

**“ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES FACING DISINFORMATION”
(4 to 6 December 2023, in Mexico City)**

CONCEPT DOCUMENT

The importance of social networks in people's lives is currently undeniable, they have transformed from tools for communication and pleasure to information transmission, debating platforms, and sources of knowledge. Social networks are progressively replacing conventional media, including print, radio, and television, since they allow for real-time two-way interaction.

Due to the incapacity of traditional media to facilitate human interaction, social networks have taken precedence over traditional media. While the former are perceived as a tool of the government or powerful groups, social networks appear more independent because they allow anyone with a smartphone to become a reporter, analyst, and communicator.

According to a study published by the Spanish newspaper EL PAÍS, in 2020 the average level of trust in the media in Latin America was 39%, the highest being the Dominican Republic with 58% and the lowest Ecuador with 29%. Additionally, interest in news has decreased significantly globally, from 63% in 2017 to 51% in 2022, according to the Digital News in 2022 analysis published by the Reuters Institute at Oxford University.

The same study shows that Facebook remains the most used social network by older age groups for news. Meanwhile, TikTok has become the fastest growing platform, reaching 40% among 18-24 year olds, and 15% of them use it for news.

However, the ease of content creation and access to information on social networks seems to have left aside something very important: the quality and veracity of that information. The phenomenon of so-called "fake news" is not new in democracies; what makes it innovative are the two factors: the simplicity and speed with which it spreads, as it may go viral in a matter of hours, and the quality and enhancement used to create a fake news story. Nowadays, with the use of Artificial Intelligence, it is possible to falsify the face, body and voice of any person, making it very difficult to identify at a glance whether it is real or fake.

Faced with this panorama of disinformation, which seeks to discredit the opposing forces in order to influence the vote, the question arises: Who should produce and use the information: the people running the elections, the businesses providing the service, or the citizens themselves?

The challenge is not simple, as the difference in economic, political and human cost between creating a fake news story and disproving it is staggering; a five-minute phone hack may turn a fake news article into a viral sensation in a matter of hours, yet it can take weeks to refute with thorough research and facts that might not be as compelling as the original story.

Projects to combat fake news, such as the United Nations' Verified, which emerged in response to the Covid-19 propagation crisis and brings together 104 entities from around the world, including Al Jazeera, Euronews,

Facebook, Globo, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), among many others, demonstrate the work involved in attempting to attack fake news on a global scale. Moving on to a more specific issue, what capacity might the state or the electoral management body have to deal with this threat?

The recent growth in social networks has resulted in the rise of new players, such as the so-called "influencers," who, appealing to their freedom of expression, give political opinions or organise impromptu debates on electoral issues, even when the law prohibits them from doing so. To what extent does attempting to regulate content posted on social media by citizens constitute a violation of human rights by restricting freedom of expression?

To this we must also add the incursion of Artificial Intelligence (AI), a tool that allows computer systems to create behaviours with such accuracy that they may replace a person's thoughts or attitudes, infiltrating human operations.

In fact, the so-called "GPT chat" was asked to summarise the impact of AI on the elections, and this was the result:

Artificial intelligence (AI) can have various influences on the electoral process, both positive and negative. Here are some ways in which AI can affect elections:

1. Data analysis and voter segmentation: AI can analyse large amounts of data to identify patterns and segment voters into specific groups. This is used to target political campaigns more effectively, personalising messages for specific audiences.
2. Microtargeting: AI can be used to identify and target specific voters with personalised messages across digital platforms. This can influence voter perceptions and increase the effectiveness of advertising campaigns.
3. Disinformation and propaganda: AI can also be used to create and spread disinformation online. It can generate false content, spread fake news or manipulate images and videos to influence public opinion. Combating AI-generated disinformation is a constant challenge for electoral bodies and online platforms.
4. Predicting election outcomes: By analysing historical data and polls, AI can make predictions about election outcomes. This can influence public perception and affect voter turnout.
5. Automation in election management: AI is used in the automation of election processes, such as vote counting and voter eligibility verification. This can make processes more efficient, but also raises concerns about the security and integrity of elections.
6. Fake news detection: AI can be used to develop tools to help detect and combat the spread of fake news during the election period.
7. Cybersecurity: The security of electoral systems is crucial. AI can play a role in detecting and preventing cyber-attacks aimed at interfering with the electoral process.

Importantly, the influence of artificial intelligence on elections depends on how it is used. It can improve the efficiency and accuracy of electoral processes, but it also presents risks and challenges, such as manipulation and misinformation. Adequate regulation and public awareness are essential to manage these challenges effectively.

With all of these elements, various strategies for dealing with fake news are initially identified, though a common factor is, on the one hand, to have efficient schemes for identifying them quickly and accurately, as well as to offer citizens specialised sites where they can check the veracity of such news.

Electoral authorities, for their part, should consider implementing content verification awareness programmes to combat the transmission of disinformation messaging, and even engage the public in the duty of propagating incorrect information or harmful data. The preceding, as a strategy for increasing public trust.

Combating misinformation is not just a duty for campaigns or elections. Electoral authorities must have ongoing plans in place to deal with and counteract false news. They should even have a specialist group to identify and respond to them as soon as feasible. And perhaps be accompanied by other election participants.

Combating fake news will ultimately benefit a better and fairer electoral competition, which contributes to the integrity of elections and the strengthening of our democracies.