4th SPD

TOPIC: Impact of Social Media on Democracy And Freedom of Expression
CHAIRS: Spencer Stone, Abigail Seo

LAIMUN XXIX

December 2-3

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Letter from the Secretaries-General

Dear Delegates,

On behalf of our entire staff, it is our pleasure to welcome you to Session XXIX of the Los Angeles Invitational Model United Nations (LAIMUN) conference. LAIMUN XXIX will take place on Saturday, December 2 and Sunday, December 3 of 2023 at the Mira Costa High School (MCHS) campus.

Our staff, composed of over 120 MCHS students, has been working tirelessly to make your debate experience the best it can be. You will find your dais members to be knowledgeable about the issues being debated and MUN procedure. We pride ourselves in hosting a conference that is educational and engaging, and we hope you take advantage of that as you prepare and debate.

At LAIMUN, we value thorough research and preparation. We ask that delegates write position papers following these directions. The deadline to submit position papers to be considered for Committee and Research Awards is Friday, November 24 at 11:59 PM PT. The deadline to submit to be considered for Committee Awards is Thursday, November 30 at 11:59 PM PT.

We also encourage all delegates to read the LAIMUN Rules of Procedure for conference-specific information and as a reminder of points and motions that can be made during committee.

Feel free to reach out to our staff with any questions or concerns you may have. Delegates can find their chairs' contact information next to their committee profile and the Secretariat's email addresses on the staff page. Any member of the LAIMUN staff will be happy to assist you.

We look forward to seeing you in December!

Sincerely,

Akash Mishra and Lily Stern
Secretaries-General, LAIMUN XXIX
secretarygeneral@mchsmun.org

Introduction to the USG

Welcome, Delegates, to LAIMUN XXIX!

My name is Naomi Kim, and I am so excited to conclude my fourth and final year at Mira Costa Model UN by being the Under-Secretaries General of the General Assembly!

Every year, we select the GA committee topics to reflect the diversity of issues present in our rapidly modernizing world, and this year is no exception. I am excited to hear the novel, creative, and detailed solutions each of you have to address these complex problems, and I hope that all of you can leave LAIMUN not just having given an awesome speech and spectacular formal caucus sessions, but with an enriched and diversified outlook.

But in order to have another amazing LAIMUN, I want to remind you all of our strict no pre-written resolutions policy. Under no circumstances is pre-written resolutions acceptable; additionally, delegates are only allowed to work on resolutions during committee sessions, not during breaks. Your chairs will outline this policy in greater detail before the start of debate, and we urge you all to comply.

Our staff have worked incredibly hard to create an informed, professional environment, and we hope that you enjoy it. Come equipped with knowledge, strong solutions, and your sleek WBA, but do not forget—MUN is fun!

If you have any additional questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at the following address: GA@mchsmun.org. If not, I look forward to seeing you all in December!

Best Regards,

Lily Stern and Akash Mishra   Naomi Kim
Secretaries-General   Under-Secretary General

Introduction to the Dias

Hello everyone!

My name is Spencer Stone and I will be one of your two chairs in 4th SPD Novice at LAIMUN XXIX. I am super duper excited to work with each and every one of you! I'm I am currently a junior at Mira Costa, and this is my third year in the Mira Costa Model UN program. I've had the incredible opportunity to debate peacebuilding in the Russia-Ukraine conflict at the BERMUN 2022 conference in Berlin,Germany, alongside plenty of local conferences; I hope to experience more conferences throughout my remaining time in the program! I was a chair of 1st DISEC Novice last year at LAIMUN XXVIII, and I hope I can grant all of you as great of an experience as I had.

Outside of MUN, I have been playing piano for as long as I can remember. I compete in local competitions and co-lead a student-led organization that plays at local elder care facilities. I also play varsity badminton at Mira Costa in the Spring. In my free time, I eat Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers; I order the box combo, substituting the coleslaw for an extra toast. Nothing is better than a piece of Cane's chicken doused in some good ol Louisiana Hot Sauce and smothered in some tangy yet wonderful Cane's sauce. Finally, I dabble in judging dog shows.

In committee, we hope to see a multitude of solutions that address the many facets of the issue. Few approaches will be as successful as hoped if implemented exclusively. If you have any questions about the committee, or if there is anything you would like to know prior to debating. I am so excited to be a member of the dias, see you all at LAIMUN XXIX!

Hello delegates!

My name is Abigail Seo, and I am one of your co-chairs for 4th SPD Novice. I am currently a senior at Costa and have been in the MUN program since freshman year. I have debated in many local conferences, and some travel ones I have had the chance to debate at are Georgetown and Berlin. I served as an OPI legal my first LAIMUN, and this year it will be my second time chairing. I really look forward to seeing everyone and which solutions you can collaborate on with this topic!

Outside of MUN, I have been part of mock trial since middle school, and my team has gone to world championships every year, winning first place two years in a row! I also play the violin in Costa's Symphony and Chamber Orchestras. I am a lead student ambassador for the Manhattan Beach Education Foundation and interned for the Samburu Project, a non-profit organization. In my spare time, I love to read, listen to/play music, sing, and enjoy anything outdoorsy – running, hiking, etc.. I like learning new languages; I am fluent in Korean and am currently learning Spanish.

In 4th SPD, we would like to see a diverse range of solutions and debate on subtopics, as we chose a topic that is very relevant to our world today. We thought delving into the impact of social media on freedom of expression would be interesting, considering that the span of technology ranges all over the world and is always incorporated into our daily lives. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us!

Best of luck,

Abigail Seo

Committee Description

The United Nations General Assembly's Fourth Committee, (also known as the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, SPECPOL, or 4th SPD) is one of the six principal committees of the UN General Assembly. SPECPOL includes every UN member nation. Created in 1949, the Fourth Committee was originally mandated to be responsible for decolonization related issues. The Fourth Committee was combined with the Special Political Committee, the seventh principal committee, in 1993 to form the Special Political and Decolonization Committee.[1]

Currently, the main focus of the 4th SPD is to address a wide array of political issues. Specifically, it addresses decolonization, political refugees, especially Palestinian refugees with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and political conflicts, such as the Report of the Special Committee on Israeli Practices.[2] SPD also deals with issues such as the conflict-free uses of space and mine action. This committee additionally reviews the articles regarding the University of Peace triennely and biennially.

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[1] https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/47/233
[2] https://www.un.org/en/ga/fourth/

Topic: Impact of Social Media on Democracy and Freedom of Expression

I.   Background

Social media has become an everyday part of numerous lives in recent years. Such platforms have revolutionized the way we communicate and share information. Although social media presents many benefits to society, it also raises concerns about how we govern our thoughts and express ourselves.

In 2004, Facebook, a social networking platform allowing users to engage in various communication forms, was launched, profoundly impacting global society. The site's expansion from its initial inception at Harvard University to its current scale, with nearly three billion monthly active users as of 2023, saw its introduction as a part of daily life.[3] Its uniqueness drove a transformation in the way individuals connected and built relationships. The launch of Facebook also opened new avenues for political participation, activism, and civic engagement, allowing for a virtual space where users may share their beliefs. The platform's user-friendly interface enabled like-minded people to form communities and amplify their voices in ways that were not possible before. As Facebook's user base grew, governance, privacy, and expression concerns emerged. The sheer volume of information shared on the platform raised questions about the reliability of the site's content. As a result, debates about the responsibility of social

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[3] Dixon, Stacy Jo. "Facebook Mau Worldwide 2023." Statista, 29 Aug. 2023, www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/.

media platforms in moderating to combat misinformation, hate speech, and other possibly harmful content arose.

Furthermore, Facebook's launch paved the way for monetizing social media through targeted advertising. The tailoring of advertisements to specific demographics gave rise again to concerns regarding the influence of corporations on public discourse and political campaigns. One such concern in early 2018 mentioned Cambridge Analytica, a political consulting firm based in London and their usage of millions of Facebook users' data to create psychological profiles of individuals; they targeted political advertising during the 2016 United States presidential election.

The launch of Twitter in 2006 introduced a microblogging platform that saw a rapid gain in popularity. While Twitter provided a unique space for concise and real-time information sharing, it also contributed to the spread of misinformation, particularly in the aftermath of Facebook's rise. The platform format, with a character limit and emphasis on briefness, facilitated rapid news dissemination. However, this format also made it susceptible to the spread of unverified content. False information, rumors, and conspiracy theories could rapidly circulate and reach a broad audience, often much before accurate information or fact-checking could catch up. Twitter also features the ability to "retweet" other posts, increasing their presence on the site and exacerbating the spread of misleading media. Alongside Facebook, Twitter became a prime target for misleading narratives, disinformation campaigns, and coordinated efforts to manipulate public opinion.

Recently, the prevalence of misinformation on social media platforms has reached alarming levels, necessitating a closer examination of the role of government regulation. The exponential growth of social media users and the rapid spread of information in today's interconnected world has created an environment where misinformation can thrive. Individuals and organizations with various motives often deliberately spread misinformation to manipulate public opinions, advance their agendas, or disrupt democratic processes.

The consequences of rampant misinformation are far-reaching. It can instill confusion, erode trust in institutions, and undermine the foundations of democracy. One such period when misinformation may be prevalent is during political polarization. In a country, a widening gap in public political identity can undermine the pursuit of the common good. This polarized climate may cause opposing political parties to use false or misleading news to degrade their opponent. In such settings, misinformation in the media may not be a result of entirely malicious parties but instead one of polarization. Another typical time for misinformation in a state is during social unrest. When false or misleading information pollutes the media, often in combination with propaganda or hate speech, it may impact individuals' ability to make well-informed choices. This can prove a significant threat to a nation's political, social, and economic stability. Finally, major public events often see large amounts of misinformation, especially public health crises. While similar pandemics have impacted millions on a similar scale, the COVID-19 pandemic saw the first with constant media coverage in our modern technological age. The fear instilled by the media has led to drastic political duality and public confusion, only worsened by the bombarding of the world with misinforming sources covering the virus. The complex emotional

issues sparked by the virus also worsen from the spread of misinformation. A trial of one thousand two hundred Chinese healthcare workers saw over seventy percent reporting psychological distress.[4] These problems grow worse by the fear instilled by misinformation. Also, researchers at Stanford University have created a model to comprehend how false information spreads over social media. According to the model, the most vulnerable groups to false information appear to include the elderly, children, social media users, and people with less formal education. Political extremists are also more prone to accept information that supports their prejudices. Particular attention should be paid to this effect when the information is sourced from a reliable source. It must be greatly taken into consideration which audiences are most susceptible to misinformation.

Recognizing the issue's urgency, many call for government regulation to address the spread of misinformation on social media. Effective regulation can establish clear guidelines and standards for platforms to ensure the accuracy of information shared on their networks. Striking the right balance between regulation and freedom is crucial, as it requires navigating complex ethical and legal considerations. Nonetheless, with the immense influence of social media on our society, it is essential to find effective and responsible ways to govern the dissemination of information, promote digital literacy, and safeguard the integrity of democratic processes in the digital age.

II.   United Nations Involvement

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[4] Lai, Jianbo, et al. "Factors Associated with Mental Health Outcomes among Health Care Workers Exposed to Coronavirus Disease 2019." JAMA Network Open, 2 Mar. 2020,www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7090843/.

The United Nations has been actively addressing social media's impact on democracy, recognizing its profound influence on societies worldwide. Through various initiatives, the UN aims to promote responsible and inclusive use of social media while safeguarding democratic principles and human rights.

The UN has a series of social media accounts on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and more, using them as tools to easily and quickly provide information to the public. While these sites also present a risk for misinformation or hateful comments, the UN disclaims that they reserve the right to delete or edit any comments they consider inappropriate or unacceptable. Through this act, the UN is promoting social media usage in a way that strengthens democracy and freedom of expression.

To ensure the protection of freedom of expression online, the UN has also called for the development of robust legal frameworks and policies that safeguard human rights while addressing the challenges posed by social media. International human rights mechanisms, such as the UN Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, provide guidance and monitor the implementation of these principles at the global level. An example of this is the UNHRC Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a call for each UN Member State to participate in a peer review process every four and a half years addressing its actions to improve human rights situations and see improvement based on commentary.[5] UPR reports

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[5] OHCHR. "Universal Periodic Review." *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/upr-home#:~:text=The%20Universal%20Periodic%20Review%20(UPR,rights%20records%20every%204.5%20years.

include the mention of media-addressed issues, such as the 2020 recommendations of the UPR process for the United States to address poor practices in the police force.

More specifically, the United Nations Development Program has compiled a report on the impacts of media pollution and misinformation on Europe and Central Asia. The study's main finding was that usage of the internet and social media increased access to alternative news sources in several nations. Accordingly, it has also been noted that there is an increase in the manipulation of public opinion via social media. The report also observed correlations between places with misinformation and election campaigning. While the report shows close care regarding the impacts of misinformation, further recognition on the global scale must be implemented to seamlessly allow freedom of expression and democracy without any barriers from social media.

The UN recognizes the role of social media in shaping democratic processes and political participation. It acknowledges the potential of these platforms to amplify diverse voices, facilitate citizen engagement, and foster transparency in governance. However, the UN also acknowledges the risks associated with social media, including spreading misinformation, hate speech, and manipulating public opinion.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of global development targets adopted by the UN member states, include targets related to access to information and media freedom. These goals partly aim to bridge the digital divide, promote media literacy, and ensure universal access to reliable and accurate information. These broad goals, however, may not be enough to fully address the impacts of social media.

Despite wide UN efforts to address the various challenges social media has created in the digital age, the aforementioned goals and committees have failed to effectively eliminate a series of modern issues. For example, comprehensive strategies have not fully been enacted to prevent the spread of false information, hate speech, election integrity compromise, and more. These issues see a much more complicated underlying issue which must be targeted to truly solve the listed issues.

It is worth noting that the UN's involvement in the impact of social media on democracy and freedom of expression is a dynamic and ongoing process. As technology evolves and new challenges emerge, it is crucial to adapt strategies to ensure that social media platforms are harnessed to promote democratic values, human rights, and inclusive societies.

III.   Topics to Consider

A. Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers

The fear that the use of social media may limit the information that is consumed online is prevalent among users. Filter bubbles and echo chambers are a big issue that spread this kind of public fear. Although called different names, echo chambers and filter bubbles are essentially the same thing; the filter bubble, sometimes referred to as an "echo chamber," is created by one's online activity, instantly limiting one's access to different sources and weakens one's ability online to avoid prejudice, fake news, and bigotry.

This is due to the fact that one's filter bubble is equal to an automatic personalization of the things that one looks at or searches up on the internet. On the other hand, an echo chamber is the environment that makes up the categories which online participants encounter when they are

on the Web. In social media, echo chambers are what reinforce online users' preexisting beliefs through communication inside an insulated network.

However, recent research has shown that filter bubbles and echo chambers impose a negative effect on the online users' psychological thinking. A social media echo chamber fuels one to experience a biased, one-sided media experience that only caters to a viewpoint that one is in favor of, in comparison to showing all different perspectives regarding politics, news, and more. Filter bubbles can lead to narrow-minded thinking, increasing social and political polarization and extremism. As the world today is more technologically advanced, echo chambers and filter bubbles can also influence the choices people make, often leading to faulty, misinformed decisions.

B. Manipulation of Public Opinion

As the world becomes more digitized, the public is often dissuaded into different directions based on their findings through social media. Across the world, there are 4.9 billion social media users as of June 2023, and it is estimated that this number will grow to be almost 6 billion by the year 2027[6]. That is how fast social media users are growing, leading to these platforms to be penetrated further.

The greatest threat social media manipulation of the public presents is towards governments and democracies internationally. This was seen by Russia's Internet Research Agency, where they utilized social media to disseminate propaganda, create numerous fake

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[6] Social Media User Statistics 2023
https://www.demandsage.com/social-media-users/#:~:text=Social%20Media%20User%20Statistics%202023,platform%2C%20with%203.03%20billion%20users

accounts to shift the public's opinion regarding the government, and often promoted fake news stories online to inflame political debates often directed towards the United States. According to the University of Oxford's recent studies, organized social media manipulation campaigns were found in each of the 81 surveyed countries, which was a 15% increase in just one year[7]. Not only does this report show that misinformation has become more advanced, but it also displays the incredible need for the public to rely on trustworthy information and outlets, especially regarding government activity.

Moreover, most young adults these days are rarely watching the news and only hear about big headlining titles through social media platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter, Snapcaht, etc. Professor Philip Howard from Oxford University states that "social media companies need to raise their game by increasing their efforts to flag misinformation and close fake accounts". On top of this feat, there should not be any government intervention as that could complicate more things.

Another research report from the Data & Society's Media Manipulation Initiative examined how different selected groups used social media culture to navigate the pros of a free online society, ultimately threatening freedom of expression, as well as personal opinions. Some other media manipulation tactics that were found during this investigation included digital tools, targeting journalists or public figures and politicians, hacking methods, and more.

C. Amplification of Extremist Views

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[7] Social Media Manipulation by Political Actors an industrial scale problem - Oxford Report
https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-01-13-social-media-manipulation-political-actors-industrial-scale-problem-oxford-report

One of the biggest issues social media is directly related to is how tech platforms fuel political polarization and amplify extremist views in the United States. A recently published report by the Center for Business and Human Rights at New York University's Stern School of Business portrays the strained connection between numerous social media platforms. The types of extreme polarization that occur are ones that typically result in the downfall of democratic values, civil disobedience, and violence within communities.

Although popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook involuntarily promote ways in which online users' beliefs in extremist ideologies may increase, they are not the root causes of political polarization. Instead, these platforms are the ways in which extremist views are exacerbated by declining trust in institutions, amplifying scorn against facts and headlining news, legislative dysfunction, and, in the worst possible case, partisan violence.

Social media is a highly used tactic to spread extremist propaganda, leading to attacks and privacy concerns throughout governments and societies. Based on the information above, a volunteer report finalized in 2021 by the Wilder Master of Arts in Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness expressed that a total of 87% of individuals engaged in political extremism used social media to promote their beliefs and personal agendas. This statistical data has only increased ever since by 8%[8].

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[8] Social Media Working Group (SMWG) for Emergency Services and Disaster Management Program
https://www.dhs.gov/science-and-technology/smwg

Furthermore, since 2016, the analysis revealed that right-wing extremists had been involved in 267 attacks and 97 deaths. On the other hand, far-left extremists were conducting the behind-the-scenes of 66 attacks and 19 deaths[9]. Almost all of these amplifying plots related to political extremism had to do with individuals who had strong support for white supremacy.

IV. Case Study: Arab Springs Movement

A specific event that encapsulates the impact of social media on democracy and freedom of expression is the Arab Spring movement. This took place from 2010-2012 and made its way through various countries across the Middle East and North Africa. Originating from Tunisia, these anti-government protests and uprisings were a response to government corruption and economic stagnation. These rebellions led to a decade of change that followed.

During this time, social media platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook, played a significant role in mobilizing and gathering citizens, facilitating the exchange and organization of information. These social media platforms also brought protestors together, amplifying their voices and demanding that they be heard. Social media facilitated most of the communication and interaction between participants of political protests during the Arab Spring movement.

Although social media platforms can be used as a way to negatively impact democracy and freedom of expression, in this case, these sources helped to organize pro-and-anti government demonstrations, spread information about activities and events, and raise awareness within communities and neighboring countries about the movement that was going on.

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[9] Right Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe
https://cco.ndu.edu/PRISM/PRISM-Volume-6-no-2/Article/839011/right-wing-extremism-and-terrorism-in-europe-current-developments-and-issues-fo/

Moreover, governments used social media to engage citizens and encourage them to participate in their local government actions. Additionally, social media provided an alternative means of communication and had the ability to bypass traditionally broadcasted media channels. This allowed information to reach citizens without being controlled or meticulously censored by government officials.

By using social media platforms directly during the Arab Spring movement, individuals had the opportunity to share firsthand accounts of what they were going through and what the movement meant for them. This spread the purpose of the movement, which rallied countries other than Tunisia to change their ways. Some of their rallying chants became focused on their human rights, what the government was doing wrong, what needed to be changed within their country, and raising awareness internationally. By steering away from state-controlled media, citizens used social media to their advantage in order to challenge the government and present their own information to the public.

The spread of information did not stop instantly, instead, it went on for multiple days, leading to months, and then amplifying each year the movement continued. For instance, in Egypt, the gains made from the beginning were reversed following a coup to overthrow President Hoshi Mubarak, seating defense minister Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as president instead. Another example was Libya's long-time dictator Colonel Muammar Qaddafi and his overthrow. During the Arab Spring movement, he was captured and violently tortured then executed by his opposition.

The aftermath of the Arab Spring in multiple nations led to waves of violence and instability, known as the Arab Winter. This period of time was characterized by extensive civil wars, instability within different regions, and a demographic downfall of the Arab League. It is important to note that the role of social media in the Arab Spring was complex and complicated. Although it stimulated unity and allowed protesters to come together, social media also exposed many holes regarding its system. Governments responded to the use of social media by attempting to restrict or block the platform and keeping a close eye on certain activists. This is another way that social media became a place for the spread of misinformation and hate speech, causing tensions to rise online.

Nevertheless, the Arab Spring movement is an important example of how social media can play a role in shaping democratic movements and bring attention to freedom of expression.

V. **Guiding Questions**

1. What are the positive and negative effects of social media's impact on freedom of expression and democracy?

2. How does social media play a role during political elections and campaigns?

3. In what ways has the United Nations ensured that there has been no malware by governments towards social media platforms?

4. How has social media impacted the privacy of individuals and their data online?

5. What are the steps that societies can take to ensure that social media influences the relationship between the public and media networks in a good way?

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