

DISINFORMATION, DIGITAL HATE, AND BIG TECH



NETGAIN PARTNERSHIP

COMBATING RACIALIZED DISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH WILL PROTECT VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES AND PREVENT VOTER SUPPRESSION

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

Information disorder is the deliberate spread of false information with the intent to sow confusion and cause harm. Growing disinformation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, in combination with the proliferation of disinformation around the uprising against violent and too often deadly policing, has created an unprecedented media landscape full of digital hate and racialized disinformation. Extremists have capitalized on COVID-19 uncertainty, leveraging white racial resentment about the economy, unemployment, public health, and an uncertain future to stoke chaos and violence. Hateful content and speech across the internet has further fueled xenophobia and racism targeting Asian, Black, and other vulnerable communities. Moreover, social media platforms from Facebook (Instagram, Whatsapp) and Twitter to Google and YouTube, face increased pressure to quickly respond to disinformation, fraud, and online hate.

In one experiment, social media companies kept 90.6% of the posts flagged as spreading COVID-19 misinformation.

WHY IT MATTERS

Rampant disinformation and online hate have made the offline world more hostile and dangerous for historically vulnerable groups. Disinformation distorts reality, preventing the public from being equipped with the correct information to protect their health and exercise their right to vote. It also fuels racism and xenophobia. Hate speech has not only forced some individuals to quit social media to protect themselves, but has also spurred physical violence – sometimes with deadly consequences. As the country faces another reckoning with its racist institutions, unprecedented mass death, an economic crisis, and the continued erosion of trust in media and the government, the public is particularly vulnerable to hate speech and information disorder. Big Tech platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Youtube, continue to fail to meet the moment.

TOP INTERVENTIONS

The rise of hateful content and disinformation online by extremists and white supremacists has grown exponentially as our means of communication,

mobilization, and advocacy shift to digital platforms – disproportionately targeting Black, Latinx, and Asian communities amid the global pandemic. Alongside state and federal policymakers, public interest advocates are working tirelessly to curb the spread of racialized disinformation by pressuring platforms to flag or remove rampant disinformation from their sites. This work also includes training staff to review existing content policies and more accurately identify falsehoods to reduce the spread of racist hate speech targeting communities of color online. Policy interventions continue to evolve as radical extremists seek new ways to spark violence and chaos and disrupt the flow of factual information vital to our society.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Advocates, nonprofit coalitions, and public interest groups are coming together to combat racialized disinformation and protect the validity of truth online. This work has never been more important as we now turn to digital platforms to not only receive critical public health information on COVID-19, but to protest, mobilize, and empower other social movements.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is educating platforms on the need to create or adapt current content policies that help staff discover, assess, and respond to disinformation related to elections and the 2020 Census. The Leadership Conference is also [holding platforms to account](#) if and when they violate said policies that directly harm historically marginalized communities. The **Center for Countering Digital Hate** also recently [conducted research](#) on how to monitor social media giants and their ability to flag or remove weaponized content related to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically. To protect the validity of accurate information in the media, **First Draft** is [training journalists](#) to better understand the spread of disinformation and teach techniques to reduce the amplification of disinformation in reporting. As a result of increased racism and xenophobia related to COVID-19 and the Asian American community, **Asian Americans Advancing Justice** released a [series of tools and resources](#) to push back against hate and provide factual information for their partners, allies, and community members. And following the recent influx of protests across the country,

Political Research Associates examined the spread of false and deliberately misleading narratives on the ground and opportunities to identify and document possible threats in real-time.

MORE INFORMATION

The [NetGain Partnership](#) is a philanthropic collaboration between the Ford Foundation, Knight Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Mozilla Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Omidyar Network and Wallace Global Fund that seeks to advance the public interest in the digital age. NetGain works hand-in-hand with the nation's leading philanthropic organizations to address our most pressing challenges at the intersection of technology and digital society. As COVID-19 rages on, NetGain is deeply concerned about the impact of the pandemic on technology and society, especially as the crisis exacerbates economic and social inequities across the world and challenges our democratic institutions. There is a significant need for funders and civil society organizations to access critical information to help them understand the current and future impacts of COVID-19 on society and the unique role that technology and the internet are playing as the crisis continues.

ABOUT NETGAIN

To learn more about NetGain's work or hear their latest briefing series on top technological challenges and harms that have emerged as a result of COVID-19 and actionable responses from civil society to address them, please visit:

<https://www.netgainpartnership.org/events/covid19/broadband-access-in-the-us>

For funders who are interested in the specific policy proposals outlined in this one-pager or have questions, please visit <https://mediademocracyfund.org/>

ABOUT MEDIA DEMOCRACY FUND

Media Democracy Fund (MDF) works at the crossroads of digital technology and social justice and is the leading convener between public interest grantees, funders and allies in the broadband fight, as well as the larger digital rights field.