1 November 2022

Damien De Ment
By email: fyi-request-20727-9053bdb4@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Damien

I refer to your information request dated 3 October 2022 made under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). You have requested information in relation to the conference titled "New Ec(h)o systems: Democracy in the age of social media", which was hosted by the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies.

Please see below our responses to each of your questions.

1. **Full unedited videos that were recorded, whether they be video camera, or the online capturing of content. Full and unedited.**

All video footage held by the University is already publicly available on YouTube and Facebook. As you are able to access this information yourself, I am refusing this part of your request pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information requested is publicly available.

We note that in addition to the videos that are publicly available, there was a Q&A session that was intentionally not recorded as this session was conducted on a Chatham House rules basis – to enable free and frank discussions between individuals. Accordingly, the expectation of all parties that attended this session was that any discussions would be deemed to be confidential.

2. **A full and complete list of all organisations who registered to attend the conference.**

There was an obligation of confidence to all parties attending the conference that their personal details would be kept private. Therefore we withhold the list of all organisations who registered to attend the conference pursuant to sections 9(2)(a) and 9(2)(ba)(i) of the Act.

3. **Digital copies of all resources provided by the National Centre for Peace and Conflict studies to participants of this conference.**

We note that there were no resources provided by the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies to participants of the conference.

However, we note that there were three documents provided to the speakers ahead of the conference. These documents were made publicly available online in advance of the conference, and remain publicly available today through the following links:

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In case it is helpful, we attach copies of these documents.

4. What was the cost (if any) to the participants to register and attend this event.

There was no cost to participants in registering for the conference.

5. An explanation in simple terms about how National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies is funded. Is it Otago Uni? Who pays it's operating costs? Are those funds paid to cover operating costs directly or indirectly from Govt provided grants, income, donations etc?

The National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies is like any other University of Otago department in which it receives funding through student fees, Performance-Based Research Funds (PBRF) and externally-funded research. The University of Otago pays the Centre's operating costs.

The Centre also has a trust fund and receives donations. The National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies was made possible by a $1.25million donation from the Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Centre Trust, which was made through the University's Leading Thinkers Initiative. The Government matched this funding under the Partnerships for Excellence scheme, lifting the total to $2.5million.

In all of the above cases, we consider that good reasons exist for withholding information, and this is not outweighed by other considerations which would make it desirable, in the public interest, to make the information available.

If you are not satisfied with our response to your information request, section 28(3) of the Act provides you with the right to ask an Ombudsman to investigate and review this response. However, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss any concerns with you first.

Yours sincerely

Kelsey Kennard
Official Information and Compliance Coordinator
Office of the Registrar

New Ec(h)o systems: Democracy in the age of social media

Session & speaker details

From the syndromic to the systemic: Democracy, peace and social media in a post-pandemic world (Fireside chat)

16 March 2021, 10.00am — 10.45am (GMT +12)

Session outline

Contemporary challenges in socio-technological landscapes defy easy capture through existing political, oversight or academic vocabularies. Hostage to outmoded paradigms, we bear witness to information, social and political disorders, but cannot coherently explain why. Unable to grasp the full import of contemporary problems, we struggle to imagine meaningful responses. Simultaneously, sophisticated political actors are increasingly challenging democratic institutions and peace. We need new ways of looking at inter-connected issues spread over diverse disciplines and domains.

What possibilities the prospects for democracy and peace in a post-pandemic world where online perceptions lead to offline behaviour?

Speakers

- Sanjana Hattotuwa, NCPACS & ICT4Peace Foundation
- Vijaya Gadde, Head of Legal, Policy, and Trust, Twitter
- Kathleen Reen, Policy and Government, Twitter

The network virus and the networked virus: Hate on social media studied as an epidemic

16 March 2021, 10.45am — 11.30am (GMT +12)

Session outline

2020 was marked and marred by two viruses. A biological strain shut down entire countries. In parallel and as virulently, online content instrumentalised public anxiety, anger and fear. From conspiracy theories to content inciting hate and violence, the pandemic had a parallel life on social media. Leading platforms struggled to curtail the spread of incendiary content, often leading to offline violence. What are governance, regulatory and media literacy equivalents of vaccinations? How, and to what degree, can society be inoculated against infodemics, growing at pace? Are solutions technical, political, social, offline or online? If a combination of these, how can we determine the right mix?

Speakers

- Zeynep Tufekci, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- M. R. X. Dentith, Beijing Normal University

Māori and Pasifika (re)presentations on social media

16 March 2021, 11.45am — 12.30pm (GMT +12)

Session outline

How does social media reflect and refract Māori and indigenous perspectives? The framing of activism, advocacy and political engagement is heavily influenced by language, context and community. In so many markets around the world, social media companies repeatedly demonstrate an inability or unwillingness to respect or respond to indigenous issues. Artificial intelligence and machine learning do not work at all or very poorly with indigenous expressions. Māori relationships and values - both online and offline - are subject to violent dismissal and marginalisation. How can social media be leveraged to empower indigenous voices, identity & presentation by, with and for the community?

Speakers

- Te Rina Krystal Warren, Massey University
- Lana Lopesi, Author, Art Critic, and Editor

Harried, harangued and hating: Modulating the volume of violence on social media

16 March 2021, 12.30pm — 1.15pm (GMT +12)

Session outline

Calls to regulate social media have grown over the past couple of years. Driven by infodemics - the online equivalent of the offline Coronavirus pandemic - the West now grapples with the same socio-political harms induced by disinformation many in Global South have experienced for a decade or longer. Regulatory responses to this toxicity bring the fear of overreach especially in countries with a democratic deficit. Complicating matters, social media companies now both invite and resist oversight. Often glossed over in debates around reform is how workplace cultures contributing to algorithmic harms and platform toxicity. How to interrogate encoded misogyny? What does regulation in 2021 and beyond look like?

Speakers

- David Shanks, Chief Censor, Office of Film and Literature Classification
- Kate Hannah, University of Auckland

Political technologies & authoritarian innovation: Inflaming fears and fighting the fires

16 March 2021, 2.00pm — 3.00pm (GMT +12)

Session outline

What constitutes hate speech? With the (ab)use of social media platforms by political entrepreneurs growing at pace, is it possible to address platform toxicity through definitions and mechanisms that never embraced hate innovation at the scale we witness today? A decade after Arab uprisings, platforms which held the potential to liberate now hold us hostage to sophisticated, sustained propaganda. Clearly, all the leading platforms are struggling. In the ensuing confusion, authoritarians increasingly instrumentalise social media and censor inconvenient truths. How and when is intervention needed? What is that intervention and by whom should it be done? Is hate speech itself an outmoded paradigm?

Speakers

- Susan Benesch, Director, Dangerous Speech Project and Berkman Klein Centre, Harvard University
- Sarah Oh, Non-Resident Fellow, Atlantic Council
- Allie Funk, Senior Research Analyst for Technology and Democracy, Freedom House

The violent valley: Social media's tryst with democracy

16 March 2021, 3.15pm — 4.15pm (GMT +12)

Session outline

Decisions that impact billions of people are taken in Silicon Valley every day. By choosing to prioritise, address, cast aside or ignore, platforms influence how users perceive and engage with each other. From mood swings to markets, electoral outcomes to viral trends, a few in Silicon Valley determine how the rest of the world communicates. Media, also hostage to algorithms, report on social media using a language that reduces complex, fluid interactions to soundbites or episodic encounters. Warnings from the Global South around platform harms went unheeded for years, but now, the focus is completely on platform harms. What is the space that billions inhabit in between these two extremes?

Speakers

- David Kirkpatrick, Founder of Techonomy and author of 'The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company that is Connecting the World.
- Victoire Rio, Myanmar Tech Accountability Network
- Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia Director, Human Rights Watch

Insights through critical oversight: Information disorders and journalism

16 March 2021, 4.15pm — 5.00pm, (GMT +12)

Session outline

Hand-wringing about the state of journalism in the 2020s invariably turns to social media's negative impact on media and information landscapes. Across many countries and different contexts, information disorders are growing at pace, posing enduring challenges to democracy, electoral integrity and trust in institutions. At the same time, social media helps bear witness when authoritarian governments control media production. Complicating this, autocrats now create alternative facts geared to sow confusion. Is social media a bane or boon for journalism? Does any meaningful answer require the interrogation of context? In an age where consuming media has overtaken journalism, how can we refocus on what should matters, beyond what's going viral?

Speakers

- Maria Ressa, Rappler
- Stephen Davis, Reporter and writer

The Christchurch massacre and social media: Lessons learnt and unlearnt

17 March 2021, 9.30am — 10.15am (GMT +12)

Session outline

The events of 15 March 2019 changed New Zealand's approach to and study of violent extremism. Just over a month after, suicide attacks across Sri Lanka claimed over 5 times as many victims. Leading up to, during and in the aftermath of both incidents, social media played a significant role. The similarities end there. New Zealand's *cri de coeur*, the Christchurch Call, aims to reduce platform harms, including the spread of hate and violence. Social media was instrumentalised in Sri Lanka after the attacks to stoke Islamophobia. In both countries, however, episodic, preconceived media coverage glosses over more interesting developments. Where is the Call today? What is the platform's future? And in Urdu, Hindi, Turkish and Hausa, why did victims in Christchurch galvanise empathy in ways Sri Lankan victims did not? What lessons for platform governance can both countries offer?

Speakers

- Sanjana Hattotuwa, NCPACS and ICT4Peace Foundation
- Paul Ash, Christchurch Call

Strengthening information literacy: Countering extremism and strengthening social cohesion

17 March 2021 10.15am — 11.00am (GMT +12)

Session outline

Advances in media and information literacy have not kept pace with social media adoption and platform affordances. For well over a decade, social media content has contributed to offline violence and harm. Globally, and also increasingly in New Zealand, an unprecedented epistemic crisis is evident, as more media is unthinkingly produced and engaged with. Encoded into this surfeit of content are calls for violence, increasingly hard to spot and harder to counter. If social media algorithms are, by default today, amplifying toxicity, how best to combat harm and hate at scale? If a healthy public sphere is influenced by content on social media, is countering violent extremism a platform governance, regulatory, civil society, government, private sector or academic issue? What's the state-of-the-art thinking in this domain, post-Trump, post-Brexit, post-6th January in the US?

Speakers

- Helena Puig Larrauri, Build Up
- Clark Hogan-Taylor, Moonshot CVE

The pulse of a nation: Measuring and managing socio-political mood swings

17 March 2021 11.15am — 12.00pm (GMT +12)

Session outline

When Hillary Clinton over a decade ago said that social media offered the pulse of a nation, she was ahead of her time. Today, all leading social media platforms provide near real-time insights into user behaviours, including unrest, anxieties, anger, political and personal preferences. What can be measured can, however, also be manipulated. How can we trust what the platforms feature & amplify, often for profit? On the other hand, studying social media engagement also puts at risks civil liberties, including privacy. New forms of discrimination are possible by cross-relating choices or interactions

across platforms, generating citizen scores which can determine access to basic services. Furthermore, social media algorithms discriminate in often unexpected places and ways. How can we best respond to what we can now collect at vast scale, and may drive governments towards illiberal practices?

Speakers

- David Hood, University of Otago
- Thomas Beagle, NZ Council for Civil Liberties

Architects of or hostages to social media: Youth on youth

17 March 2021 1.00pm — 2.00pm (GMT +12)

Session outline

How do youth see and use social media? Studies from New Zealand and worldwide show a complicated relationship with country and even city, community or gender specific trends. What can youth tell adults, including regulators, to reduce platform harms? What are youth telling their peers around circumvention, appropriation and countering bullying or abuse? Do youth think their self-perceptions or formative political ideologies are influenced by social media and if so, to what degree and how? With media focussing on the potential for increased radicalisation, depression and anxiety, social media appears to have negative impact on youth. Studies show far more complicated, on-going, contextual negotiation, with varying degrees of media literacy. Recognising this variance, what can youth in New Zealand do to strengthen healthy discourse and peer relationships? How do they see agency in algorithmic environments?

Speakers

- School Strike for Climate Change - Dunedin
- Representative from OFLC Youth Advisory Panel

From frontier to front door issues: Inoculating against information pandemics

17 March 2021 3.00pm — 3.45pm (GMT +12)

Session outline

New Zealand will not be immune to future infodemics. Disinformation, like a biological virus, doesn't recognise national borders, class, identity, gender or other socio-political markers. If information disorders are inevitable and persistent, how can we best protect democratic institutions, electoral integrity and social well-being? How can domestic legislation serve as a good ancestor for future socio-technological challenges, and a democratic template for the world? *Medice, cura te ipsum* - if social media companies are responsible for where we find ourselves today, can they strengthen our democratic potential? How, and to what degree, can government work with Silicon Valley, civil society and academia in zero or low trust contexts? What can the world learn from New Zealand? Are there global lessons that can guide New Zealand?

Speakers

- Kara Hinesley, Director of Public Policy, Twitter
- Kim Connolly-Stone, Internet NZ
- Nicole Matejic, Principal Advisor Digital Safety, Department of Internal Affairs

Curators of the conference

Sanjana Hattotuwa is a PhD candidate at the University of Otago, New Zealand, studying the role and relevance of social media in the generation of hate as well as the fuller realisation of Sri Lanka's democratic potential. He has worked for twenty years in South Asia, South East Asia, North Africa, Europe and the Balkans on social media communications strategies, web-based activism, online advocacy and social media research. As Special Advisor at the ICT4Peace Foundation, Switzerland, he works on information management during crises and a range of initiatives focussed on online platforms and peacebuilding. For nearly a decade, he led the Foundation's work around these areas with the United Nations in New York. He founded in 2006 and till June 2020 curated the award-winning *Groundviews*, Sri Lanka's first civic media website. From 2002-2020 he was a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Policy Alternatives, Sri Lanka.

Jeremy Simons is completing doctoral studies focused on indigenous leadership and transformative justice at the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago, New Zealand. He has nearly twenty years of experience as a community development organiser, peace advocate, and learning facilitator in New Zealand, Southeast Asia, and the United States. He is an appreciative inquiry and conflict transformation expert and has facilitated education, health, and justice reform initiatives. He has published on transitional and restorative justice in a variety of outlets and currently supports peace processes in the southern Philippines.

New Ec(h)o systems: Democracy in the age of social media

Conference overview

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."

Arundhati Roy: 'The pandemic is a portal', *Financial Times*

Stark evidence around the weaponisation of Facebook in South Asia was evident towards the end of 2013. In Sri Lanka, religious extremists were using the platform to seed and spread Islamophobia. Around the same time, religious extremists with precisely the same motivations produced and promoted content inciting genocidal violence in Myanmar. The (ab)use of social media by political entrepreneurs for ideological persuasion and propaganda production shows rapid iteration and innovation in the past decade. However, it was not until 2016's Presidential Election in the US and the Brexit referendum in the UK that Western media focused on social media's harmful impact on democracy and social relations. For years before, social media markets in the Global South were Petrie dishes for what in Western societies, and more mature democracies, came to pass. Silicon Valley's libertarian evangelism to connect everyone rarely considered inadvertent consequences of enabling masspersonal content production at a scale never attempted before.

In the Global South, this 'growth hacking' – a term used to describe the aggressive attempts to increase market share – overlapped with the availability of cheaper and more capable smartphones along with more affordable and widespread broadband access. The results were unsurprising. In divided societies, while these developments provided new vectors for civil society advocacy and activism to strengthen democracy, it also resulted in the faster, more pervasive spread of violence. Social media companies are quick to take credit for connecting people. To date, they rarely acknowledge how platforms, products and algorithms not designed to deal with divided societies contribute to and often amplify hate and violence. Big Tech only parenthetically and partially addresses this toxicity. Profit continues to trump ethics, and human rights concerns struggle to compete with commercial interests.

In many markets, the logics governing the (ab)use of social media are complex and fluid. Competing motivations by a diverse spectrum of users result in social media's instrumentalisation in prosocial and harmful ways, complicating meaningful responses to platform abuse. Users shape social media as much as social media content shapes usage, and through engagement, public perceptions. The same platforms that bear witness to human rights abuses are used to spread violence at a speed that often outpaces efforts to quell riots.

The same products that enable small businesses to reach new customers are powerful megaphones for populists, defying existing media regulations. The same algorithms that help trusted news sources reach more consumers enable disinformation to hold billions hostage to conspiracy theories that increasingly result in violence. Facebook is not Twitter, and YouTube is WhatsApp. Platform affordances also play a role in shaping perceptions of authenticity and popularity. From the design of social media apps and platforms to the generative potential of algorithms to amplify bias, many factors influence social media's impact on society and democracy.

Regulation, including in New Zealand, is increasingly proposed to meet these growing challenges. Though regulatory oversight of social media companies is long overdue, many governments – especially in authoritarian states – welcome more or stronger legislation addressing hate speech with a deeply self-serving, censorious lens. What can be popularly pitched as architectures to control pornography and paedophilia today can tomorrow quickly identify and contain dissent. If responsibility (who can and should act), responsiveness (how quickly harmful content can be addressed), proportionality (doing the minimum necessary for the broadest possible impact) and transparency (making explicit what was done and why) are vital underpinnings for effective regulation, it is unclear how governments with a democratic deficit headed by populist leaders can be trusted with oversight.

These are not just academic, technical or legal problems. After the 2020 global pandemic, platforms that are indispensable in connecting us are also those that political entrepreneurs and their proxies appropriate to divide us. Current challenges often outpace existing political, oversight and academic vocabularies. We often see what is going wrong but cannot coherently explain why. Unable to grasp the nature of the problems, we struggle to imagine meaningful responses. An urgent revision in critical approaches is required. Risks to democracy and peace arising from sophisticated political actors are growing and across borders. At the same time, social media is complicated and context dependent. Inextricably entwined in governance and government, social media often provides the potential to strengthen democratic institutions. To more fully grasp this potential requires meaningful and enduring exchanges between government, academia, civil society, social media companies, along with robust, international frameworks of cooperation.

The pandemic is an invitation to revise political, policy and profit models no longer fit for purpose. Coronavirus has accelerated the pace of social media's weaponisation. Simultaneously, opportunities arising from new norms around remote working and virtual connections provide fertile landscapes to seed and strengthen prosocial content and conversations. In framing a daily contest between democratic potential and divisive propaganda, this conference will strengthen the critical appreciation of contemporary social media challenges. A range of critical perspectives, including from Aotearoa, will highlight issues festering for years that increasingly impact Western societies and more mature democracies.

Curated by [Sanjana Hattotuwa](#) and [Jeremy Simons](#) at the [National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies](#), University of Otago.

New Ec(h)o systems: Democracy in the age of social media

Agenda

Day 1 (Tuesday, 16 March): Problems and risks

9.00am – 9.30am	*Arrivals and registration*
9.30am – 10.00am	**Introductions** 1. Richard Jackson, Director, NCPACS 2. Sanjana Hattotuwa, PhD candidate, NCPACS and Special Advisor, ICT4Peace Foundation 3. Kevin Clements, Toda Institute
10.00am – 10.45am	**From the syndromic to the systemic: Democracy, peace and social media in a post-pandemic world (Fireside chat)** 1. Sanjana Hattotuwa, NCPACS and ICT4Peace Foundation 2. Vijaya Gadde, General Counsel and Head of Legal, Policy, and Trust, Twitter 3. Kathleen Reen, Policy and Government, Twitter
10.45am – 11.30am	**The network virus and the networked virus: Hate on social media studied as an epidemic** 1. Zeynep Tufekci, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 2. M. R. X. Dentith, Beijing Normal University
11.30am – 11.45am	*Tea and coffee break*
11.45am – 12.30pm	**Māori and Pasifika (re)presentations on social media** 1. Te Rina Krystal Warren, Massey University 2. Lana Lopesi, Author, Art Critic, and Editor
12.30pm – 1.15pm	**Harried, harangued and hating: Modulating the volume of violence on social media** 1. David Shanks, Chief Censor, Office of Film and Literature Classification, New Zealand 2. Kate Hannah, University of Auckland
1.15pm – 2.00pm	*Lunch*
2.00pm – 3.00pm	**Political technologies & authoritarian innovation: Inflaming fears and fighting the fires** 1. Susan Benesch, Director, Dangerous Speech Project and Berkman Klein Centre, Harvard University 2. Sarah Oh, Non-Resident Fellow, Atlantic Council 3. Allie Funk, Senior Research Analyst for Technology and Democracy, Freedom House
3.00pm to 3.15pm	*Tea and coffee break*
3.15pm – 4.15pm	**The violent valley: Social media's tryst with democracy** 1. David Kirkpatrick, Founder of Techonomy and author of 'The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company that is Connecting the World'. 2. Victoire Rio, Myanmar Tech Accountability Network 3. Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia Director, Human Rights Watch
4.15pm – 5.00pm	**Insights through critical oversight: Information disorders and journalism** 1. Maria Ressa, Rappler 2. Stephen Davis, Reporter and writer

New Ec(h)o systems: Democracy in the age of social media

Agenda

Day 2 (Wednesday, 17 March): Opportunities

9.30am – 10.15am	**The Christchurch massacre and social media: Lessons learnt and unlearnt** 1. Urdu, Hindi, Turkish and Hausa: Solidarity and solace on Twitter after Christchurch, Sanjana Hattotuwa, NCPACS and ICT4Peace Foundation 2. The Christchurch Call: Challenges and opportunities after 2 years, Paul Ash, Christchurch Call
10.15am – 11.00am	**Strengthening information literacy: Countering extremism and strengthening social cohesion** 1. Helena Puig Larrauri, Build Up 2. Clark Hogan-Taylor, Moonshot CVE
11.00am – 11.15am	*Tea and coffee break*
11.15am – 12.00pm	**The pulse of a nation: Measuring and managing socio-political mood swings** 1. David Hood, University of Otago 2. Thomas Beagle, NZ Council for Civil Liberties
12.00pm – 1.00pm	*Lunch*
1.00pm – 2.00pm	**Architects of or hostages to social media: Youth on youth** 1. Hailey Xavier from School Strike for Climate Change, Dunedin 2. Alexi from OFLC Youth Advisory Panel
2.00pm - 3.00pm	Tea and coffee break
3.00pm – 3.45pm	**From frontier to front door issues: Inoculating against information pandemics** 1. Kara Hinesley, Director of Public Policy, Twitter 2. Kim Connolly-Stone, Internet NZ 3. Nicole Matejic, Principal Advisor Digital Safety, Department of Internal Affairs