RETHINKING MEDIA: TRUTHSAYERS AND NAYSAYERS

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Moderated by **Steven Erlanger**, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, Europe, The New York Times

Overview
Disinformation is not new, but the scale at which it is currently being created and disseminated is unprecedented. The rapid acceleration of disinformation is due, in part, to increased internet access and usage worldwide. The panelists agreed that social media has replaced traditional journalism as the primary source of information across the globe. This is problematic, as social media does not have the same ethics, editors, or attention to detail as traditional journalism.

Regulation of information and social media is an obvious step to combat disinformation, but it is not without problems. For example, some countries may use regulation as a pretense for censorship and falsely equate transparency with democracy. The potential for problematic outcomes has caused the global public to distrust this course of action. Until these obstacles are addressed and trust is built, regulation will be ineffective at combating disinformation on social media. As the panelists highlighted, however, there are still several actions that the world can take to confront this challenge.

Session Proposals
Address the financial crisis in journalism. Khadija Patel raised the issue of the financial crisis in the traditional media ecosystem, which has weakened journalists' ability to combat the disinformation and echo chambers that run rampant on social media. As a solution, Anna Romandash, recalling the Ukrainian experience, proposed that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter should take more action. Specifically, Romandash hoped that social media companies would target propaganda bots to combat disinformation and increase access to truthful, unbiased, and transparent information on their platforms.

Regulate social media. Social media operates based on surveillance advertising, which is the use of an individual's internet history to tailor ads and content to their interests, demographics, and attention. The panel agreed that this practice is detrimental to journalism and truth as a whole, as it accelerates the proliferation of information echo chambers and, frequently, disinformation. They proposed that surveillance advertising should be reformed, regulated, and possibly eliminated.

Define truth to target disinformation. The panel proposed that states, especially those that are members of supranational governing bodies such as the European Union, should gather to collectively define the fundamental nature of truth and the standards for establishing truthful information. This can, in turn, create a global norm that promotes and protects truthful information, as well as inoculating the world against disinformation.

Support truth-based journalism. There was a consensus among the panelists that Western states should support the growth of truth-based journalism in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. These areas of the world lack a diversity of truthful, independent media and may not have the resources to directly address the spread of disinformation online. These regions also pose the most dangers to journalists, who are often victims of violence. Supporting independent media in these parts of the world would increase inclusivity, transparency, and empathy.

Action Points Proposed by Global Liberal Arts Alliance Students
Regulate surveillance advertising. Surveillance advertising makes people who view disinformation on social media more likely to continue to do so, trapping them in a personal echo chamber. This makes consumers of social media more susceptible to believing false information, especially if it agrees with their preconceived notions. Instead of prioritizing factual information that could break these echo chambers in their advertisement algorithms, social media platforms reward posts that attract the most attention and keep users scrolling—regardless of the posts' truthfulness. To limit the spread of disinformation on social media, governments must regulate the use of surveillance advertising by social media platforms. If platforms do not comply, they should be penalized financially. Another possibility is for governments to cap profits that come from clicking on particular mainstream, polarizing news websites that the algorithm favors. These sites are often promoted because polarization creates more user engagement, and in turn, more revenue. Regulating platforms' profits would prevent social media companies from favoring this content, which sows outrage and disinformation.

Media literacy education. Media literacy should be taught across the globe. Unfortunately, in some authoritarian states, this is impossible due to the government's high level of control over information and media (and educatin). Therefore, it is critical that democracies teach media literacy not only to their own citizens but also to foreign nationals studying and living within their borders. One key skill necessary for the prevention of disinformation is the ability to distinguish opinion from fact. To that end, this education should include the study of how language and rhetoric can be used to subtly manipulate perception. Furthermore, education should emphasize critical thinking, inquiry, and sourcing information. Another key aspect of education should be discouraging people from relying solely on popular internet sources and instead highlighting the usefulness of print media, libraries, and peer-reviewed content—and how to determine the reliability of said content. This does not necessarily need to be accomplished directly through a dedicated course or structure but rather by integrating the development of these skills into existing courses. When people learn to gather, analyze, and cite sources, they gain transferable skills that can be applied in their daily lives—when watching the news in the morning or scrolling through social media.

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