



Capitol Hill Steering Committee on Pandemic Preparedness & Health Security



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
of PUBLIC HEALTH

Center for
Health Security

Transcript from October 20, 2021: Combating Misinformation and Disinformation for COVID-19 and Future Public Health Threats

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Welcome to today's webinar combating misinformation and disinformation for COVID-19, and future public health threats, our moderator and Nita Cicero will now begin.

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Thank you so much, and welcome. Thank you all for joining us today for our monthly webinar of the Capitol Hill steering committee on pandemic preparedness and health security.

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My name is Anita Cicero and I'm Deputy Director at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, and by way of introduction the Capitol Hill steering committee is a bipartisan effort from last year, with the support of 10 members of Congress, as well

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many former administration officials who are all committed to making both country and the world more prepared for the greatest health security threats, our Center for Health Security formed and manages the steering committee and we're grateful that this

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effort is supported by the open philanthropy project.

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The ongoing pandemic.

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As we know has brought with it and ever growing list of both surprises as well as lessons learned. And one thing it has definitely shown is that accurate timely trusted health related information is absolutely crucial to mounting and effective response.

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We've seen on the reverse that contradictory messaging misinformation and undermining of public health advice, have reduced to trust in public health responders.

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It has decreased trust in the covert vaccines and increased belief in false medical cures, and it's really politicize public health measures aim dead curbing transmission of the virus.

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This is no small problem either health related misinformation and disinformation can lead to more infections, deaths and disruption to the public health response and can extend the length of time that the pandemic.

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You know, is in our midst.

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So, today our speakers are going to evaluate the role that misinformation has played in the pandemic. And we're also going to offer solutions and some suggestions for ways to combat the corrosive effects of misinformation and to build public trust during

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future public health emergencies.

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So we're delighted to be joined today by Tara Turkcell, my colleague at the center she's a senior scholar at our Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security also Imran men who is CEO at the Center for countering digital hate and Kj bag ci who's Senior Director

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of Federal Public Policy at the new Chamber of progress.

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Our first panelist will introduce her is dr Tara Turkcell Tara as I said as a senior scholar at our Center for Health Security, she's also an assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Health and engineering at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg

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School of Public Health.

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At the center Tara manages and leads research projects to develop a greater understanding of potentially large scale health events.

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Her projects focused on improving responses to outbreaks, including efforts to understand and find solutions to misinformation during infectious disease emergencies.

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During this pandemic she's worked on a long list of projects including a collaboration with the who on the development of the field of info demon ology in response to overwhelming amounts of disinformation misinformation during covert.

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She's also doing research to improve the understanding of better risk communication and management of misinformation during the pandemic. Tara, over to you.

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Well great thanks so much for having me today.

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You know, I think it goes without saying that Cobra 19 has highlighted those dangers of health related misinformation and disinformation. Can we really see that you know without a doubt.

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You can have the highest levels of preparedness, the most advanced technologies and disease surveillance.

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But, and also the best medical countermeasures and in fact we have an amazing countermeasure in this vaccine.

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But none of that does any good if people are too influenced by rumors and false said to you know take those protective actions. Get the test or take the vaccine, that's needed to stop the pandemic.

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So a group of us at the jG Center for Health Security, we've been working on how to manage health related misinformation and disinformation for quite some time.

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And that's because we think that the ability to manage.

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You know this component of biological threat is really essential to the response. You know, I think it's really important to make this clear. If we want to prepare for pandemics and bioterrorism in the future, we have to prepare for misinformation and

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disinformation.

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In fact, if you think about a deliberate threat. I think we can be. It's a fairly good assumption at this point that this information will be part of that effort.

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and this information.

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You don't also want to point out that this information can also take a more limited threat, and turn it into a much more significant impactful threat than it would have otherwise then.

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and misleading information. I guess the question really is how worth it. Is it our misinformation Citigroup all mentioned, with the help of our economist at the center and Richard Broons did a conservative cost analysis to try to get the idea of this.

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Try to get a figure to figure this out. And while you know I will say that the research to establish these really exact and high confidence monetary costs is really limited right now mostly by the lack of that detailed data, and you know causality.

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We're trying to sort of fill this gap, and look at here in this case just the monetized cost of that one. This one facet of the issue.

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The misinformation and disinformation informed decision not to get a coven vaccine.

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And so our bottom line number really is that even if even 5% of non vaccination is caused by misinformation and disinformation that leads to at least \$50 million worth of harm, every day, and that's in the non Delta search environment like we saw in June

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and July, you know, and hope that we can get back to.

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In the next few months. And if it's 30%, that number increases to 3,000,300 million dollars a day. So I think Margarita, put these links, some links to our analysis in the chat, and that will actually contain more detailed information on the analysis,

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if you want to look into it, but this really means that you know if a public health effort or, or government effort or industry effort to reduce or counter misinformation was able to reduce that non vaccination by just 10% it would be worth between five

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and \$300 million per day.

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So, and just to put that in monthly terms. That means that it's between 150,000,900 million per month, while the pandemic continues.

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So this is a big problem really and it's a big problem that, you know, deserves an investment.

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But we don't think that this is a problem where we can just assign the solution to one sector. This is a whole society of problem in which each stakeholder is necessary, but it isn't sufficient in themselves to solve the problem.

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So at the center we've called for a national strategy to combat missing this information, and I think Margaret may have also put that in the chat can't quite see the chat right now, but that strategy just to summarize it, it's you know it rests on four

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pillars controlling misleading content and sources, promoting factual information, increasing public resilience, and also ensuring the collaboration of all stakeholders.

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And when I talk about controlling misleading content and sources there is clearly a need for active and transparent intervention from social media and news media.

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I don't want to discount that I think that's incredibly important. We also need to see that prioritized as a national security issue. And I really would like to see a national commission to provide guidance and recommendations for how to transparently

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and I want to emphasize that transparently decide what is misinformation who gets to decide it, and how to manage it.

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And when we talk about promoting factual information.

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You know from the public health perspective here. We really need to prioritize public health risk communication in several of my studies that I've done, you know with practitioners, we have been hearing that they are overwhelmed.

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They're often the only people in their health departments focusing on risk communication and dealing with misinformation. They need a lot of help in the form of funding and more resources to make that happen.

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And we also really need to coordinate between public health experts and social media and news media so Hopkins actually has done a lot of this and I've worked with them to try to, to coordinate some of these messages and make sure that, you know, public

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health voices are heard out there.

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The third pillar to increase public resilience is so critical since Well, you know, never be able to stop the misinformation and disinformation.

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We need to increase, health and digital literacy, as well as the resources for public to verify information. And then finally that last pillar, getting all those stakeholders involved.

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This means multi sector collaboration, and actually, I'll point you here to the Surgeon General's report where they outlines what different sectors of society can do.

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But this means social media. this means news media government's national security officials, public health officials, scientists, the public, you know, it's also part of the solution, and others.

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And then we also need to increase that coordination across government. You know when I work on this from a public health perspective and I talked to the folks from the defense defense agencies.

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You know it often seems like we're speaking a different language. So I think that more needs to be done to coordinate across all the different agencies who are doing a lot of work on this.

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So, really just some of my comments.

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You know, we know that we're going to have to take health related misinformation and disinformation seriously now and for the foreseeable future.

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We can't be prepared for big events, if we haven't started moving towards solutions for this problem, and from our cost analysis, it really isn't worth it to make the investment to find those solutions and a good place to get began from our perspective

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is really with a unified national strategy.

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So thanks for listening and I look forward to your questions.

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And thanks so much Tara. Our next panelist is Mr Imran a med, and run is the founding CEO of the Center for countering digital hate.

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He's a recognized authority on the social dynamics of social media and what goes wrong in those spaces such as identity based hate misinformation conspiracy theories and modern extremism.

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Iran is regularly featured in the international media as an expert voice and advisors politicians in the US, UK, you and elsewhere on policy and legislation.

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Good to have you with us today and run over to you.

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Good afternoon, thank you so much for inviting me to this building on what Tara said, it is clear that there is a threat that there is a harm, which I mean they've gone so far as to economically quantify caused by this information to our societies.

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What the CCP he has been doing for the past year and a half is trying to understand what what is the nature of that threat how what To what extent is it a contribution of the way that the systems work the new rules of physics of digital platforms, and

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the ways in which information is ordered and prioritize within those environments. In short, what is typically called the algorithm, but is in fact an interlocking set of of priorities for those companies, all of which I would argue, bend themselves towards

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one court coordination, which is that engagement is what matters eyeballs matter advertising revenue and they put profits before anything else, something which of course has been corroborated by Francis Horgan the whistleblower but also the second problem

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of how malignant actors use this those systems, and I think in particular one of our reports the antibiotics playbook shows that those platforms have been gained incredibly effectively by bad actors to create harm.

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I think what the problem. The reason I get invited to these things is because one of our studies the disinformation doesn't has taken on a life of its own, beyond its initial launch in March 2021.

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When we found that in the schema of how we see the production of harms we see three things that are quite common first is the production of evidence points that's content which is seeking to mislead or misinformed The second is presented ization.

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So the content production can be on YouTube, it can be on Instagram, it can be on bespoke websites. The second thing is the present ization and misinformation which occurs primarily on Facebook Reddit and other forums like that in which people are able

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to create answering spaces and feed people misinformation contextually, and the third is discourse shaping tools like Twitter and Instagram where you can change the way that things are talked about and perceived, and through the presented ization of misinformation

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from 12 key content producers. By then, a further very small number of misinformation. Super spread is a vast amount of end views are generated. And those end views serve to do two things.

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First of all, through familiarity bias so frequency bias to normalize misinformation as being information.

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The second thing that they do is inject doubt.

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And I'm very specific that they're not seeking to persuade people have a new case they're seeking to inject doubt about the central case being put forward by public health authorities and scientists.

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This is an asymmetric contest. Our job is to get people's off the off people off their bums and into clinics and hospitals to have an injection. Their job is just to make them hesitate.

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And when President Biden labeled those companies as being as being bad actors he said that what they had what they were doing was causing a situation where people were turning up in ICU saying please give me the vaccine now.

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I thought it was going to be harmful. I was just waiting to see more evidence that the injection of doubt, not necessarily persuading anyone have a case has been the reason for 10s of thousands of deaths in the United States and overseas in the past year.

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This information works, we know it does, we know that the people that are turning up in hospitals people are seeking not to vaccinate have been misinformed, and so dealing with it has to be a national priority.

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When there is enormous amount that we could talk about the nature of that threat but I would encourage you to look at our website counter hate calm and look at the anti Vax playbook that explains in their own words what these how bad actors said they

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were going to use those platforms. And then other studies that we've done that have shown how the algorithm drives people to that bad information.

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Thanks.

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Thank you so much.

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Our next panelist is KJG, who senior director at Federal Public Policy at the Chamber of Commerce, progress sorry Chamber of progress is a new tech industry coalition devoted to progressive society economy workforce and consumer climate.

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KJ is a veteran of Capitol Hill and public interest organizations, having served most recently as Senior Policy Council at New America's open Technology Institute.

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He was previously the tech policy Attorney for the National Civil Rights Organization Asian Americans Advancing Justice, and he has over 10 years of experience in public policy and legislative strategy at the local, state and federal levels.

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Welcome KJ over to you.

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Great, thanks so much for the introduction. And before I jump in just want to thank the organizers for giving us an opportunity to have this conversation, and I'm looking forward to a robust discussion with the, the audience, after after opening remarks.

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So I wanted to just cover you know three points I want to use my time to discover those three points.

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The first is I want to talk a little bit about the background of the chamber of progress. We're a newer entrant into this space and so to give folks an idea as to how we sort of navigating these conversations and the, the second point I wanted to talk

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about is how do we as consumers. What is the framework we want social media companies to follow when we enter these spaces. And finally, I want to talk about the misinformation disinformation universe at large.

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So to start off, you know on the background of the chamber of progress I call us a baby tech trade association compared to our, our colleagues in the space we've been around for less than a year, and we have about 22 partner companies at this point that

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run the gamut from the social media companies to autonomous vehicle companies car sharing ride sharing property tech, and we, you know, it's obviously a new issue that's always popping up but what we really focused on is messaging to centrist and moderate

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Democrats, and we do this by really trying to bring in the perspective of what is best for the user or the consumer. So for today's discussion since we're talking about and online ecosystem will use those words sort of interchangeably.

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And when we think about the consumer that you know leads me to the second point so as a consumer, as a user, what do we want when we enter an online space, we want social media companies router, I would argue that most of us would agree that we want online

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ecosystems or social media companies that are promoting a freedom of expression and the free flow of information in these spaces, but we also want to make sure that our guardrails, so if a user and appropriate circumstance.

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Feels like their information was unfairly tagged or taken down they have the ability to appeal. So we want to process, we want to make sure users have due process, but we also want to make sure that users feel safe in these ecosystems and of course, that

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the information that they're seeing has has on this you know is that misleading. And so to this and you know companies create company guidelines. The major companies that we focus on our partners include you know Google, Facebook and Twitter, and their

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company guidelines you know may have the same goal but of course differ in terms of how they're implemented or us.

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I think the coverage, you know the sort of the anchor in the discussion today is going to be about how to the social media companies actually enforce their, their community standards, and I think it's it's really important to point out that there are

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you know an elevating level of actions by these companies based on the nature of the information being shared. And so while we tend to think about the platform as the ultimate right this is what happened to our former president after the January 6 insurrection,

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we saw companies, sort of, you know, had moved to the platform him and so therefore, even if he tries to come in through a different avenue and bring, you know, bring conversations, they get shut down.

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But there are other layers that come before that even happens right you have warnings, you have labels appended to your post. And you can have suspensions that are temporary and are permanent, and for the most part most companies have a multi strike approach.

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So, again, like it's not the first strike, and then you're off the platform forever and of course we don't want that we were talking about just information misinformation today.

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But when we're thinking about the entire online ecosystem. When you think about the racial reckoning and how folks were posting videos of, you know, hate speech and violence when we saw videos of folks from the Asian American community having, you know,

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being the on the receiving end of hateful attacks, again, we want to make sure that people are able to focus this information and if anything does trigger a, an action from the company that they have the ability to appeal that with respect to coven 19,

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you know, I can say generally for the company's when we talk about misinformation and disinformation, the overall framework is really two main goals. The first is to promote authoritative and verified information and to demote or down rank bad information.

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It's sounds simpler than it really is. Because you have a lot of situations that fall in the gaps. When you think about the public interest exception or notification when you have your elected leaders, spreading bad information, how should accompany treat

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that we want to hear what our elected leaders are saying, but we are also want to make sure that individuals are not misled. And so companies have different approaches to put warning labels or to append, you know, put a label saying this information hasn't

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been verified. This happened quite a bit with a former president, we saw on Twitter. But again, these are the sort of, you know, we have to think about the layers of guidelines and and communication.

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And so with respect to coven 19 misinformation we do know that the company's took a number of actions.

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We do know that Twitter removed about 43,000 accounts. 43,000 tweets and they suspended about 1500 accounts. We know that Facebook took down about 20 million posts and suspended about 3000 3000 accounts and I'm going to look at my cheat sheet here, and

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YouTube you know removed about 1 million videos since the start of the pandemic. And then when they amended their policies about covert vaccine misinformation they took down about 130,000 videos.

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Now these numbers are not meant to indicate that we at the Chamber of progress think that these companies are always getting right, nor do we think that they're always moving as swiftly and quickly as they shouldn't take any action, but it does make the

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point that we know just as our, our knowledge of the virus evolved over time in terms of how to treat it. How to, you know, stop the spread how to reduce the spread of it in the same sense how online ecosystems respond to trying to inoculate or demoted

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or down rank that information has, you know come into that same play. And so I want to, you know, conclude with my final point and that is there's a larger misinformation disinformation ecosystem that we have to acknowledge in this conversation.

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When I was at Asian Americans Advancing Justice AJC a civil rights organization we focus a lot on hate speech and violence inciting speech online that we always make the point that online ecosystems are not a, a it's on the door with the physical space

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ecosystems take what is already happening in the physical in the real world, so to speak, and amplify at times 10, because you have folks who can be so dot you know anonymous. And so in the same sense when you think of misinformation just information we have to think about the fact that we have

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we have to think about the fact that we have a news, you know, major cable news channel focused on just you know trying to sow seeds of doubt, try to create, you know, sort of create skepticism around the efforts by the current president when it comes

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to covert 19 and trying to treat it and to reduce it and especially the vaccine, we have to also think about which I don't hear enough on these conversations about those communities that are non English speaking, the Asian American Advancing Justice has

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focused a lot on misinformation and sort of Asian communities and who the speakers are their National Hispanic media coalition has done a great work and they're working with the platforms on dealing with misinformation coming from Spanish speaking communities.

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And so, again, this idea of this entire misinformation disinformation universe so I would definitely echo what Tara was saying earlier about the fact that it has to be a multi prong approach, and you know I want us to acknowledge that as we move forward

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so I'll turn it back to you. Thanks so much for having me here.

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Hey, thank you. that's.

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Thank you to all of our speakers it's a lot of good content to chew on. And so we will move into the q amp a portion of the webinar, please put your questions type them into the q amp a box and then we'll triage them and get them to our panelists, but

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I'll kick us off with a few questions to get us rolling so we we heard, Tara has proposed a development of a national strategy around, you know to counter misinformation and disinformation.

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I think it's fair to say that this is.

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It's not a new problem maybe but the field of knowing what's in the toolbox that actually works well and where do we get our biggest bang for the buck is not really fully developed yet so in addition to the number of other things that we need to happen

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and kind of a all of society approach to this.

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You know what is their role and what is the role for the federal government to address health related missing disinformation, and what are some essential steps, maybe not a complete list but some things that both Congress could do, and potentially the

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administration like what steps should they be taking.

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So I'll just throw that one out and see if you can each react to that.

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So, I'll jump in on that and say that I do think there's a role for government here, they think that they must really be a careful approach. Because, you know, I, the question really comes down to who gets to decide what information is misinformation

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and disinformation and obviously there's some stuff that's very clearly misleading or false, but there's other stuff that's kind of in that gray area.

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And I think that, you know, I, you know, if government is the one that decides I think that there needs to be a very very very transparent process and it would worry me though that it could be used in a way that's political.

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So I think that government's role is to convene to develop strategies to fund to help people.

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You know, move in the right direction. But, you know, as far as the beam the decider.

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You know I or implementing criminal.

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You know, situations, I think that, you know, we should be very careful there.

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I mean, to add to Tara, I would emphatically agree that it is bonkers two hours the state to regulate, or decide acceptable and not acceptable speech, because they're very bad.

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And actually, the, the coalition's that we're seeing around the world I was back in the UK is the first witness to the online safety Bill Committee, which is the new large tech regulation build the UK is putting into place we've been giving evidence the

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the Digital Services Act in the EU, and to other countries as well which are all seeing look we're all seeing the problems that the, the issue of not being able to pull a lever during a pandemic and get good information to people so that they can protect

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themselves and protect the nation which is what you expect government to be able to do.

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That's, that's being, that's being seriously hampered by the fact that there are disinformation actors who are sort of grinding up the gears and making it impossible for people to pull those leaders.

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The question of how you address it. I think is going to require quite confident policymaking, which requires a reliance upon civil society upon other aspects of society but it does require a cogent strategy and I think what's really admirable about the

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work that was done, and others in other countries as well is that there is an understanding that this requires a whole of society response.

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But for it to be an effective homicide the response is going to be need to be based on good data. And right now we have two issues, first of all, the government hasn't been, I don't think an incredibly effective convener of the right actors from throughout

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civil society. The second is that, that, that we don't have the data, and that's because these are black boxes we're dealing with. For the main part CCD he has analysis of the algorithm is like a.

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It's like we're in a cave and we're using a flashlight and we're slowly mapping out what that cave looks like.

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And we're slowly getting an idea of the topography of how the systems work. The truth is that in the past few weeks and over the coming months, a flood light is being switched on, by some of the documents that are coming out of Facebook in particular,

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and we are starting to see the nature of what it is, the information ecosystem in which we live and then which we're going to have to decide how to communicate a pandemic.

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That but but the government can play a role in that and having enhanced transparency of algorithm enforcement decisions of economics and advertising on those platforms, I think is critical for us to build a common situation understanding, so that we can

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actually move forward with effective policy making and strategies.

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Okay, thank you so you agree that we need a national strategy but also have identified other things that you know we need the government could usefully help to do which is, you know, gather that data convene the right stakeholders and, and, and help to

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in that way, inform the conversation as we all work together on that.

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KJ Did you want have anything to add do yeah I just had to recommend like to recommendations to think through. The first is the, the FCC can consider using Section.

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Section five A of the FTC act that focuses on unfair and deceptive practices so going after businesses that are using better engaging an online ad campaigns or e commerce.

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Again, like we have that that law that's on the books, that's one actor that can think about actually, you know, enforcing using that sort of framework.

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The second thing I would say is, government, you know we have a talked a lot about, I started my kind of opening remarks talking about the real world sort of play that misinformation disinformation hasn't, and that is to make sure that our elected officials

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officials and government officials are ensuring that they are not taking part in to spread disinformation and misinformation. We've seen this quite a bit early on during the pandemic when you had, you know, members of Congress, tweeting or putting out

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whatever. But to make sure that they themselves hold themselves accountable and are not part of that ecosystem.

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Thank you. Um, let's see another question.

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This pandemic is really shine a light on the challenges of communicating in environments where there's an abundance of information and everyone's doing their own googling or other searches.

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What lessons have we learned from managing this info dynamics so far.

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And what steps can we take to bolster confidence and trusted sources and I think many of these questions get back to you know what is the definition of misinformation and what's misinformation What's this information, one of our audience members had said,

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if someone is delaying vaccine vaccination because they have natural immunity, or that where they, you know, from prior infection. Is that are they acting on misinformation.

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So, you know, how do we manage this going forward and how can we bolster confidence in in trusted sources of info.

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So, there are actually some, some folks who are part of the original input genealogy crew, actually in the audience so I don't want to, you know, I think that there are many people who could answer this question better than me but, you know, we know that,

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you know, people, there's so much information out there and it's hard to sort of figure out what's true, what's not true, who do, who do we trust.

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You know how do we get that information to people, it's not that people have an information deficit is that they're not getting the information in ways that they can trust.

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And I think, I don't want to be too critical of public health but one of the problems during this pandemic was that public health, folks who were out there talking about these issues were speaking as if they were talking to other public health.

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People who agreed with them, and we're on board and have the same values and beliefs, and just, you know, got it. And I think that one of the most important things to do is to speak to people who don't agree with you understand why they you know what

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are their motivating factors, what are the things that are important to them and sort of communicate in ways that then can allow them to reach to that are ways that you can reach those folks.

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And so I think that that's something that's really hard. Can you can you step into the other person's shoes. And you know, I think that's something we need to do more of.

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Okay, well as also another question is KJ you outline some things that your your members and social media companies have been doing to try to curb misinformation.

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During during the pandemic is, do you have any sense of how much of the, you know, what percent of the problem that has addressed you do you feel like it's been successful, are there other things that could be done from a technology perspective I know

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that there are, you know, as we've discussed, there are many other things that other actors and government should consider but where do you see this going on on the tech front.

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Yeah, so I mean in terms of the percentage and the metrics of like what how successful certain policies have been and all that like I that I wouldn't be able to provide that but what I do think I can, what has been successful was broadly speaking, among

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the companies has been, you know, working with the CDC and other verified sources so and implementing that into the platform right so when you look at Google search and in the beginning when you would.

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People would do crazy searches there wouldn't be any sort of like response by the platform but now you have these knowledge panels coming up right on Instagram.

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You have, again, those, I got married last year and so I put up, photos, after when your anniversary and they mentioned the pandemic and coronavirus and within that there was like a little you know information tag comes up saying for more information

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on covert 19 like click here and it takes you to a verified source so I think in terms of trying to that goal I talked about the beginning of elevating authoritative authoritative and good information in spreading that widely.

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I think that has been successful and I hope that you know we continue to see more of that

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to my understanding the data from within companies shows that that hasn't been successful, and it's been visible and it's been heavily promoted. But the question is to its efficacy.

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And I think that's another thing that's really important is that in the lack of transparency owners quite I think telling that the first comment from the tech industry when I talk when people are talking about transparency is to say, well fox news is

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bad to. And there are some politicians on the right, who are bad.

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too. And there are some politicians on the right, who are bad. That's not good enough. Look, the entire the entire audience for the anti vaccine industry we calculated back in 2020, in June was about 60 million people, direct audience for anti Vax is the key

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the key factors online. There is not a single network that comes close to those sorts of figures, nor do they have the ability with one reshare to be able to access another few hundred million people.

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So the primary means by which we share information we set social mores we agree the corpus of knowledge that we accept as facts that we we set our values as society has shifted to online spaces that is a fantastic reflection of the power of social media

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to bring people together. And it's centrality to the way that we live our lives, but it has allowed it because of the failure to enforce the rules of those platforms something again the KJ mentioned earlier on, that the failure to enforce those rules,

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they have become toxic toxic, not just because algorithmically their toxins in the pipes bringing information to us, but also because bad actors are dumping toxins into those pipes to.

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And because of Section 230 there was zero liability for the producers for any harm produced. There is no other utility, as, as, absolutely ubiquitous as social media that has that freedom of liability.

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And even when there is a Ford Pinto moment, like the pandemic has been for social media. There are no leavers to pull to cause to turn around and say well actually there's a real problem here and there's nothing we can, and, you know, someone needs to

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do something about it at the company itself. I think one of the things that's that's absolutely apparent to me is that we have to be able to get real statistics on on from inside the companies we need much more transparency.

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And unfortunately, as the past few weeks have shown us, we cannot necessarily trust the to cherry pick statistics that we've seen to date from the firm so we do need a proper malignant actor use of the internet function within government I know there's

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tui already terrorists us needs that, but Malecon malignant actors combined with the rules of physics, the rules that govern those platforms and the performance of those platforms in creating harms in our society, because right now what we're, you know,

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If I can jump in and yeah.

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So I think we have to be very careful about two things, just as we're having this conversation, especially with folks I know we have a number of folks who are working in Congress and are thinking about what sort of advice to get their, you know their

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members and their bosses when it comes to attacking some of these issues. The first is, I think, trying to sort of diminish or disclaim the world that, that sort of real world implications here of disinformation and misinformation I think again like doesn't

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go truly to the heart of the overall issue we're trying to go go after the second point I'd make is for Section 230 again. They're like, this has been bandied about a lot in Congress in the last year or so as sort of a way to kind of go after some of

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the companies that because because of some actions that have been seen in, you know, again, not defending any of those actions but trying to throw out section 230 as a way to kind of be a band aid solution is a little bit to be very careful because again

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this is a statute that benefits communities of color, it benefits marginalized communities, and the idea of Section 230, just to say it's sort of a shield against this information misinformation sort of reduces the actual application of the Law Section

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230 focuses on the idea that user generated content that the platform that hosts this information like should not be held liable for again that user generated content and that's why.

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Again, we're going to talk about the efforts to, you know, against stopping API hate against the sort of racial reckoning piloting information there again you want companies, as I mentioned in the opening to like promote a freedom, you know, free flow

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of information and section 230 is one of the tools that allows that to happen so if you want to have a discussion with section 230 Let's definitely have that I'm happy to come back and speak on that panel, but in terms of just information and misinformation.

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I would you know strongly disagree that that is one tool in the box to go after that issue.

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Let me ask you another question, um, you know, there's misinformation or disinformation that is spread on, on the internet or people learn from the internet, but then you know it's, it kind of amplifies through communities and connections of people who

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know each other.

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And so I guess my question is to Tara but others can jump into, you know, what do we do about it at that point, how can you stop the spread of vaccine misinformation with groups that, you know, after it leaves the internet, that, you know, after it leaves

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social media and they're talking to each other and their friends and their work co workers, etc.

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Well, so, you know, that's, I would say that's traditional missing disinformation in the way we've had it for centuries, and that you know different communities will sort of, sometimes it's hard for people to disentangle themselves when they want to for

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missing this information because their whole communities are sort of part of that narrative, but I'll emphasize that this wouldn't be as big of a problem if they weren't already getting it on from, you know, social media and the internet.

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And so you know I think it is important that you know we have people in communities who can say, that doesn't sound right to me let me use a number of tools that I have to check to do the fact check or whatever that's out there.

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But at the same time.

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You know, I think that, you know, disinformation and misinformation have become much worse because we have, you know, these, the multiple multiplication or how much more of an exponential function here with social media.

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Okay, good.

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I know we have a lot of questions to get to in the chat here so I'm going to turn to my colleague Margaret Miller's been monitoring all of those questions and Margaret you can highlight some here.

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Great, thank you so we've been talking a lot about bad non state actors and I wanted to get your you know somebody's asking about how about rock and check China and how they're promoting.

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You know misinformation and disinformation How does the us tackle this challenge Terry you were talking a little about that about it becoming a national security issue and wondering if you could go more deeply in on that.

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Well this is really, this is truly a problem that it's not just domestic actors it's international actors. And that's why one of our focus, one of our pillars is to bring all the agencies together right we can focus, we need to understand what's happening

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internationally and a lot of that is, you know, State Department, with the gack or other intelligence agencies, and I think that, you know, this is, this is something about bringing in partnerships so that you know when public health is dealing with it

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they understand what's happening what threats are coming on to them from from other countries but I also think that we need to talk the same language.

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You know I get to hear about some of this stuff and I'm very, like, you know, limited way but all the time I just think wow you know like I'm in public health I study this topic and there's this whole other sort of space of where this is happening and

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they think that we need to be able to communicate about that, but that's not also to minimize that we also have domestic actors working here as well.

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And run on Kj Do you want to speak on that one.

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And I think the point on foreign actors and you know, in particular, I mean, occasionally I'm a little bit sort of just, let's pull the curtain behind back and and tell you what, how it really works.

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But the truth is that foreign actors get a lot of attention because of course that engages bits of the state that have money available to them and that are able and have much more enforcement mechanisms available to them then you do with domestic actors.

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And we know that from looking at counterterrorism all the way through to this sort of disinformation, and we can we can label well there's a bad guy overseas and he's causing a problem.

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The truth is that for the main part what foreign actors are doing with this information is they're merely helping to enhance the visibility of disinformation and really increases salient So, you know, the easiest thing you could do would be to amplify

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like the posts produced by domestic actors who are producing this information which is very effective.

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And so we've created this weakness within our society that they're able to sort of frack our societies by injecting light heat into existing fishes to cause earthquakes, but those earthquakes have a cost that's paid lives, especially when it comes to

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to this information in the midst of a pandemic. I, I'm sorry I do have to leave but I i I'm really really honored and grateful for this opportunity. I know that, you know, having a brick coming here and talking to Americans I'm not attempting to lecture

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my, my friends and colleagues in the States, but two things accountability and transparency. I know that, you know, people like to obfuscate and say section 230 and all this stuff and it sounds confusing and complicated it's not it's just accountability

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It's saying that if you produce harms yeah negative externalities to your economic product economically productive growth, you should be. You should try and just incentivize them by creating costs for them.

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And that's all that accountability is the second thing is transparency. It is. We are now at a point beyond where you can claim that commercial confidentiality alone means that we can't see how how the system works and how it is that we're ordering information

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in our world.

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It's no longer down to the old markers of epidemic way, it's down to the decisions taken by commercial organizations. And given that they are the primary means of public discourse.

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And so therefore have a crucial part in our democracy, asking for transparency is de minimis that we should be able to ask that we should be able to demand from our legislators, but thank you so much for allowing me to speak today.

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I'm really grateful. Thank you everyone for joining I failed to mention he had to leave early but we'll continue the q amp a with our remaining panelists.

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Thanks.

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Is there an agreed upon set of social media best practices that stakeholders can get behind an advocate for, for example, I heard the basic book whistleblower talk about strategies like making users scroll all the way through an article before sharing

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it. Twitter users that functionality as well.

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Are there their tools that we should be advocating for in the space.

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Going to say like I know this was, we talked about this in sort of the prep session and maybe I haven't found a way to insert this response but in terms of like when you're thinking about what platforms can do more in this space.

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this idea of what you're kind of alluding to right this idea of a standard sort of best practices I you know I do think seeing something similar to the gift CT model when it comes to working on counterterrorism we see companies coming together.

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They, you know, I think they hired staff, like last year and so having more of a sort of like company to company conversation and discourse on what they're seeing.

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I do think it's. It is worth mentioning that they're the CDC already.

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They supply what they call polos or be on the lookout for sort of ideas that are permeating in the conversations and give them warning to give those warnings to social media platforms and so acting on that that sort of one kind of standard way but I do

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think taking the next step and having sort of you know intra company discourse is definitely or inter company discourse is definitely something to think about.

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Oh, you know mention. Yes, I think that partnership component is so important.

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You know I also think these companies are where the expertise is when we talk about you know we need to be able to do things and other languages we need to be able to do a better job at the natural language processing and the revealing the videos and

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and the photos. You know, these companies have such expertise and I think that we need to see more of a partnership here, and we need to see, you know, they're a stakeholder and it's not an oppositional thing for it.

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Hopefully, you know, hopefully at least there's part of it the CO operative, and they think that we need to see, you know this, you know partnership on something like the commission that I talked about or something like that where we have you know that

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expertise included in trying to find the solution and trying to, you know, help, you know, a crack civil society solution, come to fruition.

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Right here's another question what are some best practices for handling this or sorry, no information are misleading partially incorrect information that may be inflammatory, how should social media or tech companies or other stakeholders approach content

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that is misleading and may potentially be dangerous but also contains elements of truth.

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Okay. Well, most information contains an element of truth right it's an element of truth that's then you know i mean yes okay there's the creepy, there's some really crazy stuff out there but most of it, especially the stuff that's most plausible.

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You know you can find an element of truth you can, you know, go back to sort of some article or something, some biological plausibility thing that then is twisted and twisted and twisted and felt something that's misleading right so join them a narrative

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of things that are like that, and that you know like I was saying before, are part of that values and beliefs. I think that it is, you know, the inflammatory nature of this is, is actually created so that it gets more clicks.

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And I think here. You know, we need to you know make it so that that is something that's not promoted and also that people who see it, are able to recognize it for what it is and i think so we have problems on to both ends of the spectrum here both that

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it is, you know, spread and also that people see it and believe it, and they think we need to sort of, you know, find a solution that's, that's across all of those things.

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And the fact that there are grains of truth and, and then misinformation intertwined is one of the things that makes it so difficult to, to solve. From a tech or other perspective KJ we're going to add in there was yeah I was going to quickly say so when

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I was at the open Technology Institute prior to this role, we, we worked with a number of civil society groups on election disinformation and misinformation.

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And one of the sort of active campaigns we took part in was inoculation of misinformation disinformation and that is working with civil society groups that have their specific constituencies and spreading those sort of inoculation tools, you know, verified

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information, multi language multilingual and getting that those out on various forums and platforms to kind of help with that. The process of just sent me a breaking down to this information.

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So I would say like again like just adding to the tears sort of all society kind of model. I do think again there's a role for civil society groups, specifically civil rights and racial justice groups that have very specific constituencies that they can

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that they communicate with on a daily basis.

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To help you know supply them with those tools to combat that when we talk about that actually found on that and just say you know when we talk about the pre bunking.

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The inoculation. I think that we need to stop being so just being stuck in that reactive mode when it comes to miss and disinformation right, we can say with a fairly decent confidence, looking back at what we have.

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You know what has happened in the past, what events are kind of emerging in today's world, we can say with fairly good confidence what kind of missing this information, we're going to see and so I think that we can do more, you know the public warning

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space has done a lot here to sort of think through how do we respond to these, these emergencies or these events when they happen, and they think that we need to be thinking ahead more when it comes to dealing with missing disinformation and part of that

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is to recognize that this is going to happen and this is you know kind of what I was trying to emphasize in my opening remarks that we should expect this to be part of the problem that we have to deal with and we should be sort of anticipating this, just

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like we anticipate, you know, with a hurricane evacuation, you know, we're going to have these bottlenecks here, we should have this as part of our response plan and I think that needs to be integrated as just part of this work from now on.

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Again, if I could place back on that and, like, like softly push back on that, I think, I don't know if we can always right. I think that's the challenge that that tech companies are seeing when they're trying to figure out what rules or what type of

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content they should be looking out for and how they should be reacting to it, whether it be you know put putting a label up saying this is not verified or just giving a warning.

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I'm especially thinking about communities of colors I mean I hate saying this but john oliver today did a great show on this two weekends ago talking about in communities of color again, the type of misinformation you're seeing and so that he talked about

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in language you know Vietnamese radio show where clips net radio show this person is like spreading misinformation in language, and that starts being spread through different platforms that are, you know, the companies were talking about today, I don't,

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I don't know if it's hard for me to say that yes companies should be able to, they should have seen this coming, and they should have reacted to it in an appropriate way so I agree there should be definitely shouldn't be completely reactive I agree with

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that but i don't think i think there is a, an element, right in this discussion about reacting to what's going out there, but of course being on the forecast I agree with that but I think it goes hand in hand right it's not necessarily just one.

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You know more than the other.

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Here I think that we agreed actually and that I should clarify what I was saying that if you're going to public health space and you've been working on back to you.

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You feel like, you know, you knew that infertility was going to be an issue, right, you knew that that was going to be a topic.

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You know, we did a great exercise back in 2019 where we were doing, you know, thinking through what would happen in a coronavirus pandemic. And we talked about misinformation for a quarter of that many of the topics that we thought would be issues, if

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you work in the space long enough, I think that you can look back and see the different paths in from different misinformation campaigns and have seen you know the Ebola work that I did.

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Many of those same needs have been renewed. And so I think that we can look at those topics and say, we're going to see a topic that's related to you know experiments on children or something like that.

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And I think that we can prepare for those types of things ahead of time.

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And since we know we're going to see more misinformation and we can, to some extent, based on the past predicted like at least some of the topics that misinformation will be circulating around.

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And we know that civil society needs to be part of it could you could you both elucidate more. How do you empower civil society organizations to to combat misinformation or moderated what you know we say they have a role but how do we give them the tools

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for that.

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And and allow them to do. First of all have that on their agenda and then men, you know with funding etc. to counter misinformation and do more community engagement type of work.

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Again Guess I'll let you go tear and then I'll jump in.

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Okay, well I don't have a great answer for this question.

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You know, I think it does kind of comes first with sort of recognizing that there are tools out there that that people can use and helping to familiarize people with those tools.

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I think the ARP actually has started to sort of, you know, have misinformation as part of the conversation. And I think that this is part of just sort of socializing and there are ways that we can figure out what is good information what's bad information.

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And I think, you know, this is part of that digital and health literacy component of increasing resiliency that you know we think it's so important in tackling this problem.

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And I was yeah I was going to quickly say a lot of.

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I think that the problem, the challenge of disinformation misinformation is that about, it's with the scale of the problem right it's like it's worldwide, and even you know side of those numbers at the very beginning I said, you know, even though we recognize

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it acknowledged, you know, the millions of posts that are being taken down or accounts that are being spent thousands of accounts being suspended. This problem still persists, and so, you know, again like so you don't see a lot of the, the impact so companies have already been you know when I when I was at

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know when I when I was at AJC we would work with the platforms on issues around this, and I cited and HMC and their work on, you know Spanish language misinformation and what they're focusing on what they're working on with the platform so the work is

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being done I think again it's about scaling it up, and I think that's the challenge right but again I think continuing to have sort of civil society and industry collaboration and partnerships, kind of enhance that to you know broaden the scale I think

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will be important.

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Great. And just one more question as we kind of narrow in, and some may be helpful tips for the attendees we have How can people evaluate reliable information what are your literacy, you know, tips, as people go through, you know, continue through this

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base.

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Well the first thing I think that people can do is look at the sources the source of credible sources that you know if you go through the website doesn't look like it's one dude, you know, writing everything about this website does it look like it's edit

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like different editorial sort of check on it.

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You know, I think, when you do if you're suspicious about misinformation do a fact check on it, a lot of times and this and this information has made it to the point where one of the really great factions, checking organizations will have done it back

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check on it and I think that's very helpful especially if you're trying to help your friend or someone like that sorts Russa, a lot of misinformation they're getting you can't spend your whole day. Finding every study to refute something and so it is can be helpful to do a fact check, but I think when it comes to you know

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fact check, but I think when it comes to you know taking a look at it taking a look at the sources. Taking a look at you know doesn't seem like it's fair to sort of, click my emotional buttons.

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I think that these are some of the more critical things to look for when you're taking a look at information that's out there.

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Yeah, I mean plus \$1, I completely agree it's about verified sources and just evaluating information.

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Okay. Great. Well, thank you all, I think that's all the time we'll have for additional questions but Kj Tara thank you so much for joining us and everyone who have dialed in for this.

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Thank you for joining. And please also come to the November 17 webinar for that we're having on modernizing research and development for pandemic readiness.

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And at that session we're going to be joined by both.