technology firms, think tanks 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 calls for young people to take responsibility for the information they consume, create, and share online. The document should therefore also be read by millennials and Generation Z, particularly those who can influence others and mobilise where necessary

Our hope is that this manifesto will support young people's calls for a more equitable and responsible online environment. For this second edition, we incorporated feedback from discussions with young people and used generative AI to validate ideas, synthesise concepts, and clarify language, ensuring that the manifesto remains concise and clear.

We do not expect all of the issues and requests in the manifesto to resonate with everyone

The manifesto is not meant to be prescriptive.

The manifesto is meant to stimulate discussion and individual and collective action.

Application of the Manifesto

We review the manifesto regularly and publish updates in a variety of formats, including summaries. Here are some ideas for programmes and projects that could arise from this manifesto:

» Targeted campaigns led by young people to inspire regulators in their negotiations with technology firms.

» Meetings between young people and policymakers to facilitate changes in education curricula to accommodate media, information, and technology literacies.

» Podcasts hosted by young people on topics discussed in the manifesto.

» Workshops and summits between student representatives and relevant institutions to develop joint action plans.

» Conferences and workshops organised by young people for millennials and Generation Z in positions of influence.

» Talks between Millennials, Generation Z, and Generation X to identify alternative pathways to disinformation and fact-checking.

» Incentive schemes to create solutions to disinformation.

» 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 global Wikimedia Movement.

» Books, pamphlets, posters, vlogs, and videos addressing elements of the manifesto.

» Facilitation of 'LearnTech' activist groups.

» Facilitation of networks of young people interested in information and media literacies.

Change can be activated at local, national, and regional levels. It may have humble beginnings. It may start with a single, local-level project - perhaps with an intergenerational group in a town or city.

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

THE STATE OF PLAY WITH

ONLINE

INFORM

MATION

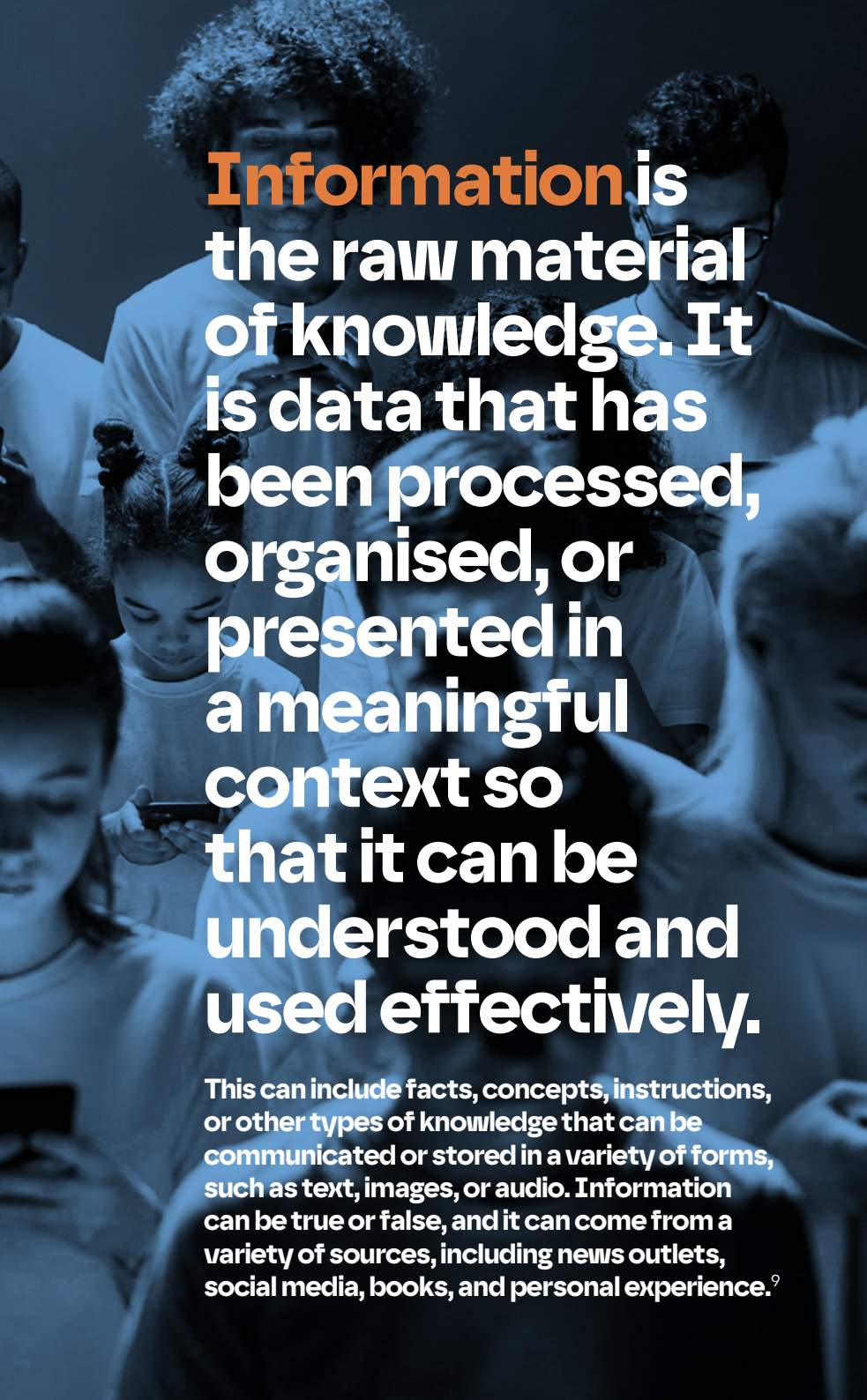
THE ISSUES WE WANT TO ADDRESS

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]

Image: Cottonbro Studio / Pexels.com



Information is the raw material of knowledge. It is data that has been processed, organised, 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

1 Media freedoms encompass the right to freely express and access information without fear of censorship, surveillance, or harassment. With these freedoms come responsibilities, including fact-checking, understanding bias, respecting others, and protecting privacy.

2 Social media platforms are media outlets, as opposed to agnostic carriers of data. The medium is the message; all media are social.

3 Journalism is about delivering accurate, verified information while engaging audiences through compelling storytelling. It is meant to inform the public and hold power accountable by making complex issues accessible. In the digital age, journalism has evolved, since professional journalists no longer have exclusive access to news or the authority to determine what constitutes a news story. Today, anyone with a smartphone and internet access can participate as a citizen journalist.[10]

4 Journalists often learn by doing, rather than through formal training. In the digital information age, journalists must go beyond the core skills of investigative reporting, copywriting, and story identification. They need to understand how content is created, shared, and repurposed on social media; they must be proficient in fact-checking and ethics[11] and have a working knowledge of emerging digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI). The type, quality and availability of journalism training is further complicated by cultural differences. Introducing journalism standards into compulsory education would address some of these challenges.

5 Many mainstream media outlets operate with a small core of permanent staff burdened by content expectations, often at the expense of accuracy. The internet created new fields of competition to the 20th century model of mainstream journalism, with newsrooms. Profit margins in the 'objective middle' are low. One of the consequences is the abundance of media outlets targeting users seeking affirmation and confrontation rather than information.

6 Public trust in journalism is declining, with local news being a possible exception. However, local journalism faces significant financial challenges and is in decline in numerous locations. Imposter websites sometimes masquerade as local news sources.

7 Online media is as permeable to the influence of the state and business as old media.

8 As long as mainstream media outlets depend on online advertising revenues, they will be vulnerable to many of the information disorders associated with social media platforms. The shift from print sales to free online news has often been funded by new and more insidious forms of native advertising. If citizens demand quality news, they might have to pay for it, even if it is being produced for online channels.

9 The ease and urgency of publishing online content may compromise fact-checking. The coming years will not only be defined by the speed of digital adoption but also by how we transform content to meet changing audience expectations.

/ Addressing Media Freedoms

10 There are many reasons for the decline of media freedoms: media ownership concentration, aggressive libel and foreign agent laws, censorship, journalist intimidation, hostility from incumbent media outlets, weak pan-European policy-making, lack of press freedoms in some nations, and political polarisation within journalism - to name a few.

11 Trust in the internet as a place for democracy was misplaced. We face constant surveillance and commercialisation. The early promise of web 2.0 to empower users has been diluted by the hegemony of a few big-tech, for-profit, social media platforms. The utopian mantra that 'information wants to be free'[12] has been debunked. Free speech on 'free' social media platforms has not led to universal truths.

12 It is not clear if social media increases accountability for journalists, or simply increases the likelihood of them facing abuse and threats. To date, regulatory and education-based efforts to address this problem have failed.

13 Social media platforms have failed to self-regulate. Profit trumps prudence.

14 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.[13]

15 In the past, access to information and truth held value and influence, much like currency. Social media presents a double-edged sword: while it may serve as a platform for democratic engagement, it also exposes the flaws of democratic processes. The rise of generative AI tools, such as chatbots and machine learning algorithms, may further enable individuals to evade accountability, particularly in a 'post-truth' era where determining facts has become increasingly difficult.

16 Once someone else is thinking for us, we risk ceasing to think for ourselves. This applies to people as much as to machine learning and the more subtle forms of generative AI permeating our lives. The more we rely on AI without understanding its programming and limitations, the less we will know about the world and ourselves.

17 Some citizen journalists operate more as influencers than career journalists, even if they produce news stories. They need to create and nurture their 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.

18 Algorithms shape the media we consume and share by leveraging user behaviour and data, giving platforms significant control over online information flow.

19 Despite the promise of decentralisation and self-sovereignty in Web 3.0, a handful of dominant platforms operate as gatekeepers in what was meant to be an open social media space. Silicon Valley platforms retain their power in the Western information space – for the time being, TikTok is an outlier.

20 Misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation ('information disorders') are not simple problems that can be fixed. They are symptoms of a broader social condition, similar to crime, which leads to information harms and requires ongoing monitoring and intervention.[14]

TRUST IN THE INTERNET AS A PLACE FOR DEMOCRACY WAS MISPLACED

MEDIA OUTLETS ACT AS ARBITERS OF TRUTH ONLINE

Combating Information Disorders

21 The most damaging aspects of the post-truth society stem from the deliberate intent to spread false information – for instance, imposter websites can masquerade as legitimate or local news sources. Other factors – such as unintentional misinformation, platform algorithms, and cognitive biases – also contribute significantly to the proliferation of information disorders.

22 Social media platforms wield significant power by shaping the flow of information and influencing public discourse. Platforms like TikTok can amplify citizen stories and surface news omitted by traditional media, but algorithmic datamining may also fuel political polarisation and confirmation bias by amplifying partisan propaganda and information disorders, often at the expense of user privacy.

23 Old and new media outlets increasingly act as arbiters of truth online, while trust in content is shaped by platform policies and users' reliance on personal networks. In a world where influence often outweighs facts, platform accountability and individual responsibility are crucial in determining truths.

24 Technology companies and social media platforms remain opaque about the data they harvest while algorithms dictate much of the content consumed online. These platforms use algorithms to push content to users on social media platforms to maximise engagement while simultaneously data-mining their devices. Computer engineering faces a common challenge: achieving full transparency in deep learning systems is perceived to reduce the efficiency of machine learning and AI. While citizens have legitimate demands for greater transparency, engineering standards for 'explainability' are not yet meeting these expectations. Consequently, the internal mechanics of algorithms and data mining processes are seldom clarified in user agreements, leaving transparency concerns largely unaddressed.

/ Combating Information Disorders

25 Some media organisations allow users to contribute commentary on their online platforms, which can lead to information disorders. Journalists are tasked with fact-checking this user-generated content, and may resort to algorithm-based content moderation which struggles to manage the current volume of content and lacks the ethical reasoning necessary to distinguish between harmful and benign material in complex situations. While AI could serve as a secondary line of defence against harmful content, human moderation remains essential.

26 The problems we encounter with mass datafication are not just technical but human problems, exacerbated by technology at scale.

27 Freedom of speech does not grant the right to spread falsehoods without accountability.

28 Neglecting human rights undermines well-established principles of liberty, fairness, and equality, as well as the processes that ensure accountability. Aspirations for a digital utopia often clash with dystopian realities, where Big Tech platforms, despite the promise of eliminating intermediaries, function as de facto gatekeepers of information. In contrast, open platforms like those in the Wikimedia Movement offer a viable alternative, promoting the free exchange of knowledge with minimal restrictions.

29 Debates about the usefulness of technology are often simplistic and imprecise. We must critically examine how, when, and where technology intervenes in our daily lives, shaping our interactions, decisions, and lifestyles. In areas that demand social and emotional intelligence, such as empathy and understanding, human and ethical oversight is essential.

30 Search engines and algorithms shape our understanding of ourselves and the world. They shape much of the content we see online, determining engagement and occasionally amplifying information disorders.

31 Despite its early promise, generative AI cannot yet differentiate between truth and falsehood. Machine learning lacks consciousness and conscience. It is trained on vast amounts of data, which includes human-created texts that may carry biases, truths, and untruths.

32 Blockchain technology was meant for decentralised secure transactions; it could also change information consumption patterns for the better through digital rights management and information verification. However, while it can provide an 'untampered' ledger of information platform, it is also vulnerable to the 'garbage in-garbage out' problem and cannot verify its accuracy or truthfulness.

33 Understanding how disinformation architectures work may be demoralising and empowering in equal measures. Many young people are weary of being warned of the consequences of their online interactions. Yet they also need education and support if they are to secure some control over their online identities. Improving education on information disorders can empower young people to balance caution with the curiosity and openness needed to benefit from the affordances of social networking.

34 Consumerism, rather than disinformation concerns, remains the primary force behind calls for government intervention to address online harms. While some await or even fear government responses to digital abuses, activists are ready to challenge platforms and pressure policymakers to shape the governance of the information space.

35 Institutional education which is built on a one-size-fits-all model has failed to keep pace with cultural and technological changes. We need renewed investment in lifelong learning and digital literacies, especially for young people. Education must address uncomfortable issues like privacy, information disorders, and the complexities of the digital world, empowering young people to navigate the challenges created by new technologies. The onus is also on older people to acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding with minimal formal institutional support, through technology-enabled learning experiences.

36 Network silos reinforce existing beliefs and biases, creating a false sense of consensus that makes it difficult for individuals to separate fact from fiction. Echo chambers can facilitate the spread of information disorders and harmful ideologies.

/ Combating Information Disorders

37 Media regulation is shaped by socio-economic conditions and political culture. In some countries, it is associated with censorship and the infringement of human rights. In advanced economies with substantial digital investment, there has been a reluctance to regulate social media platforms as media organisations since regulation is viewed as stifling innovation. High-profile antitrust cases against major tech companies typically result in large fines, which are quickly settled or contested.

38 Government efforts to regulate the tech industry have lagged significantly behind technological advances. The rise of artificial intelligence has coincided with AI developers warning that their products carry significant risks of harm, prompting lawmakers to work more quickly than usual. 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 regulate AI.

39 Geopolitics may sometimes shape the global information space. From the manipulation of media outlets to the dissemination of fake news and conspiracy theories, psychological warfare is used to shape perceptions, attitudes and control narratives.

40 In politically sensitive regions, multinational platforms may restrict access to specific content, driving some users to regional social media platforms with more localised moderation teams. Others turn to decentralised, autonomous information spaces powered by blockchain for greater freedom and security.

41 Information disorders are often amplified by public information consumption patterns, and the intentional or unintentional confusion sown by institutions and individuals in power.

42 The attention economy has significantly shortened the attention span of its target audience.

43 Younger audiences have shifted their patterns of media consumption and production towards short-form visual narratives. Information is increasingly packaged in short video formats.

44 Many young people understand their dependence on social media and smartphones but remain locked in an addictive relationship. Deciding the appropriate age for smartphone and social media access remains a contentious issue. Fear of missing out, instant gratification and peer pressure are among the reasons why young people want to be part of the social contract orchestrated by big tech.

45 AI is reconfiguring search to deliver more personalised and context-aware results. It offers publishers an opportunity to deliver more personalised information to help deal with channel fragmentation and information overload. AI also brings existential and ethical questions about information that we are only just starting to understand.

MASS DATAFICATION IS A SYMPTOM OF NOT JUST A TECHNICAL PROBLEM – BUT A HUMAN PROBLEM EXACERBATED BY TECHNOLOGY AT SCALE

FOMO/ INSTANT GRATIFICA-TION/ PEER PRESSURE

Understanding Online Behaviour

46 There is a generational divide in technology use and online behaviour, and while it may be narrowing in some areas, differences in digital fluency and trust in online platforms persist. Bridging this divide requires concerted efforts from different age groups to foster mutual understanding of online behaviour. Research into these generational differences is critical for determining multi-generational levels of trust in online information and developing strategies to improve digital literacy across generations.

47 Many young people aspire to become social media influencers, but the lack of reliable metrics makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness, sustainability, and quality of their content. As they position themselves as personal brands, promoting products and services, there is minimal ethical oversight of their operations and little scrutiny to the goods they sell or the endorsements they make. While influencers play a significant role in shaping the digital landscape, their motivations often appear driven by engagement and profit, sometimes at the expense of integrity. A deeper understanding of influencer culture is needed, beyond its commercial aspects, to critically examine its broader societal impact.

48 There is a risk of ambivalence towards information disorders on social media. Young people consider these more of a nuisance than a democratic crisis. The reasons for ambivalence and the propensity to participate in and share information orders need to be researched.

/ Understanding Online Behaviour

49 People may be more likely to be uninformed than misinformed. Understanding online behaviour requires the entire composite of digital literacies – particularly the ability to think critically about the sources of information.

50 As young people navigate the uncertainties of the Fourth Industrial Revolution[15], digital literacies must expand to include a range of new literacies, including health and financial / fintech literacies.[16]

51 Age verification online is a massive failure: the checks and balances inserted by social media platforms are vested in legalistic terms and conditions that are circumvented by ticking a box, absolving the platform owners of any further responsibility.

52 The internet and social media continue to be a fertile breeding ground for extremism and discrimination. Social media platforms amplify the worst forms of online behaviour such as cyberbullying and trolling, with devastating impact on minors. Disturbing content is accessible to anyone, irrespective of their age or education.

53 Many LGBTQ+ adults do not feel welcomed, seen, accepted and safe on social media.

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

55 Cancel culture originally aimed to withdraw support from public figures or companies after they engaged in objectionable or offensive behaviour, serving as a means of holding those in power accountable. However, it has shifted from its initial goal of fostering a more inclusive and respectful society to a practice where young people are overly scrutinised for their past mistakes. Online public shaming and ostracism of young individuals have become widespread practices.

56 Many young people have grown to be risk-averse for fear of retribution on social media. This stifles free speech and open dialogue, discouraging creative risks and self-expression.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ARE MEDIA OUTLETS AS OPPOSED TO AGNOSTIC CARRIERS OF DATA

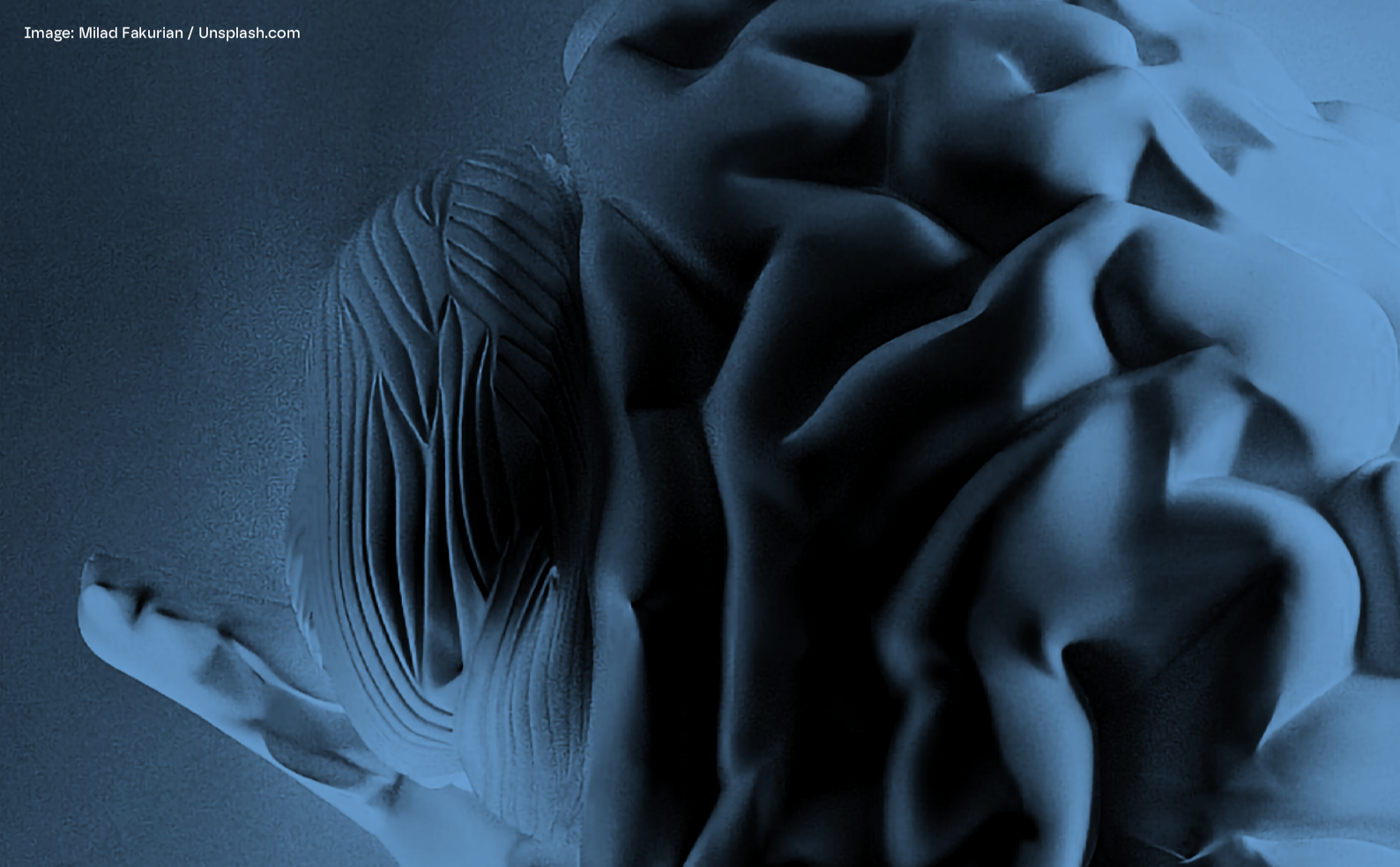
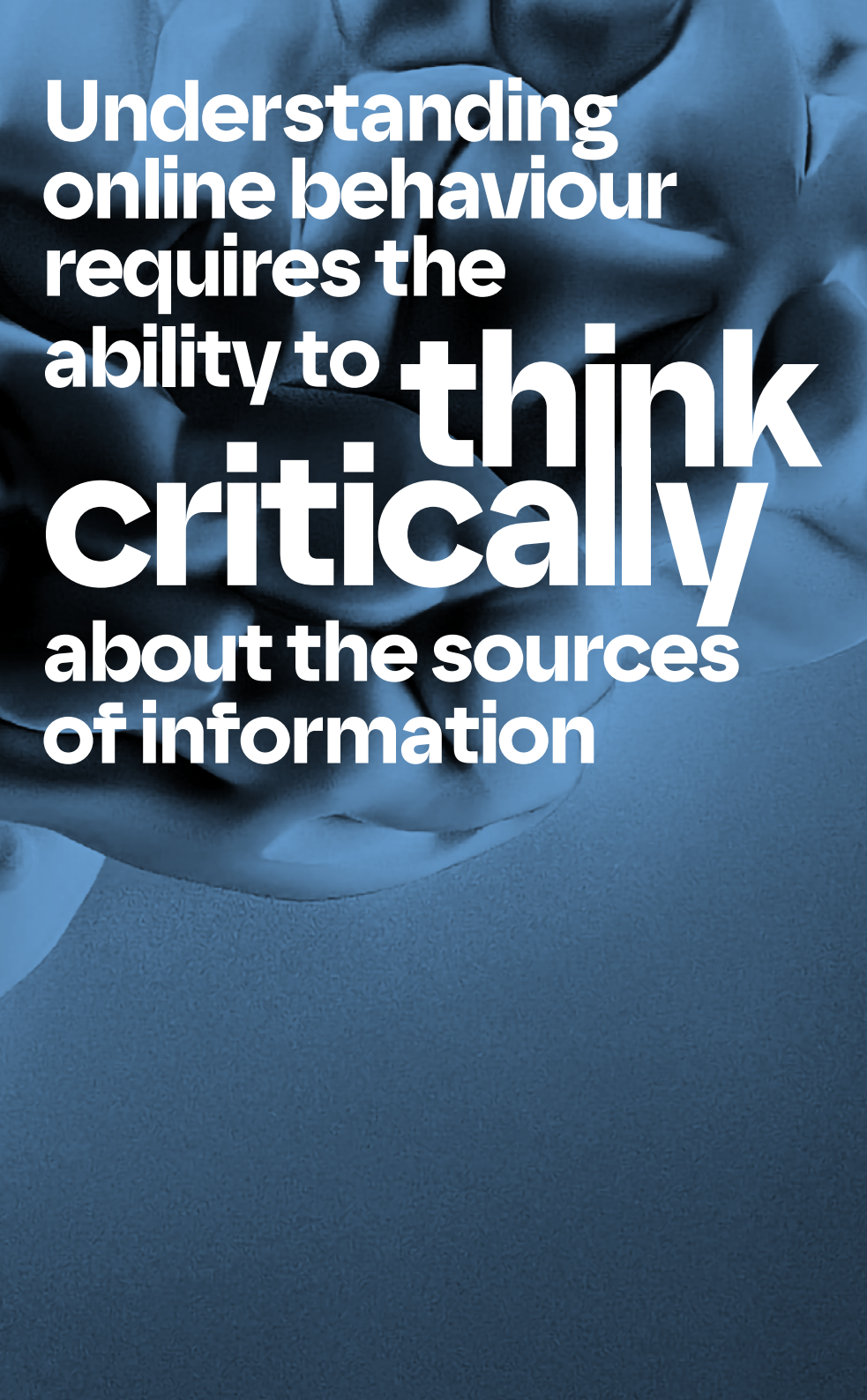


Image: Milad Fakurian / Unsplash.com


Understanding online behaviour requires the ability to think critically about the sources of information

YOUNG PEOPLE & INFORMATION:

MAN

THE
MANIFESTO

WE ARE
HUMAN

WE ARE
NOT DATA

The Manifesto/

Media Freedoms

1

We are human. We are not data.

2

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

3

We must achieve universal access to the digital space. The digital divide[17] is a significant barrier to acquiring essential skills for the future.

4

We feel both apprehension and optimism about the rise of AI. We are concerned about its potential risks but intrigued by its possibilities for innovation and positive change.

5

We recognise that there is no such thing as free media. The price of an internet connection is not the only cost we incur when securing online information. The harvesting of personal data for third-party benefit is rarely quantifiable.

6

We have the right to freely express ourselves and access unbiased information online, without fear of censorship, surveillance, or harassment. We support journalism – whether practiced by mainstream outlets, independent citizen journalists, or bloggers - that holds those in power accountable.

7

We have the right to participate in citizen journalism to amplify diverse voices. We may gather, write, distribute, and publish news freely, without the permission of traditional media gatekeepers.

8

We need trained journalists, irrespective of whether they are engaged by media outlets or operating as citizen journalists. While journalism school is helpful, the mentorship and support of experienced media practitioners are invaluable.

9

We must call out bias in media coverage on any platform. As consumers and creators of news, we must also challenge our own echo chambers by seeking reasoned and diverse opinions that counter our beliefs.

10

We urge mainstream and community media organisations to actively involve young people in decision-making processes. As advanced users of digital platforms, young people are essential in creating spaces for diverse voices and experiences and shaping the future of media.

11

We support investigative journalism that stands up to the powerful. Journalists must be protected from retribution, particularly in small states where personal risk is high. Legal safeguards must extend to all journalists, irrespective of whether they work for mainstream media or as independent bloggers, to ensure that investigative work is not stifled by fear.

12

We need trustworthy, fact-checking, and investigative media to expose and combat information disorders. Access to justice and the rule of law must be applied to online spaces which currently operate without clear regulations. Human rights law should be applied to these digital environments to ensure accountability while upholding fundamental freedoms.

13

We need alternative media with strong input from local news sources to serve communities and ensure diverse representation. Local journalism is crucial to the health of democracy, providing accountability and fostering civic engagement. Public funding models should be explored to reinvigorate and sustain local news. Social media platform revenues should support bona fide news organisations. We need to create a more equitable media ecosystem where journalism thrives independently of corporate and market pressures.

14

We need a 'new social contract' for digital media companies that ensures democratic oversight of communication systems. This contract must support the development of public infrastructure that is vital to a healthy democracy, especially local journalism that holds concentrated power to account. Independent, community-focused reporting must be free from corporate influence.

15

We must preserve the availability of open knowledge, free from the commercial interests that threaten it. As more young users consume news through social media, we must adapt to new formats that prioritise both speed and journalistic integrity.

16

We need journalism that not only tells stories but also offers solutions, resisting profit-driven corporate models. To support truly independent investigative work, alternative funding models that prioritise the public interest over profit are essential, ensuring freedom from corporate pressures and enabling a fearless pursuit of the truth.

17

We call on policymakers to learn from countries that have enacted legislation protecting journalists. Legal safeguards must extend to both mainstream media outlets and independent bloggers. While self-regulation is ideal for investigative journalism, oversight is necessary to ensure accountability and uphold media integrity.

WE NEED TO SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

The Manifesto/

Information Disorders

18

We need to speak truth to power now more than ever.

19

We have the right to access and share information freely but responsibly, without fear of censorship or reprisal.

20

We need to rebuild trust in digital technologies as they are critical to an open and democratic society.

21

We believe that information disorders can represent a direct threat to democracy in certain contexts. Coordinated efforts across education, media and technology, with input from diverse various disciplines and generations, are necessary to address these challenges.

22

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

23

We need a decentralised internet that safeguards the autonomy of its diverse user base despite the business interests of platform providers. Platform providers should shift value back from shareholders to users.[18]

24

We must understand how platforms manipulate attention. We support efforts to increase platform transparency and accountability, and protect individual privacy. Social media companies must regain public trust by promoting responsible content and meaningful connections, rather than fuelling outrage and anger. We look forward to the emergence of new networks and models that prioritise digital responsibility.[19]

25 We need regulatory bodies, governments and technology companies that are prepared to take bigger, sustained steps to prevent information disorders, including technologies' propensity to spiral fake news and produce deep fakes.

26 We must question how states use social media and AI to shape public perceptions. We need to be vigilant to prevent state-led efforts from manipulating media regulation.

27 We ask for human rights to be the baseline for the governance of technology, including AI. We advocate for freedom of speech, equality and empathy for all. We request that companies, governments, international organisations, civil society, and investors take practical steps to safeguard these rights.[20]

28 We need digital literacies to be a compulsory component of national curricula, starting from early education and continuing throughout life. While compulsory and tertiary education is important, media literacy and critical thinking courses should be available to people of all ages to effectively address the ongoing information crisis.[21]

29 We need greater investment in research to address the ethical challenges posed by digital advancements, such as AI. This is vital as we navigate debates about deepfakes and the openness or otherwise of AI.

30 We request that fact-checking resources are readily available to young people, empowering them to verify, interpret, and create content responsibly.

31 We urge policymakers and educators to meaningfully involve young people in shaping policy and curriculum changes, moving beyond token public relations gestures and one-off conferences.

32 We must critically evaluate content before sharing, questioning sources, motives and bias. Developing the skills to interrogate the online information ecosystem - such as questioning the ownership and agendas of media platforms - is essential. Children should be trained to interpret news using principles like stop, question, check, decide, and believe, applying these critical skills in ways that are relatable to their age group and local context.

33 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.

34 We need algorithms that are designed to provide us with trustworthy information. We need a better understanding of how these systems work and how tools that augment human capabilities, like generative AI, are being developed. We must use these technologies to enhance our knowledge, not diminish it.

35 We need policymakers and users to develop a deeper understanding of algorithms and their role in shaping access to trustworthy information. Social media platforms require robust regulatory frameworks, as opposed to self-regulation or professional codes of ethics such as those governing traditional journalism. We cannot rely on tech companies or their billionaire owners to regulate themselves effectively.

36 We ask policy-makers to learn from past mistakes in regulating social media and develop effective AI governance policies. Given the tangible risks associated with AI misuse, it is crucial to establish governance frameworks that ensure AI serves humanity's best interests.

37

We believe that young people can drive improvements in online information through collective action, lobbying and 'naming and shaming' platforms that fail to safeguard users. Social media platforms should be ranked based on the risks they pose to users' well-being. Young people can work in tandem with regulatory bodies to ensure platforms face sanctions if their systems contribution to information disorders.

WE MUST CR
EVALUATE CO
BEFORE SHAR
QUESTIONING
MOTIVES AN

38

We request that the ‘one size fits all’ education system is reformed to embrace democratic ideals and teach young people critical digital literacies.

RITICALLY
NTENT
ING –
G SOURCES,
D BIAS

39 We need to understand how platform business models and technologies work together to manipulate information. Decentralised technologies, such as the blockchain, can offer alternatives improve the search for truths - for instance, by putting news items on the blockchain.

40 We must respond to information disorders online, particularly when it is disguised as 'news.' Instead of engaging with such content and boosting its algorithmic reach, we should report it, flag it, or inform the person who shared it.

41 We must pressure media organisations, publishers, and social platforms to take stronger action against the spread of fake news, beyond token efforts to appease regulators. AI can support mechanisms such as a ‘doubtful’ category to prevent user resharing until verification is complete.

42 We demand that governments, higher education institutions, and media organisations collaborate to combat fake news, while recognising that individual citizens also bear responsibility for fact-checking. Over-reliance on digital technologies can also be balanced through meaningful inter-generational dialogue.

43

We demand social media platforms prioritise transparency and accountability. They should openly disclose their algorithmic and content management practices. This means making feed curation tools readily accessible rather than hidden behind complex menus.

44

We demand that platforms establish robust participatory governance mechanisms, including independent oversight councils and dedicated ombudsmen to ensure accountability.

45

We demand that social media platforms protect minors, by developing tamper-free age verification systems and creating safe digital spaces. Legislation is needed to hold platforms accountable, with industry working alongside lawmakers, policymakers, and educators to address issues such as consumer redress, product liability, and algorithmic accountability.

WE MUST GET OUT OF OUR ECHO CHAMBERS AND LISTEN TO DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The Manifesto/

Online Behaviour

46

We must advocate for digital well-being by managing our online consumption, taking responsibility for our actions, and their impact on others.

47

We must engage in respectful and open-minded dialogue on social and political issues, rather than attack those with different viewpoints under the guise of woke or cancel culture. 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 offer second chances.

48

We believe in consent as the basis of online interactions. People should be able to express their views freely without monitoring unless their opinions incite violence or hatred. Simple prompts such as 'Do you really want to post this?' could improve online interactions.

49

We demand that platforms stop selling personal information without explicit consent. The must provide users with effective tools to control, audit and manage their data. We need solutions that respect privacy and protect against surveillance. Solutions that prioritise privacy and protect against surveillance are essential to building trust.

WE DEMAN
PLATFORMS
OUR DATA W
EXPLICIT CO

50

We request that user tracking be turned off by default, and terms and conditions must be clear, and free of jargon. As users, we must take responsibility for understanding these terms and better educate ourselves on how to manage privacy settings.[22]

ID THAT
S STOP SELLING
WITHOUT OUR
ONSENT

51

We demand platforms are inclusive, providing clear, accessible terms for all, including vulnerable groups such as those with cognitive impairments.

52

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

53

We must protect individuals from online predators, cyberbullying, and harmful content that targets vulnerable people. We have the right to safeguard our online identity, including the use of pseudonyms where necessary for personal safety and privacy, and when divulging personal information is at the risk of identity theft or political retribution.

54

We demand that social media platforms and AI stop exploiting user data for profit without transparency. We need to address the rights of third parties to use, appropriate and repurpose our online content without our explicit permission.

55 We support efforts to promote diversity and combat hate speech and online harassment. Violence against women should be treated as a public health issue. Both mainstream and alternative media platforms must address misuse by bad actors. Social platforms must intensify efforts to foster inclusivity for all, especially LGBTQ+ individuals.

56 We request that policymakers spend less time on social media and more time developing policies that safeguard the quality and veracity of online information.

57 We must hold influencers accountable for the content they promote, with transparency regarding their motivations. Trust in influencers as sources of alternative information to verifiable sources should be based on the same standards as traditional media.

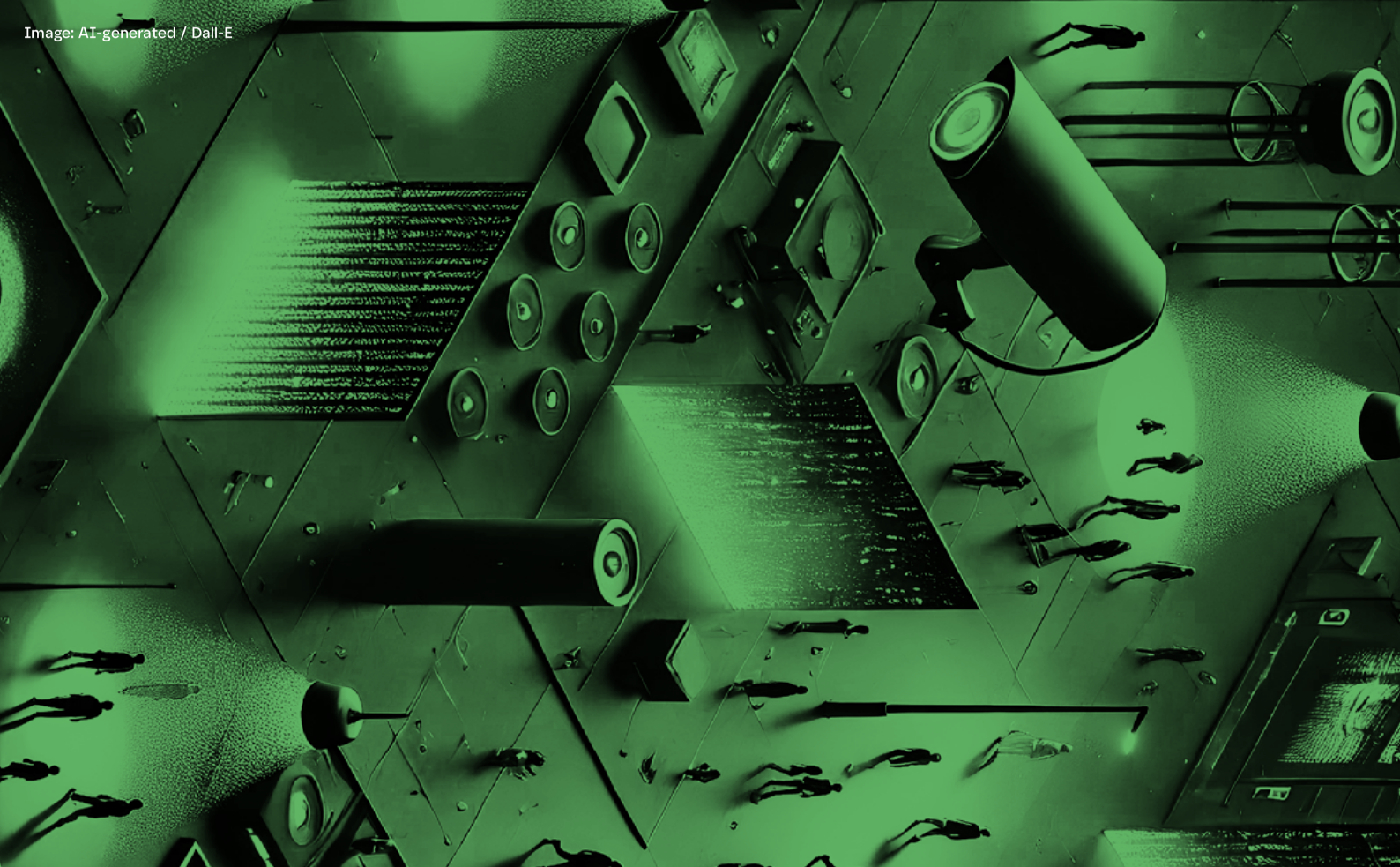


Image: AI-generated / Dall-E

Further Reading

Aaronson, S.A. (2023). *Building Trust in AI. A Landscape Analysis of Government AI Programs*. CIGI Papers No. 272 — March 2023 https://www.cigionline.org/publications/building-trust-in-ai-a-landscape-analysis-of-government-ai-programs/

Altay, S., Berriche, M., & Acerbi, A. (2023). *Misinformation on Misinformation: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges. Social Media + Society*,9(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221150412

Bugeja, M. (2019). *Interpersonal Divide in the Age of the Machine*. Oxford Univ. Press.

Carrigan, M. and Fatsis, L. (2021). *The Public and their Platforms. Public Sociology in an era of Social Media*. Bristol: Bristol University Press. 242 pp. ISBN 9781529201079

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022). *Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/28248

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022). *Ethical guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and data in teaching and learning for educators*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/153756

Grech, A. (Ed.) (2021). *Media, Technology and Education in a Post-Truth Society. From Fake News, Datafication and Mass Surveillance to the Death of Trust*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Harari, Y. (2024). *Nexus. A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI*. Random House.

Jones, K. (2023). *AI governance and human rights. Resetting the relationship*. Chatham House. https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/01/ai-governance-and-human-rights

Kaplan, A. (2021). *Artificial Intelligence (AI): When Humans and Machines Might Have to Coexist*. In: Verdegem, P. (ed.) AI for Everyone? Critical Perspectives. Pp. 21–32. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/book55.b.License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

Lindner, A. M., & Barnard, S. R. (2020). *All Media Are Social*. Taylor & Francis.

Lipschultz, J.H. (2022). *Social Media and Political Communication*. Taylor & Francis.

Lovink, G. (2022). *Extinction Internet*. Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam.

Maciel. M., Begović, B. Laksmi. S. and Kovač, B. (2024). *Decoding Disinformation: Lessons from Case Studies*. Diplo. https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/decoding-disinformation-lessons-from-case-studies/

Newman, N. (2023). *Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and the University of Oxford. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/journalism-media-and-technology-trends-and-predictions-2023

OSCE (2022). *Expert roundtables on disinformation and media freedom*. https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/488890

Rosen, D. (Ed.) (2022). *The Social Media Debate. Unpacking the Social, Psychological, and Cultural Effects of Social Media*. Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781003171270

Zuboff, S. (2022). *Surveillance Capitalism or Democracy? The Death Match of Institutional Orders and the Politics of Knowledge in Our Information Civilization*. Organization Theory, 3(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221129290

Endnotes

1 Media and information literacies are a subset of digital literacies.

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

4 '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.

5 The right to freedom of expression includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers. This right is essential for a democratic society.

6 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. Malinformation is information that is based on reality but is deliberately manipulated or shared with the intent to cause harm.

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 Adapted from ChatGPT.

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. Social media and Gen-AI use is now widespread in both mainstream and citizen journalism. Technology continues to provide users with the opportunity to gather information, develop stories and share these with audiences.

[11] See *https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/resources/digital-media-ethics/*

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

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

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

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

[16] Fintech is emerging as a key tool for financial literacy, providing accessible education through smartphones. Low financial literacy hinders the effective use of financial products, yet fintech applications already offer youth accessible financial education through age-appropriate online content. By removing some intermediaries and leveraging smartphones, fintech is bridging the gap between the world of finance and young users.

[17] See *https://ourworldindata.org/internet*

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

[19] 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.

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

[21] See *https://www.digigen.eu/results/the-impact-of-technological-transformation-on-the-digital-generation-policy-recommendations/*

[22] Terms and conditions which are simpler, shorter and with minimum jargon increase trust in media platforms. All communication media must be capable of being understood by vulnerable groups, including 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.

This 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, think tanks, 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.

ISBN 978-9918-0-0975-6
9 789918 009756

The 3CL Foundation
www.3CL.org

Image: Ververidis Vasilis / Shutterstock.com