Countering Disinformation: Democratic accountability and algorithmic transparency for social media

Social media has become an increasingly more powerful democratic actor. But we have yet to create a system of checks and balances that holds social media accountable for their influence on free democratic processes. The fact that a checks-and-balances system does not exist has allowed for misuse of these platforms by malicious actors. In order to hold social media more accountable, we need more transparency. Recently, we have seen a public and political demand for social media to share less data. However, sharing less data creates a "monopoly of truth" held by these platforms, and limits smaller member states ability to detect disinformation campaigns.

Nextwork A/S propose a system of digital checks and balances grounded in a "Democracy API". Such an API should make these platforms more democratic accountable and transparent. This will allow for member states to better detect, understand and counter disinformation and divisive content.

Data-sharing

- **Social media should share more data:** Social media should share more data with authorities and civil society actors and allow other organizations to better analyze and detect disinformation campaigns.
- **Build a requirement specification for a "Democracy API":** European authorities and civil society actors should work together to formulate a requirement specification for an API, that ensures transparency of the relevant activity on the platform both under an election and during the time leading up to it.
- **Anonymized access to account-activity:** Facebook should rewind closings of its API-structure so that it allows a "Twitter-level" access to user-activity across pages on an anonymized level. This will allow for better bot and troll-detection.
- **Enhanced agent-system interaction:** Users should be given more information to better understand who else is interacting with the information they see and share. This would make it easier to know if you are actually a part of a polarized echo chamber.
- **Capacity building with social media:** Authorities and civil society actors need to work with social media to better learn how to understand and analyze data, so that it can be used to detect disinformation campaigns.

Censoring political content

- **Transparency on censorship:** Social media should provide any censored actor with information on why he/she is being censored.
- **Reporting on censorship:** Social media should report on what kind of content (adds, post, comments) is being censored.

Transparency of sources and filters of information

- **Transparency of influencers:** As done by Facebook in the US, social media should provide a full list of adds that are run on their platforms.
- **Algorithmic transparency:** As done by Youtube, other social media platforms that are used by more than 10% of a countries population should provide a full explanation of how its recommendation-feeds are working.

Tailor-made training for policy makers:

- **Deployment of a standardized training team for MEP's and advisors for the upcoming EP-Elections:** Implementation of a set of guidelines on potential risk and pitfalls on social media, during an election.
- **Tailor-made digital infrastructures training for MEP's and advisors:** MEP's should be given a free course to understand data-flows of social media which would qualify better legislation and an ability to counter disinformation