



General Assembly 6 (GA6)

**The Legal Implications of Digital Misinformation in Political and
Social Conflicts**

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Issue: The Legal Implications of Digital Misinformation in Political and Social Conflicts

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Introduction:

Combating the legal consequences of digital misinformation is fast becoming one of the biggest governance and international cooperation challenges. Fake information spreads quickly in the current technological age, but its impact on a nation's political stability and social well-being must not be underestimated. As more people start using social media for information and communication, the line between what is real and what is not becomes increasingly blurry. Political agendas, social strife, and even wars are now ignited by campaigns of disinformation. While access to technology has become more widespread, many nations still lack the legal tools and infrastructure to monitor and control this phenomenon effectively. Both MEDCs (More Economically Developed Countries) and LEDCs (Less Economically Developed Countries) have a role to play: MEDCs must support efforts in LEDCs to establish stronger regulatory systems and promote digital literacy. This research report aims to provide information on the topic, outline solutions to this growing threat and calls for continued engagement by the UN in shaping legal frameworks that can adapt to the evolving nature of digital misinformation.

Definition of key terms:

Misinformation

Any form of false information that is spread without the intent to harm others causes any political, economic or social issues. Even without bad intent, misinformation can spread confusion and weaken public trust.

Disinformation

Any form of false information which is spread with the intent to cause harm to specific parties. This can lead to social unrest, targeted discrimination, or manipulation of public opinion.

Malinformation

Any form of true information that is spread with the intent to cause harm, often by taking it out of context or exposing specific details. It is mainly dangerous in political conflicts, where it can damage reputations or provoke certain parties, even if the content itself is true.



Deepfakes

Realistic fake AI-generated videos or audio that mimics a real person. It is usually used to manipulate or deceive others.

MEDCs

This stands for More Economically Developed Countries and refers to countries which have higher levels of economic output, modernization and overall standard of living.

LEDCs

Less Economically Developed Countries. These countries with low levels of economic output, economic modernization and just overall quality of life. They often face challenges such as limited access to education, healthcare, technology, etc.

Digital Literacy Deficit

When the public does not know how to evaluate online content. In many regions, users cannot distinguish reliable sources from false ones, making communities more vulnerable to manipulation.

General Overview:

Origin

The origins of digital disinformation trace back to the emergence of the internet and social media, where information was quickly democratized but rarely fact checked. The disinformation of early times spread via blogs, forums, and emails, mostly with little effect on large groups. But as the virtual space grew in scope, controlling the public mind with fabricated material started to become increasingly evident. The 2016 US presidential election is regarded as a turning point in which fake news stories and misleading posts were spread intentionally to try and manipulate voters. This showed the danger posed by misinformation and how manipulative it is.

Evolution



The evolution of digital misinformation has predominantly been associated with technological advancements. AI, machine learning, and algorithmic platforms have let false information to be spread more effectively and credibly. The emergence of deepfakes which are highly realistic but entirely fake audio or visual content presents new challenges for detecting manipulation. In addition, the use of bots and coordinated online activity has enabled all parties regardless of their nature, ideology and other factors to conduct mass disinformation operations. These developments have exponentially increased the prevalence of misinformation, turning it into a common element leading to political and social unrest.

Current global relevance

Digital misinformation continues to pose a threat to political stability, democratic institutions, and public safety. In conflict zones, misleading information can encourage violence or hide the truth which complicates humanitarian responses and international mediation efforts. During elections, misinformation undermines trust in electoral systems and can change outcomes. Governments and international bodies have tried to respond with legal measures, yet these vary by country. In some cases, regulations intended to combat misinformation are used to suppress opposition and limit press freedom. The global and fast-moving nature of digital communication highlights the urgent need for more unified, transparent, and human rights-based legal approaches to address this evolving threat.

Key Events Timeline

February 8, 1996	U.S. Communications Decency Act (Section 230) Part of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Section 230 was made to provide legal immunity to online platforms for content posted by its users. Meaning any social media company will not be responsible for what is posted by their users. While initially being aimed to promoting free expression online, this law has been in debates about the legal responsibility of platforms in moderating misinformation.
November 8, 2016	U.S. Presidential Election and Russian Interference During the 2016 election, planned misinformation campaigns linked to Russian actors were found to have influenced voters through fake news,



negative content, and targeted ads on many platforms but mainly Facebook and Twitter.

March 17, 2018 Cambridge Analytica Scandal

The Observer and New York Times revealed that Cambridge Analytica harvested data from 87 million Facebook users without consent. This created many debates over data privacy note that this was only 1 of the many other scandals that have been associated with the SLC Group (Cambridge Analytica's parent company)

September 26, 2018 EU Code of Practice on Disinformation Launch

The European Commission created an agreement with major tech companies such as Google, Facebook and Twitter to counter online disinformation ahead of the 2019 EU elections in the case that events such as the 2016 US elections would happen again.

October 13, 2021 Introduction of UK's Online Safety Bill

The UK introduced a legislation making tech platforms legally responsible for harmful content, such as misinformation. The bill displayed the shift toward stronger frameworks for digital platforms in democratic countries.

September 2022 UN Global Digital Compact Process

During the General Assembly, the SG introduced the Global Digital Compact. This was part of the Our Common Agenda initiative which aimed to address misinformation and digital rights

September 2025 Adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Digital Integrity

This is planned to be adopted during the 80th session of the UN General Assembly. This agreement would establish international guidelines on digital misinformation, platform accountability, and human rights protections online. The framework aims to promote transparency in algorithmic systems and enhance international cooperation in combating the impacts of disinformation.



Principal Stakeholders

United States of America (USA)

Home to many tech companies like Meta and Google, USA played a key role in shaping online speech. Section 230 in the Communications Decency Act of 1996 protected platforms from liability. This promoted innovation but did complicated accountability. The USA still debates on federal regulation, though state governments and federal agencies are pushing for more direct action against misinformation.

European Union (EU)

The EU have taken the initiative in combating digital disinformation. They introduced the Code of Practice on Disinformation in 2018, and in 2024, the legally binding Digital Services Act. These initiatives make the platforms more accountable for negative content while attempting to preserve free expression and data rights in its member states.

Russian Federation

Russia has been linked to state-sponsored misinformation campaigns, notably during the 2016 U.S. election. While they deny these claims, Russia continues to use misinformation strategically in foreign and domestic arenas and frames its digital control laws as defence against Western influence.

United Nations

The UN has become more active in global digital governance in recent times. Its Global Digital Compact, introduced in 2022 aims to set international standards on misinformation, digital rights, and platform accountability. It also promotes media literacy and source evaluation sharing through agencies like UNESCO.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

An international NGO that advocates for press freedom and combats disinformation worldwide. It monitors online manipulation, ranks countries in its World Press Freedom Index, and supports journalists facing threats. The RSF has been openly advocated for the need of global standards on information integrity, and they promote transparency, fact-checking, and media literacy to counter the spread of false information



Meta Platforms (Facebook)

Meta has been central to misinformation controversies, most recently during the 2016 U.S. election and the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal. In response, it is said to have introduced fact-checking partnerships and content moderation technology but is still criticized for inconsistent enforcement and allowing negative content to spread.

Potential Avenues for Resolution

In order to counter the legal dimension of online disinformation in political and social conflicts, delegates can put forward a range of measures that are in line with international law and the UN mandate. Diplomatic efforts can involve advocating international agreements that guarantee transparency and shared standards for platform responsibility, and triggering cooperation among member states to counter cross-border disinformation activities. Economic efforts would include subsidizing independent fact-checking efforts, investing in safe digital infrastructure, or incentivizing tech firms to improve content moderation and algorithmic transparency. Humanitarian efforts could be placed in the form of media literacy campaigns particularly in conflict-affected regions to strengthen public immunity against manipulative narratives. These policies need to be realistic, adaptable, and respectful of digital rights, encouraging cooperation among states, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector to build a secure and credible information space.

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