

Josh Machleder:

Thank you, Janina, and thank you to all of you participating in this webinar. This webinar is part of USA's democracy, rights and governance series on advancing integrity in media. You can find recordings of our previous webinars on USA's Learning Lab. See in the pod the links for our previous webinars.

Josh Machleder:

I'm joined today by Professor Tim Weninger. Tim and I will be guiding the conversation over the next hour. Tim is an Assistant Associate Professor at the University of Notre Dame. His fascinating work seeks to, and this comes from his bio, identify how people generate, curate and search for information in the pursuit of knowledge. He's also the Director of a DRG-funded activity called Media Literacy for New Digital Rivals in Indonesia, which we're going to talk about.

Josh Machleder:

But before we start I want you to take a look at a short video that you may have seen or heard about. The video was on a social media platform for short videos called TikTok. Watch the video clip, and then we will put up a poll to ask you to give us a sense of your gut responses to it.

Janina:

In just a moment you'll see your screen shift, and you'll be taken to a new web browser with the video. Please do quick play when you arrive to this new web browser. After you've finish watching the video, please do redirect your web browser to this eConnect page.

Janina:

Hello, and welcome to those of you who are joining. We do have a video playing right now, and we do invite that ... had an opportunity to watch this video and you are now back in the main space, there are a couple of opportunities for you to share your insights. So please go ahead. If you're using the computer desktop app, go ahead and type all of your reactions in one-word phrases in that bottom left chat answering the question in a word, how do you feel about this TikTok video? And then right next to that chat you'll see another chat pod that kind of asks this question. Do you know other examples in your context like this video that you want to share?

Janina:

If you're using the mobile app, you're welcome and invited to please type your reaction to the video into the chat pod, and we will be sure to include that in the word cloud.

Josh Machleder:

Just as I see the reactions that people getting, I just want to say a couple of points about it. I think that the video's kind of compelling because it injects a serious issue into a somewhat nonserious space, and that might turn some of you off. We're not used to hearing human rights messages this way. They're usually a lot more formal messages. They're usually addressed in a much more serious way.

Josh Machleder:

But you can imagine that people are connecting with this issue, people who maybe never connected with it before, and connected in it differently than the way people typically connect with human rights issues that are quite serious. That said, for those of you who want to learn more about the Uyghurs, I'd

like to recommend this new PBS Frontline documentary called China Undercover, and you can see it on YouTube. It has undercover footage and first-hand accounts from survivors of China's detentions camps. It investigates the Communist regime's mass imprisonment of Muslims, and its use of sophisticated surveillance technology against the Uyghur community. And the link to that is in the pod, and Janina's put that just up.

Josh Machleder:

So as for the TikTok video, although it's not produced by human rights activists, it was one of the most visible awareness rated pieces on the internet about human rights abuses against China's Uyghur Muslim minority. I think that this got a lot more views than the PBC Frontline documentary. It was made by an American Teenager, [Feruzah Aziz 00:19:20] from New Jersey in her makeup tutorial video. It went viral on the platform TikTok, and for those of you who are not familiar with TikTok, it's the third most downloaded social media app around the world, and it's popular with younger internet users.

Josh Machleder:

Her video was also shared on Twitter and Instagram, and got millions of views and a fair amount of media attention, especially when the video was taken down by the platform TikTok, which happens to be Chinese-owned. Many suspected that this Chinese-owned company was taking orders from China's ruling Communist Party, which routinely sensors the internet and has refused to acknowledge the detention and persecution of the Uyghurs. TikTok later reinstated the video after all of the negative attention. So why am I making you watch this? I think this is an interesting example to kick off our discussion on how the online space has a very different feel to it than offline or the real world in how it draws attention to particular issues, and why it can be such a potent tool or vector for advocacy, which can be a great thing, but it's also easily abused as an effective tool for propaganda or disinformation.

I think many of us working in the democracy, human rights and governance space are concerned about the latter, that we're losing this information war, that the good information is losing out to the bad stuff. But I want to make the case that those of us working in the democracy, human rights and governance space can take back the space for good, but we need to use the platforms more effectively, and we need to understand better how they work. Bad actors, that is those flooding social media with disinformation and propaganda, and doing so successfully, are using the platforms very much the way that they were designed to be used. Online platforms are not libraries or universities, those traditional place where we turn for knowledge and deliberation. Actually they're advertising platforms, and content which provokes certain emotions thrive there and go viral. I want to share an interesting report from Dipayan Ghosh and Ben Scott called Digital Deceit. The link to that you can find in the pod. The authors of this report write that the central problem of disinformation that corrupts political culture, it's not Russian spies or a particular social media platform. They write the following, and the text is up on the screen.

"The center problem is that the entire industry is built to leverage sophisticated technology to aggregate user attention and sell advertising. There's an alignment of interests between advertisers and the platforms, and disinformation operators are typically indistinguishable from any other advertiser."

So in this webinar we're going to unpack some of the ideas in this report about, particularly about the attention economy, about advertising systems and working with data. We're going to try and think how to make the system work for those of us working in democracy, human rights and good governance.

That might mean getting out our messages more effectively, reaching more people, or perhaps targeting the right people. We're going to show you a case study also, funded by US Aid DRG, and we're going to challenge to think about your own programs and how you might do them differently.

So now I'm going to turn to Professor Tim about the public square. The public square nowadays boasts online and offline. Tim.

Tim Weninger:

Hi, Josh, and thanks for inviting me. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Tim Weninger. I'm from the University of Notre Dame. I do have to comment briefly before we move on that I particularly like the picture. I guess it's a painting. This is a painting of Pericles, who was the leader of Athens back around 200 BC, and in this particular painting you notice that this gentleman in the middle is wearing a funny hat, and everyone's watching him. People are talking to each other, but many of them are listening specifically to this person in the middle, and I'm wondering to myself why. Why are people watching and paying attention to this one gentleman?

Is it because he's in the center? Is it because he's wearing a funny hat? What is it about this gentleman that commands people's attention, especially in the public square? So that's something that I want to come back to a little bit later is this idea of attention. And that's what we're talking a lot about today.

Josh Machleder:

Great, Tim. And speaking of the public square, I also want to share this recent report by the [Beruan 00:24:42] Institute, and the link is available in the pod. It came out a month ago, March, 2020, before we all started working from home and being online as much as we are. The report's called Renewing Democracy in the Digital Age, and it discussed what the public square in the digital age could look like. It challenges us with the following question. It says, "Social media had broadly transformed the old public square of face-to-face interaction and mass media into a networked and fragmented space. The challenge is now to create a common space for deliberation and discourse based on trustworthy information amid this new connectivity." Tim, what do you think?

Tim Weninger:

Thank you, Josh, for that introduction. I'm going to kind of put on my professor hat for the next few minutes and talk a little bit about my interactions in what I study and the type of work that we're doing at Notre Dame and our consortium with our partners around the world. I think I want to start with something that I am particularly familiar with, and something that maybe we are all becoming more familiar with, espy with the global pandemic that's happening, and that is this interplay between the online and offline public square.

Tim Weninger:

In my space, I'm a professor, and typically I am in front of a group of students who are commanding, and I am commanding their attention. People are watching me write on the chalkboard and lecture and communicate. But that's all been upended nowadays, and instead of having people in a room watching me, there's a bunch of people instead on Zoom. And there's a difference, there's a large difference. I think we're all experiencing that now as a lot of our programming is moving online because of ... it's lots of reasons, the pandemic being one of them.

Tim Weninger:

But you notice there's a difference. There's a large difference in how that attention is kept. There's something about being in a social gathering in a physical space that there's social conventions that dictate that, you know what? Maybe when you're out to dinner with your friends, you're not on your

phone all the time. Whereas if you are on a Zoom meeting, there's really nothing keeping your attention. It's very easy to just put that Zoom up in the corner and maybe surf Facebook or check your email, like maybe you might be doing right now, something else while the Zoom meeting is happening in the background.

So that's kind of an introduction to what I want to talk about, and my goal today is to introduce you to how in this space we are working to keep people's attention, and measure that attention in the online space. So if we're trying to translate, to transfer some of our offline programs to the online space, what are the things we might consider when we're doing so? My job is to talk through some of that and introduce some of the basics.

What I want to do is start with some of the basics, underpin the online ecosystem. So first some kind of definitional things. A lot of us understand what the internet is and what the web is, but a lot of us don't know the difference. The internet and the web are actually different things.

The internet is, technically speaking, a series of computers that are wired together, and they communicate information. Right now in this Adobe Connect system, we are using the internet and the networking that is built by the telephone companies and the cable companies.

The web, for example, is built on top of the internet, and these are the things like the web pages and Google and Facebook and all of those other services you use. It's a particular protocol, like email, like any other services, but the web is just one.

Now on the web we are all familiar with things like Google and social media, white websites like TikTok and YouTube and Facebook, and these social media websites vary from culture to culture, from country to country, geographically. Depending on where you're looking and where you're operating, the ecosystem of a region might be very, very different than what we have here in America.

This is kind of where I start my research is how people interact and understand and search for information on the web. One thing that helps become abundantly clear, and I mentioned this earlier, is that attention is everything. Attention guides the online space. It's something like I said, difference in the physical space, online attention is everything.

So going back to the example before, we have ... what we would like to see is that if someone is in a webinar meeting or a Zoom meeting or a Hangouts meeting, that everyone's paying attention, but it's just not the case. You're not sitting around a dinner table, and you're not in a client's room. Attention is fleeting, and it's difficult to capture. And moreover, especially with things I specifically study, is how search engine optimization, how social bots, how rating spams, how all of these new inventions are corrupting our attention, and taking our limited attention and maybe using it and redirecting it for nefarious means.

Probably the biggest example of this is click bait. We have a limited attention online. Something catches our eye. We click on that click bait headline or that news article or that advertisement spam, and it redirects our attention and it diverts it.

And so that's what I want to be talking about today is how to, without being nefarious, without being ... doing bad practices, how can we take some of our offline programming, move it online and still command attention.

Josh Machleder:

Sorry. Actually I just wanted to ask you if you could just very quickly give quick definitions of search engine optimization, social bots and ratings spam for those who are joining who may not know what those are.

Tim Weninger:

That's a great idea. Thank you very much. So search engine optimization is a billion dollar industry where companies and organizations ... what they're trying to do is when you search for something ... I'll have example about this a little bit later. When you're searching for something, you want your product or your organization or your company to become the first, the number one ranked thing for that search term. So if I'm Apple Corporation, and I want my new iPhone to be the number one thing when people search for phones, there's a way of doing that to optimize the placement in search.

Social bots I think maybe many of us know are the computer programs that share and reshare and refeed and post and act as normal humans to try to get messages out.

And then ratings spam is a particularly nefarious thing that I study specifically where you might have seen the star ratings, like you take an Uber, there's a four-star or five-star rating you can give. And people aren't going to buy a product or take an Uber ride with someone who only has two or three stars. So what you might end up doing is pay people a dollar or two to hey, give me five-star ratings, spam the ratings system to inflate my star ratings so people will be more likely to eat at my restaurant or take my Uber or buy my vacuum cleaner, as it may have.

Josh Machleder:

Great. Let's just stop a minute here and see if we have any quick questions from any of the participants before we move forward. I know everyone's quickly typing there.

Okay. If no one has any questions, actually let me ask you, Tim, if you could go a little bit deeper. We talked about these social platforms or about the space just being about intention. How do you get people's attention online? Could you tell me more about how you reach people effectively online or on social media? What are the different concepts or principles for how a democracy campaign or anyone with a message or information to get out there reach a large group of people? Or if not a large group of people, target the specific groups of people they want to reach, and do it effectively? And when I say effectively, I'm meaning show impact. Do we know ... how do we know if it has an impact on their behaviors offline? Are those measurable impacts? I know this is kind of of a ... the question always about advertising and propaganda. Does someone go and buy or act in the way that the person putting the message out wants them to.

Tim Weninger:

So that's a great segue to what I was planning on talking about next, and that is the different ways of measuring attention. So let's say that you have an online campaign or something that you're trying to reach people on and tell them any number of things. What you want to do is measure that attention that your campaign is receiving.

In the business, and this isn't really academic, this is more in the almost advertising business, there's five key concepts you have to understand in order to measure are you reaching ... how many people are you reaching, and are you reaching the right people?

I don't have the definitions listed here, but I can kind of talk to them briefly. I'll give you an example. The first way to measure attention is through impressions, and that is whenever you see an image or an ad online ... If you're scrolling through your Twitter feed and you see an ad, that is an impression. So if the image or content is viewed by the user, it is an impression, and these happen all the time. There are millions and millions of impressions that happen in any kind of campaign.

But what you really want is you don't know if that person looked at that advertisement or that message or not. What you really want is to measure do people actually ... did you capture their attention? And

you do that by looking at the click through rate. The click through rate is the number of people who saw that campaign, that piece of content, and they clicked on it to learn more.

When they click on it, they can go to the website that you're sending them to. They might look at the website and say, "Oh, I made a mistake. I did not mean to click on that," or "I thought I was going to be looking at something, and it wasn't the thing I meant to look at," and so they'll click the back button, and they'll what we call bounce. They'll click through to the website, realize they made a mistake, and then click back. That's called a bounce. So the bounce rate is something that we look at.

Then there's the time on site. Let's say they click through to your website, and then they stay there for maybe two or three minutes, and that time onsite is something that you want to try to increase to keep the person's attention.

And then finally, if you have something to ... you want them to enter their email address, or you want to sell them a product, or you want to have somehow change their behavior, that's called a conversion. And so of those people who clicked on your website and did not bounce, how many of them actually did the thing that you wanted them to do. That's called a conversion rate, or you measure that in the conversion rate. So that's the five kind of basic ways of measuring [inaudible 00:37:19].

I have an example here that's particularly ingenious. So I used the example of Apple Corporation earlier, and when they had their new iPhone 6 came out, they wanted to get people to buy it. However, there's a competitor, Samsung. Samsung did something kind of ingenious. They actually paid for the word iPhone on Google, and every time you Google'd iPhone, especially when they were rolling out the 6S, they say oh, obviously you meant the Samsung Galaxy something, I don't know. And what they were trying to do is redirect your attention.

You're looking for the iPhone, but Samsung was capturing that attention and redirecting it somewhere else. And that word redirect is something that I want to come back to much later on.

Josh Machleder:

Great.

Tim Weninger:

So I think we could probably move on to the next example, and when we're putting out these types of online campaigns, the one thing we always want to try to do is try variations. So one of the things that's very important is that when you're putting out some content, you don't know if it's going to be effective. And so you always, always try variations. And I'm going to use the example here, you can see on the slides, of the Obama campaign back in the 2000s. This is not political, this is not historical literature. So when barackobama.org or .com was being, when they were starting up, they had a website, and they had this image, and the media had a picture of Obama in the middle of a crowd. What they were trying to do was get email addresses. So they're asking you to enter your email address and your zip code, and then click "Sign Up."

The campaign, they had a disagreement over what image or video should we show to get people motivated to actually sign up. You can never just produce one piece of content. What you have to do is try out the variations and see which one works the best. And so what this campaign did is they had six different images, actually three videos and three images, and you see a list of A, B, C, D, E, F, here on the screen. They also had four different buttons with four different messages. So join us now, learn more, sign up now, or sign up, and they weren't sure which one was going to work the best, which one was going to drive the most conversions.

Tim Weninger:

The campaign, I actually talked to the person who ran this experiment, not with the campaign, and they were certain, the campaign was certain that the video that they worked really hard on and spent tens of thousands of dollars would actually be the winner. But I want you all to tell me which image, A, B, C, D, E, F., and which button actually increased the conversion rate than most. So take 30 seconds, fill out the survey and let me know what you think.

Josh Machleder:

This is so interesting, Tim. I hope you'll talk about the difference between having a still image and a video as an option.

Tim Weninger:

Yeah, that's some ... I think that's a good ... while people are filling out the survey, maybe I can give an anecdote. Attention is so fleeting that if a page takes, a web page takes a quarter of a second or more to load, people will notice. In fact, bing.com, which is the Microsoft search engine, if you look closely, they only return nine search results. Google and MSN and Yahoo return 10, but Bing returns nine, and the reason they do is because that microseconds that they save actually results in a higher conversion rate for them because that quickness of the page load matters that much. And the same thing happens here with video. The reason I mention it is because videos here take a little while to load, especially with people who don't have broadband internet. And so that waiting for the page to load irritates people, and it increases the bounce rate. As an anecdote.

Josh Machleder:

So Tim, could I conclude if I wanted to make a very quick conclusion that there's something about speed and the immediacy of something on the internet that is what is better able to capture our attention?

Tim Weninger:

Speed ... people are impatient. They demand speed, and they demand things quick. Attention is fleeting, and if you can't communicate your message, and we'll talk about this later on in more detail, but if you can't communicate your message in as short a timeframe as possible, then people aren't going to pay attention.

Before we move to that, I do want to get the results. We have, I think, it looks like A and B are tied, and join us now is the clear winner for the button. I'm going to go ahead and proceed and tell you the winner. It turns out that it was B and number two, button number two was the winner. So learn more. And what this is, they tried out different variations, and they found a 40% increase in the conversion rate from eight point something to 11.6.

And really that 40% increase in conversion rates was extremely important. What it meant was an additional 2.9 email sign ups. And that was ... they didn't have to spend any money. They didn't have to work any harder. All they had to do was try variations to find out which one they thought was the best.

So someone was asking a question about how do we come up with these options. The options that I was talking about which image did we show? Sso when we're trying to have a campaign, in this particular a presidential campaign advertisement to try to get people to give theie email address and their zip code, you don't know which image is going to drive the most attention. Is it the video of the campaign? Or is it the image with Obama and his family? Or is it an image of Obama and a crowd? The campaign doesn't ...

it might have an intuition, but they don't know exactly what draws the most attention. But this is a data driven approach called A/V testing that actually lets the data and human behavior speak for itself.

Josh Machleder:

Tim, a couple of questions. You said there was a 40% increase in sign ups. What kind of metrics should we be saying are success when we're optimizing?

Tim Weninger:

Typically ... so your question of how do we optimize success, and success means different things to different people. What the campaign wanted here was they wanted email addresses, and that's a conversion. They wanted you to insert your email address and your zip code, presumably, and I can only guess here, in order to send emails to ask for donations. I'm guessing that's what that was for. And also to maybe drive voter turnout, or I don't know what campaigns do.

But if you were a ... if you are a different kind of ... if you're a product, you want people to buy your new iPhone, or you want people to behave in a certain way. You want people to change their behavior and maybe don't share fake news as much. Or change any kind of behavior, and we measure that in different ways. The conversion rate is usually the thing that we use to measure.

If you want to measure how much reach your advertising has received, then you might consider the impression rate. How many people saw my ad? Or how many people clicked and were directed to my web page? It just depends on what you're measuring as success.

Josh Machleder:

Okay. I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the ethical considerations. What we just experienced here when you pulled up ... it was kind of modeling what campaigners are doing. They're constantly, campaigners or the internet or social media platforms, they're constantly experimenting with us, and we probably don't even know it.

So I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions around some of the ethical issues, the ethical implications of this. And also what might be some of the pitfalls of working with data this way. What might be the implications on privacy because we are working with individuals, and we're doing an experiment without necessarily informed consent.

And then also our metrics on this. Are we seeing how inclusive they are? Are we reaching enough women, for example? Are we reaching minority groups? Who are we reaching? Do we know? And are we getting all the people we want in through this kind of method?

Tim Weninger:

Yeah, those are excellent questions, and those are really important to consider, especially with the tools that are available to us nowadays. As for the ethical considerations here, we don't have to play dirty tricks in order to have effect. A lot of the advertisements nowadays you might see, especially in political campaigns since we're talking about political campaigns currently, they are hyper-targeting people down to the individual level.

There was a story, again another anecdote, where you can buy advertisements to target very specific groups of individuals. I remember hearing a story about a person whose roommate wasn't doing the dishes, and so he took out an ad on Facebook that hyper-targeted his roommate so that to encourage him to do the dishes. So that's another example.

Those tools are available, and we don't have to go to that extreme to hyper optimize to specific, specific groups. One thing we can do is try to balance the gender and the regional reach of different advertisements. So that's something that we always try to do. As far as ethical considerations go, there's this idea of informed consent. That's actually something that I as a university researcher have to, by law, consider.

When someone is enrolled in an experiment, if you will, a campaign of mine, I have to say that your results will be, are being used for an experiment. We're going to be measuring these things, and here's my email address and my phone number in case you want to call me about it. And by the way, you can leave at any time.

So if you were to click through, and we'll talk about the case study here in a little bit, but if you were to click through on the campaigns that I was running, you would see a pop up that says we're measuring your responses, and here's my email address in case you're interested in learning more.

So those ethical considerations are very important to us, and not things that we overlook. Unfortunately, corporations, Apple and Coca-Cola, they don't have to abide by those same kind of ethical considerations that we do, but I am happy to make sure that my ... that our work is ethical and respects privacy.

Josh Machleder:

And then could you just talk a little bit more about inclusiveness of your targets?

Tim Weninger:

Sure. I advance this slide, but that's fine. As far as inclusivity goes, we can actually ... what the platforms allow ... we can get YouTube and Facebook and Twitter. They allow you, or give you the opportunity to say we want males and females at equal amounts. And we want people from different regions of a country at various amounts. We can say 90% here and 10% there. And so we can use the tools available. We can spread the message to a representative group. One thing we cannot control is who is actually going to click on and click through into our program. So that's something that is ... that's up to the user and we can't control, but we can give everyone an equal opportunity to join.

Josh Machleder:

Okay. Because I think this is an area that's worth focus at USAD and their partners to be thinking about, there's a couple of tools from USAD and its partners that I wanted to just post there. First of all, I encourage everyone to take a look at USA's agency digital strategy, which we've launched only last week, and the link should be up there. Also, USA's Making Artificial Intelligence Work for International Development, as well as the principles for digital development.

So after a lot of these broad principles that we've been talking about, about the online ecosystem and attention, let's talk about how it might work in practice to get out a successful campaign to advance democracy. And in this case, Tim, I'm going to ask you to talk to us a little bit more about the media literacy campaign that you implemented in Indonesia.

Tim Weninger:

Certainly, I'm happy to. Before I move on, there were a couple of comments in the chat I see from Mark and Mike about on Facebook, and doing the group creation and sign ups and micro targeting. Those are absolutely correct. You might remember the big ... during the last election campaign the micro targeting by Cambridge Analytica. What they would do is they were asking people to sign up for these groups and

like certain pages so they can micro target people based upon these profiles that are being created of these individuals.

We don't do that. That's not something that we ... There's no machine learning. There's not cognitive profiles being developed here. That's not something that we're interested in ethically or practically ... That's not something that we're interested in doing. We find that we can have a pretty decent effect, and I'll talk about the effect sizes that we're having a little later, without having to resort to those types of, like I was saying, dirty tricks and unethical behavior.

So Mark and Mike, those are excellent comments, and I agree with them completely, but we can still have an effect without having to develop these micro target and cognitive profile type approach.

Josh Machleder:

Good to know. I don't think we want to be put in the same basket as Cambridge Analytica.

Tim Weninger:

Yeah. That's something that I'm always a little bit defensive of because we're not doing that. We're just doing straightforward pro-social media type campaigns. As Josh, as you mentioned before, we had ... There was a case study that we did, funded by the USC ID DRG, and that case study was called, or that program was called Advancing Media Literacy Among New Digital Rivals. I'll take a few minutes to go through some of the lessons that we've learned, and some of the progress of this particular program.

The goal here was to ask this question. And the research question we can read together was, if we provide customized online literacy content to segmented audiences and new digital arrivals, and the recipients of media literacy will be less likely to engage with and spread misinformation.

The goal here was to decrease the amount of misinformation that is spread, particularly in this case in Indonesia, through media literacy campaigns.

To do that we had four different tasks. It wasn't just Notre Dame. It was also our friends at [GeoPoll 00:54:50], [Irex 00:54:50] and [inaudible 00:54:51]. And the tasks were such. So Notre Dame's job was to understand the information ecosystem and identify the vectors of misinformation in Indonesia specifically. How are people sharing information? What are they sharing? What are the types of disinformation that are out there? Can you get a handle on it.

Now GeoPoll was a organization that conducted baseline inline polling, that is phone calls, phone polls, to measure effect offline. So all of this is online programming, but what we really want is behavior change in general. GeoPoll's job as to help us measure that.

Irex has social media literacy campaigns that are typically done offline, that is in schools around the world, and their job was to take that media literacy campaigns and digitize them. Put them, make them so that they would be online campaigns. So we didn't actually have to come to a classroom to learn about media literacy.

And then [Moonshock 00:56:02], their job was to take and perform A/B testing. To try out different variations of the media literacy campaigns, share them with the individuals that needed to see them, and then of course measure the effectiveness of these campaigns and optimize continuously. So that's the task. That's the job.

Now the first step here is to identify the vectors of disinformation in Indonesia, and to do that we are working with two partners on the ground. One was [Methindo 00:56:35] Group, and the other was [inaudible 00:56:36]. These are fact checking groups in Indonesia, and the goal with working with them

is to get an understanding of in Indonesia what is ... how are people sharing misinformation? How are people sharing information in general? And get a sense of what's happening on the ground.

Adam asked a question, what is the definition of media literacy? That's a really good question. I should be more clear. This is social media literacy, and the idea here is to understand how misinformation spreads, and to understand that, and we'll talk more about this in a little bit, each user doesn't realize how valuable their shares and votes are. So if you like something or share something on Facebook, to realize that that actually has a measurable impact and effect in the overall ecosystem of misinformation.

So to encourage people to slow down and to think before you share, to think before you click, and to realize that your individual behavior has power, that's the key ingredient in our online social media-

Josh Machleder:

Can I just put in there that the formal definition for media literacy is all the practices that allow people to access, critically evaluate and create or manipulate media. And it's not restricted to any particular type of media, but in this case we're talking about social media.

Tim Weninger:

That's exactly right. I should be more clear. Media literacy is a broad subject. There are entire courses at universities taught on this. Our goal here was to talk about online social media literacy, so that's a good question from Adam.

Okay. One of the things that we're finding in Indonesia is that a lot of the content that is shared were images, memes, if you will. So you'll see here the image on the left was shared a lot, and there's also an image on the right. These are not photographs. They are altered. You might be surprised to know that. They're not actually real images.

One of the things that we've found is that you can learn a ton about a culture and a region and what people are interested in and what they're afraid of by looking at how people alter images and share those altered images. As we see here, the one on the left is current president, [inaudible 00:59:18], who is snapping his fingers at [inaudible 00:59:21], and then the opposition party is disappearing, right? So that's kind of a funny political image.

The one on the right is we don't want to let the Chinese Communist government take over Indonesia. This is a Photoshop'd image with the hammer and sickle and political party. And these are kind of funny, but they have a political message.

There's some other more nefarious versions, and we're actually able to capture these with image alteration detection technology, where we can say that this image here on the left, which is an online influencer, this woman. And then she is holding up a finger and thumb. We see a lot of this finger and thumb being edited into images, especially of celebrities. We didn't realize what that was, and people in Indonesia probably know, but this is a sign, a political sign for the number two person on the ballot. And this means that we don't want to have the current president, who was number one, we don't want the winner of the election to be elected. So this was in support of the opposition, in this case the losing party of the last election.

But this is a fake image. Actually the finger and thumb was not part of the original image. We also see a lot of hammer and sickle being entered into images and shared around. And this is something that we can look at. We can actually take all of these altered images, extract what would be inserted, and then learn about the types of disinformation that are being shared online.

What we want to do from these, we take all this information and we want to take and create media literacy campaigns that are responsive to these types of disinformation. We want to be able to target them to the people who are sharing that disinformation. To do that we also were tracking what or what types of content people were looking for and sharing.

This is a graph that [Moonshot 01:01:36] was able to put together for us that we're looking at the searches online for different content. You see spikes around the Indonesian general election, spikes of searches around the student riots. There's a few earthquakes that happened, and then of course recently with the rise in coronavirus cases.

And then we want to take and see who was sharing this misinformation. So we see majority of online people are male. People who are sharing disinformation are male, but they have a broad range of age groups. And of course a representative group we can ... where's the pointer here? You can see Jakarta. That's not working. You can see the population centers are more deeply colored.

The goal up here is we take all of this information, we create lessons that people can access, and we share them with ... we create a website and we put these lessons online so people can look at them.

These are generally short videos with a website attached to them. [inaudible 01:02:57] Can you pull up the example of one of the videos that we had?

Video clip playing

Tim Weninger:

So that's just one of the content. We have a lot more of them. The idea here is we take [inaudible 01:03:43] advertisements, and we put them on Google, on YouTube, on Facebook, and this is ... if people are searching for content that is [inaudible 01:03:55] to disinformation, we will instead redirect them to view our media diversity campaign.

And we do that hundreds of thousands of times. When we do that, we also ask people before they view the content and ask them to view the content, what did you think of it? Only a handful, so about 1,000 of the people were surveyed, and we asked them questions about did you find this content helpful? And 95% said, "Yes." We asked them this question. "How much do you agree?" I find it difficult to say what information is true and what is not. And 38% said that this statement was not true of them, which was a 60% improvement over the baseline.

And then we asked an interesting question, which is do you read articles before you re-tweet them? And 80% said, "Of course," which was a nine percent increase over the baseline. Which I think is some interesting results, but that was immediately after the people saw the content. What I think we're maybe more interested in is their offline behavior.

When people visited the website, [inaudible 01:05:00] we actually asked some of them for their phone number. We said we'll give you 50 cents top up on your phone bill if you give us your phone number. It turns out about 100 people did, and so what we ended up doing with those hundred people is we called them before ... we called 1,000 people and asked them their general media consumption habits as a baseline before any of this started, and we asked them an interesting set of question. There were five versions of the following questions. We asked them a true headline, and we asked them do you believe this headline to be true? We also asked them a false headline, do you believe this information to be true.

We were basically trying to get people's understanding of are you able to identify a real or misleading or fake news story when it was asked of you? That was in the baseline, but then we also, and the results were reasonably split 50/50.

After our campaign was run in the country, we asked an additional 1,000 people, but we also asked the 100 people that entered the phone number online. We knew for sure that they view our content.

The people that viewed our content and entered their phone number were twice as likely to answer those questions correctly. Twice as likely to identify misinformation news headlines compared to the baseline, which shows the effect, the offline effect of this programming. It's also important to remember this didn't happen immediately after they saw the lesson. They entered their phone number, then three or four weeks later someone calls them and asks them questions about news media.

That's [inaudible 01:06:56]. That shows the effect of this. It's not a panacea. It's not solving all of the problems, but as an overview in this we had seven lessons total. Just under 20 million impressions. That means 20 million different people saw our content, 183 thousand page views and about 74,000 weekly hacking attempts, people trying to break into our site.

So lessons learned is that we have to keep our content short. If people last for about 20 to 30 seconds, and then they leave. So keeping our content short, keeping it concise and quick, and also we have a large positive response from our users.

So overall I think it was a successful program, and we were able to learn a lot about how to take typically offline content, offline programming, move it online and measure that attention and effectiveness. So with that, I would like to open up to any questions you might have and turn it back over to Josh.

Josh Machleder:

Actually I really hope we were able to keep people's attention. We are getting close to time, so we won't be able to do questions and answers. But if you do have questions, I want to encourage people to send them to me at my email. My email is in the pod. It's jmachleder@usaid.gov. And I just want to encourage you. Think of experiences of examples that you might have setting up these kinds of programs online that are relevant and how we can help you boost them up. Think about how we might be able to use these kinds of tools and interventions for other kinds of programming.