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>> As a part of a Talks at Google 5-part podcast mini-series in partnership with the Google news initiative, in this episode you'll hear from Clair Wardle of First Draft about the future of news and disinformation at the first Google News Initiative Innovation Forum in London. You can watch the video of the talk by visiting [g.co/TalksatGoogle/FightingInformationDisorder](https://www.google.com/TalksatGoogle/FightingInformationDisorder).

>> WARDLE: Hello. It's so lovely to be home. I'm not gonna lie. I am based in New York and when I came through Heathrow Airport yesterday, I was like, this is like love actually. There are people cuddling, so yeah. So, it's so lovely to see that many people here I know and it's-it's great to see. So, my name is Claire Wardle. I lead First Draft. And for the last six months, we've been working in Brazil and also in the US monitoring different types of information disorder. I'm gonna talk about that today because many of you in this room are probably going to end up covering the EU Parliamentary Elections. And so, I want to share with you some of the trends that we've seen in Brazil and the US.

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And surprise, surprise there are many similarities, and there are many similarities that we're seeing in Europe. So, I'm gonna talk about those trends and talk about what that means for journalists and people who will be covering these stories. So, I'm gonna start with this example. This is a hot tip to my colleague, Cameron Hickey who found this. But this was circulating very widely before the midterms. I'll read out what it says. Illegal aliens are far more likely to commit federal crimes based on statistics. They are seven percent of the population, yet they commit seventy-two percent of drug possession, thirty-three percent of money-laundering, et cetera, et cetera, build that wall. So, let that settle for second. Those of you in the audience who are somewhere on the left of the political spectrum are probably thinking this is a lie. Some of you, the audience from the right wing might be thinking that sounds about true, how can I retweet that? The truth is this is accurate. These statistics are accurate. The kicker is that word federal crimes. Most crimes in the US are state-based.

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If it's a federal crime, it would be drug trafficking across a border. This is a little statistical treat. You know this as a--you're like, of course. This is how it works. So, the problem is increasingly the types of content that we're seeing are actually genuine but misleading, genuine imagery, but recycled. What we do with that as a society is the challenge. 2016 was not an era of a hundred percent fabricated content of the Pope endorses Donald Trump and deep fakes as much as people are shouting about them are not the worry yet. The concern is this type of content, which--well, this has actually circulated across Europe from 2016, this is actually from Turkey. This was used to suggest that these were people from Central America trying to cross into Mexico as parts of the caravan circulated very widely. This is an example from an election day of a video that showed somebody trying to vote, and every time she went to vote it was the wrong name. That was actually a genuine video. She did have that problem. We spoke to the polling place and they said yes, but we gave her another chance. She voted. Democracy was served.

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But as you can see, it was shared very widely by people who wanted to push a narrative around election integrity. And here's the kind of ding-ding-ding, disinformation bingo, here, we have two women, two people of color and the word communist. This is a genuine image. The only false thing about it is the word communist that was Photoshopped onto that sign. Again, it was shared very widely. Huge disinformation campaigns in the US aimed at women, people of color who were running, and anybody who wasn't Christian. No surprises there. So, our research in both Brazil and the US shows that this threat is not about false content. It's actually about misleading content that is designed to deepen existing divisions in society. And this wouldn't surprise you, but I could have stood here for 24 hours giving you a drip, drip, drip of this content. It really is constant. The problem is we don't have time for a 10-year longitudinal study about what the long-term impacts are of drip, drip, drip, drip of Hyperpartisan misleading content. Maybe, we'll be fine, maybe, we weren't. And the problem is we haven't got time to wait.

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And whilst this feels like it's potentially hyperbolic, the most effective disinformation is that which taps into our emotional responses and lots of the conversations about information disorder ignore the big societal shifts that happened in the last decade. The impacts of the 2008 financial crisis, the collapse of the welfare state, the rise of automation, people have worried about their jobs, they're terrified about climate change, they are worried about global migration trends, and we haven't talked about it properly. Put all of that underneath the layer of information disorder and that's why we have problems, and that's why we need to think about those societal shifts, because the most effective disinformation is designed to reinforce your position and denigrate the other side using dog whistles, logical fallacies, and false equivalency. Problem is if you're a platform, what on earth do you do with that? This is legal speech. There's nothing you can do about it right now, and I'd be very concerned if we started it saying that we should do something about it. But what does that mean when that kind of messaging is on top of societies that are worried?

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They are frightened about their own safety, their own communities, and their own welfare. So, the question is, how did journalists work in-in terms of this context? And I would argue that it's absolutely crucial that journalists understand how they fit into this context of disinformation. So, I like to call this the Amplification Trumpet, TM. And what I want to stress here to you, those of you who are journalists is that we need to understand where a lot of this disinformation starts, and it often starts in anonymous spaces on the web. It then moves into closed or semi-closed networks, it then moves into conspiracy communities online, it then moves into more traditional social media spaces, and then, unfortunately, sometimes it ends up on mainstream media. So, you can have content that starts on discord or 4chan, that if nobody did anything with, it wouldn't be a problem. The problem is it moves from that into places like Facebook Messenger, Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups, into YouTube communities, Reddit forums, places like Gab onto the mainstream outlets, and then mainstream media.

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So, let's take us back to our video from earlier. When we saw this on Election Day, we did the—we we did the fact-checking. This was a genuine video. Somebody did struggle to vote. But then when we did our provenance checks, you probably can't see here, but the user name is @FindTruthQ. Any American conspiracy theorist in the audience? If you were, you may have heard of QAnon, which is a rather large conspiracy theory. It's kind of like Pizzagate but on steroids. And the other thing about this video is that it would actually been reposted from an Instagram video and the user name included the name Seth Rich who was a young man, he was killed, he was a DNC staff in 2016, found murdered, huge conspiracies about him. So, I thought, what's the likelihood of somebody being unable to vote who also was one of these conspiracy communities? So, we did some digging. We went to discord and found on discord the original video that had been uploaded from an iMessage that then was being distributed through these QAnon conspiracy networks. And then, moved through these networks onto Twitter and Facebook, and then ends up on mainstream media.

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Now, I'm not saying not to cover the story, but I'm saying how do you tell the story in a way that recognizes the amplification mechanisms that were pushing this. What was the purpose of the--of ensuring that this story became part of a bigger voter election integrity storyline? So, key learning's for any of you sitting in this room. Firstly, be prepared. Train your newsrooms on how to work in a disinformation environment. I've been banging on and in fact training journalists for a decade on verification, but this isn't about whether or not you can find out whether this image was from today. This is about is your newsroom prepared to wade into spaces? Does it understand how to operate a VPN? Does it have an ethical policy that says whether or not you can be in anonymous spaces? And if so, can you report on it? Do journalists understand how vulnerable they are? And in that network of my Amplification Trumpets, that at the end of that trumpet, do they know that they're at risk? Many don't. Secondly, don't act as a stenographer.

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Of course, I'm saying, this as somebody who spends a lot of time in the US, but we see real issues with outlets repeating the lies in headlines, Tweets, and Facebook post headlines. Nobody reads the 800 word fact-check. All they see on Google News is the lie repeated multiple times by multiple outlets. We really have to get better at understanding how to do journalism in an age of disinformation. Here's my Trumpet again. Thirdly, be responsible. Don't give disinformation additional oxygen. We talked a lot of First Draft about the tipping point. There is a moment where before the tipping point doesn't mean that you shouldn't be aware, you should. As a news industry, we should be aware of those threats. But just reporting on it and doing pointing journalism, "Oh, that's interesting. I found it on 4chan." There's a responsibility about how we do journalism after the tipping point, yes, the comprador model was how do we amplify collectively to give weight to the debunks that we're doing. Forth, be aware. Understand the implications of a networked audience. So, 20 years ago, if you write something in a newspaper or you put something out in

the BBC News, it gets watched by Beryl and Bob. They're watching the 6:00 news.

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Bob says to Beryl, "Oh, Beryl, have you heard about QAnon?" "No, Bob, pass the toast." Now, Bob's QAnon on Google. "Beryl, have you seen this?" He said, "I told you we shouldn't be trusting this policies. I told you that there was something to this." Now, again, I'm not saying that we don't cover this, but we have to understand the impacts on--of the fact that our audience is a network, and there is a way now for these, what were previously very small conspiracy theories to be connected and to be connected immediately. Finally, inoculate, do more reporting that helps explain the issues that are often subjects of disinformation campaigns. This was a proper Google event. We'd have breakout sessions with post-it notes, and on those post-it notes, we could write all of the big issues that we think are gonna be a problem around the EU Parliamentary Elections. We could do it right now. It's gonna be election integrity. It's going to be immigration and there's going to be anything that divides the EU around racial and ethnic divisions. Now, we know that. How can we be thinking about doing reporting now so we don't in the day after [inaudible] at the top search term, what's the EU?

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What's the equivalent that we could be doing now in preparation for the EU Parliamentary Elections? Because finally, it's not the robots that I'm scared of anymore. I'm actually concerned about us as human beings being made more divisive, more angry, and more prepared to actually attack one another that I am in this guy. I'll let that settle and I will say Happy Holidays. Let's go watch Love Actually.
>> Launched in 2018, the Google News Initiative is Google's ever to work with the news industry to help journalism thrive in the digital age. To learn more about the GNI, please visit g.co/TalksatGoogle/GoogleNewsInitiative.