Houston Area Model United Nations
Standard Committee

CSTD

Chair | Katherine Zhao
Topic A: Combating AI-Based Misinformation in Global Affairs
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Atilgan Ozdil/Anadolu Ag

Chair Letter

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to HAMUN 51! I'm Katherine, and I'm thrilled to be chairing another set of ambitious, hardworking, and curious delegates at this year's conference. MUN has been an important part of my life, and I continue to give my all to HAMUN because I believe it can leave a profound impact on you as a future global leader, student, and person as well.

A bit about me: I am a sophomore accounting major at Texas A&M. Outside of academics, I love to read, watch movies, and sing as part of the A&M Reveliers. Most importantly, I adore MUN and the work I put into it. I first started the activity during my junior year of high school and haven't looked back since. This is my fourth HAMUN overall: I attended twice as a delegate and chaired the UN Security Council at HAMUN 50. MUN has taught me that I am a global citizen: part of a world bigger than myself that is growing and changing every day, and the importance of keeping up with major issues. As delegates, it is your role to thoroughly understand and embody the stances and policies of your countries in the context of the topics we will be discussing. That includes articulating your ideas and collaborating with your fellow delegates to form solutions that you all find not only creative and effective, but viable.

If I have any advice for you all, there are two things. Firstly, don't procrastinate. You want as much time to take and marinate on your research as possible so you will be prepared for committee in February. Second is to have fun and enjoy getting into it, as cliche as that sounds. MUN may be a work-intensive activity, but it's a rewarding one and you may as well enjoy it because you are learning about things you likely could never conceive learning about normally right now, and your time at conference will be one to remember as they always were for me.

Have fun researching, delegates! See you all in committee!

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Introduction to Committee

The Commission on Science and Technology Development (CSTD) is a subsidiary of the UN Economic and Social Council, one of the six principal organs of the UN. It serves as an intergovernmental forum for ECOSOC and the General Assembly for discussion on the latest news and development in the fields of science and technology, and the committee receives substantial support from UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The CSTD meets annually and reports to the Economic and Social Council, and it currently consists of 43 elected members who serve four year terms and a bureau of a chair and four vice chairs.

It is a successor to the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology, which was originally formed in 1979 and transformed into a subsidiary body of ECOSOC in 1992. CSTD has been a relevant focal point of discussion in the follow up to the issues discussed at the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005, and has been a forefront on developments of big tech such as big data analytics, the Internet of Things, and AI.

CSTD serves the UN member states' national governments and civil organizations through the experience and expertise of its representatives, and it also collaborates with other UN bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women and UNESCO.

HAMUN

Executive Summary

Over the past few years, there has been no more contentious topic than the uses and risks of artificial intelligence. AI's impact on government, education, economics, healthcare, manufacturing, and more, cannot be overstated. This topic primarily focuses on generative AI models as the crux of AI-derived misinformation is formed from the use of these models, which rely on preexisting data such as images, text, and video.

Misinformation and disinformation has existed in society as long as media as been around, but the proliferation of AI tools has made it easier for actors to create false narratives and extend the visibility of synthetic media to wider audiences via platforms such as fake news websites and social media. In 2024, the World Economic Forum released their Global Risk Report, which deemed AI-generated misinformation as being the second-highest risk to global security, losing only to extreme weather/natural disasters. It touched on AI's ability to interfere with global politics and elections, as well as heighten social polarization and incite internal conflict.

Part of the impact of the unrest misinformation of any sort creates is the repression of freedom of thought and a certain kind of "digital authoritarianism". Certain countries will find it more difficult to manage the balance between free speech/press and the importance of AI regulation, as ethical and wise use of AI is a subtopic that is relevant to any discussion of technological innovation but not necessarily the focus of the problem at hand. Although it is the responsibility of the individual to be able to fact-check and notice false narratives, the digital divide is another barrier to achieving equality in this factor as less digitally literate countries will have trouble differentiating between authentic and synthetic media.

The most important term in discussing solutions and counterattacks to this ongoing problem is media literacy, which is the ability to analyze various forms of media and make wise and ethical decisions based on critical thinking and being socially responsible. Media literacy education and programming varies by country and is not the end all be all to even the most convincing AI-produced disasters, but all global citizens have a duty to know what is right.

Topic Concept

Part of the reason why misinformation generated or supported by AI is becoming more of a discussion, when misinformation in print and digital media has always existed, is the democratization of widely available information. It's not just corporations and public figures that can manipulate data to serve their own purposes: anyone with either good or malicious intent can. Gita Johar, a professor at Columbia Business School, labeled this framework the Three Ps: *publishers* will create falsified or sensationalized content, *people* will consume them, and *platforms* will give these creators and writers a wider reach.

Admittedly, people and businesses will not always think of the implications of where their image will be posted. They do not explicitly decide where their work will be promoted, as these algorithms decide where advertisements go via a vague auction system. If an ad ends up on a false news site, it will end up damaging one's reputability and reliability. The nature of these algorithms do cause inflammatory content to be shared more, so businesses will get more press, but at a cost.

Not only customers will be misled by potentially fake info in purchasing decisions, but investors might be too hesitant or enthusiastic about having faith in the company's market share.

Companies need to prepare to mitigate potentially negative effects of AI-generated content, although in today's environment, that is becoming more difficult. This type of media is not only widely accessible but also generally high quality and believable. Regulation is often inadequate and too "loose" to provide protection without needing to sacrifice personal liberties and creative freedoms. The additional costs to a party's risk management and crisis plans could also be a hindrance.

Generative AI models, unlike traditional AI models which perform pre-assigned tasks, are intended to create original content. Due to the amount of data that goes into models such as ChatGPT, GPT-3, and learning language models (LLMs), they can often pick up on word sequences and syntax, giving the illusion of human intelligence and authorship without understanding the real life applications and context in which these words exist. This phenomenon of machine-based errors is often referred to as "hallucination".

The most controversial use of AI-generated content in a field that is already rife with misinformation, bias, and inflammatory rhetoric and behavior is global politics, specifically elections and campaigning. Generative AI can utilize text, images, and video from a prompt to create politically charged emails, speeches, and proposals. AI is also used in daily governance and as a bridge between policymakers and their constituents. Citizens are often encouraged to provide feedback and influence public opinion in democratic processes, and media consumption and analysis plays a large role in what the general public has to say. However, for a policymaker, it is difficult to take into account the opinions of every sentiment received, and it's especially frustrating when it is hard to tell if an actual human being is writing them.

In 2020, the American Journal of Democracy conducted an experiment where they composed different advocacy letters and used an AI model to write hundreds more. All the letters were sent to over 7000 state legislators, with response rates between the human-written and AI-written letters only differing by about two percent.

Individual tastes and preferences are often taken advantage of by AI models through the process of digital personalization, which is often a term used for business strategy and marketing purposes; ie, curating a view that a customer would find easier to work with based on algorithmic data about their history and desires. However, it's a popular move in political activism as well. In 2016, the Russian IRA used sensationalized advertisements and falsified reports to polarize the American public, encouraging people to skip elections or incite nativist sentiment.

One of the most popular AI-generated tools that is rife for misinformation, as well as debates on ethics, identity theft, false representation, and intellectual property rights is deepfakes, synthetic videos that rely on machine-learning algorithms, specifically a technology called Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), which use a predictable set of head, jaw, and lip movements to create replicas of facial expressions. Because visual communication is more integrated into our society than written communication, they are easier to cognitively deceive people and have a greater illusion of realism and human intelligence. People in a study titled "Face Forensics" led by Andreas Rossler have admitted that they could only tell apart the fake from the real about 50 percent of the time.

With all of the knowledge of how AI-generated misinformation negatively impacts global security and people's trust in mass media and authority, debates about solutions will be just as contentious and full of unique benefits and flaws depending on what is most necessary to each country's specific issues.

Fact checking tools such as the MediaBias website and X's community notes feature are often not trusted by the public due to the rampant polarization caused by the problems of misinformation. Regulation by governmental bodies can be a helpful step in disciplining any malicious or simply irresponsible actors: the European Union's Digital Services Act is serious about fining platforms for up to six percent for propagating misinformation. However, other countries such as the United States do not deem themselves responsible for the content that goes on these platforms, as set up in their Telecommunications Act of 1996.

This is also a largely Western-centric, Anglosphere-focused approach to combating these issues, as people who do not have English as their first language are less likely to have these fact-checking tools available to them or the accessibility of media literacy education.

It is a global responsibility of citizens to help each other think for themselves, as these easily reachable tools and laws cannot be widely applicable and helpful to everyone involved. Because bias and discrimination based on race, gender, sex, nationality, ethnic origin, and religion is often a factor in feeding into misinformation, more diversity in the fields of data science and AI development are always welcomed. Smaller organizations formed of people like advertisers, educators, and political consultants are helpful in ensuring that the images and intentions of their constituents are not falsely misrepresented.

The "Face Forensics" dataset used in Rossler et al's study.

Topic History

The advent of digital media has made it so that artificial intelligence can find an easier way to pervade online discourse. AI is just a tool and not the source of harmful misinformation, so it's important to track down the roots of these machine models as well as recent trends in the digitization of communication, advertising, and more in today's global sphere.

Computers and machines have gained knowledge and speed that can outpace humans thanks to advances in learning algorithms. These algorithms are composed of neural networks, a set of "neurons" that resemble the human brain. Neural networks can identify and classify images, videos, and text and use this stored knowledge to collect and analyze pre existing data.

Concerns of wider AI use on a public scale rose in the wake of the rise of text prediction tools, such as GPT-2. Essentially, typing in the start of a line of text will enable the tool to finish it with words and syntax that match the style of the input.

If this hasn't been sensed already, the integrity of the journalism industry will in no doubt come into question. These tools can be greatly beneficial but have also played an integral role in spreading rumors and fake news, the latter term being something that has existed for centuries but has taken on a new meaning. This grew prominent in the mid 2010s with 2016 elections in the US and Israel, inspiring outrage, scorn, cynicism, and lack of faith in the media from citizens. Conspiracy theories and misinformation surrounding global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 have also called for a larger focus on media ethics.

A study conducted by Dr. Hala Ahmed Elhoussainy in 2024 applied the public sphere theory, which alleges that social media presence and technological platforms such as Facebook and Youtube facilitated misinformation to support certain governmental interests or gain popular sympathy. AI tools such as Midjourney, Copilot, AI Studio, Prompts, and Dall-E were used to fabricate the majority of these falsified stories. Some of these images the participants saw included reports of US President Donald Trump's arrest for bribery, Egyptian President Abdelfattah Elsisi kissing the hand of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, French President Emmanuel

Macron cleaning streets to gain public sympathy, and several images of Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip during the Israel-Hamas war.

Questions pertaining to the study but can also be applied more broadly to the general media consumer included the following: where they obtained the news, what they believed the most credible sources were, if they had ever been exposed to fake news, what type of news was most susceptible to falsification, whether they cared about verifying the accuracy of said news, and whether they thought that misinformation spread in fake news could harm international security. Common answer trends believed that online media was naturally more likely to be “fake”, television or live news was more likely to be reliable and would often be a source of verification, and political/economic news was most likely to fall risk to falsification.

The above results fall in line with what has already been discussed, as well as recent trends to combat this such as the increase in fact-checking tools.

A deepfake of President Vladimir Putin kissing the hand of President Xi Jinping asking for support in the Russo-Ukraine War. This photo was circulating on an English language publication (Kyiv Post) but was later called out for odd details such as the facial deformities and inhuman appearances.

Case Example

Fake News in India

WhatsApp is the world's most popular instant messaging platform, especially in India. However, in 2018, concerns over responsible use and fact-checking arose when a certain video went viral, leading to a string of angry mob violence.

India has one of the highest ownership rates of cell phones (over 1 billion, which makes sense for being the world's most populous country), but a relatively low digital literacy rate (38 percent). Most people in India get their news and basic contact with the online world via their cell phones, so emphasis on instant messaging as a first hand source of information is the key to understanding the outrage.

In April of that year, a video showing two men on a motorbike grabbing a small child and then taking off went viral; over outrage at the supposed kidnapping, a series of lynchings and mob killings occurred over the next two months over individuals deemed outsiders or strange: a 55 year old woman was lynched by a mob after offering sweets to children, a man in Andhra Pradesh was lynched for speaking Hindi instead of Telugu (the local language), and two more men were killed after stopping their car to ask for directions in June.

The video that inspired the fears of these kidnappings was doctored: the real, unedited video was actually not from India at all but Pakistan, and it was merely an educational safety video to raise awareness of the issue rather than depict it happening. Pratik Sinha, the founder of Altnews.in, an India-based media fact-checking outlet, has reported that the fear was partially due to Indian citizens not having much exposure to the Internet other than what they see on their device.

He also theorized that WhatsApp's encryption technology made it harder for the app to keep track of fake news. Pankaj Jain, the founder of another fact-checking site, SM Hoax slayer, was inspired by the numerous rumors and false information being fed to him by the app.

The population of India's dependency on cellular devices is a factor in the struggling digital ecosystem due to a relative dearth of alternative media sources and tabloid-focused television (BBC).

TOPIC B: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What type of media does your country primarily rely on today? Has it become entirely digitized, or is legacy media (radio, print, TV) still prominent?

- How much of your country's population is considered digitally literate? This does not just include access to the Internet or a device, but literacy skills.
- What types of alternative news outlets or fact-checking tools are widely available to your country, and how are they used or developed?
- How does your country provide media literacy education or training to its citizens and to what extent does it affect how people consume media or write it?
- What are the biggest issues (political, social, economic) in your country that are subject to the most brutal misinformation? What has already been done to combat it and how effective have those techniques been?

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