UNICA STUDENT CONFERENCE
4. Social Media and European Societies

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- Social Media is a <u>powerful tool for global information</u> and public influence

- <u>Risks</u> for individuals and society.
  - <u>Misinformation</u> (Fake News, polarization and information/advertising bubbles, propaganda, undisclosed algorithms with uncertain social effects and targeted advertising misinformation).
    - This misinformation as proven to be capable of of causing social harm, put public and individual health at risk and promote unjustified hate, descrimination and distrust in institutions.
  - <u>Mental health and well being</u> impact (self esteem, addiction, anxiety, social media peer pressure, cyber bullying), and yet to be understood broader societal impacts.

COVID 19:

- **Just another example of the good the bad and the ugly about social media.**

News | **Opinion** | **Sport** | **Culture** | **Lifestyle** | Mo

World ▶ Europe US Americas Asia Australia Middle East Africa Inequality Global development

Coronavirus

Majority of Covid misinformation came from 12 people, report finds

CCDH finds 'disinformation dozen' have combined following of 59 million people across multiple social media platforms

Erum Salam

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- **Recommendations for Action for Universities and Society**

- **Education**- efforts should be put towards
  - development of campaigns, tools and courses with focus on social media literacy, media awareness, awareness of information bubbles, critical thinking and critical appraisal of content and social-emotional skills.
  - This should be promoted in all educational settings (with easily available online tools).
  - As a part of a broader societal effort, universities should lead the development of these tools, promoting and advocating for their application and evaluating their impact.

- **Research** –
  - <u>Prioritizing multidisciplinary and cross-faculty research groups on Social Media</u> and the creation of social media departments in Universities with adequate,transparent and ethical funding.
    - Research areas should include
      - education,
      - misinformation flows and bubbles,
      - impact on social issues and mental health,
      - functioning of algorithms
      - definition and impact of regulations.

- **Advocacy** -
  - <u>Universities should be close to governments and regulators to support and inform the development of social media policy</u>.
  - <u>Communication departments of Universities should consider social media as a critical area of public communication</u> and should work with social media stakeholders (influencers etc<u>.) to connect Universities with the broader public opinion.</u>

- **Regulation and platform strategies** must advance to promote the defence of users rights with support from universities research and insights.
  - More power over advertising and content preference settings defined by users (ex targeted advertising, content prioritization algorithm decisions).Abuses should be reported.
  - Algorithms should be more transparent and anonymized data should be shared with Universities for clear and ethical research purposes(ex studying high risk information bubbles and misinformation, understanding information and sentiment flows in a global world).
  - Paid advertising should be traceable and strategies should be in place to avoid large misinformation advertising campaigns in social media targeting specific groups
  - Efforts to Prevent entrance in bubbles and to buffer or avoid misinformation with changes in algorithms should be promoted (ex exposure to information from credible sources/opposing arguments).
  - A symbol approach to categorize advertising and "risk content" should be considered for users empowerment
  - Educational ads and campaigns/courses on social media as a social responsibility effort of the platform's owners must be promoted
  - The platforms should share responsibility over contents as an incentive to improve content quality according to their own policies and international regulations/recommendations.

- All regulatory and platform strategies must be cautious to protect individual freedom online and access to quality content without compromising freedom of speech and opinion in its various components

- Universities should monitor and evaluate evolving strategies. Action in needed and balanced approach is necessary to protect and improve democracies in the years to come.