



**UNCSTD**  
United Nations Commission  
on Science and Technology  
for Development

# UNCSTD

TOPIC A:

## **Addressing International Guidelines and Regulations for the Development, Design and**

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# INTRODUCTION

Technology's original purpose was to serve humanity as a tool: to provide a better lifestyle, to create solutions, and to be a stepping stone towards the future. However, in the present era, the technology industry has been modified in a way that it has ceased to be a tool for humanity, and has instead become an exponential threat to it. Companies focusing on information and digital technology have transformed the society on a large scale, and the decisions made by a handful of them influence and affect billions of people around the world. This results in several challenges that outnumber the possible benefits. A threatened democracy, division, polarization and disinformation are all problems and concerns that emerge from the information era, which is plagued by a race for attention and profit making. With time, society's reliance on technology will grow, meaning that the ongoing issues pertaining to it will be harder to solve. This in turn creates an added pressure to address those concerns with utmost importance and urgency. In a digital age in which everything is related to technology, the need to discuss the creation of international guidelines and regulations for the development, design, and implementation of technology is imperative.

## BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Multiple factors - such as the way modern technology has become a pillar of society, the manner in which companies oversee ethics when designing their business models and their technologies, and the lack of regulations and guidelines - have contributed to the growing concerns in this area.

The relationship between society and technology has evolved to become a reciprocal relationship<sup>1</sup>: “[...]Society drives technological change, while changing technologies in turn shape society” (TELF, n.a). In 2020, the most relevant, rapidly changing and evolving technologies are Information-Communication Technologies (ICT) and Computational Technologies (CT), both with influence in the world and a high transformative capacity.<sup>2</sup> ICT and CT create new business opportunities, enhance competition, efficiency, productivity, creativity, reduce workload and speed its completion, facilitate communication, the spread of information, allow worldwide communication and in general are one of the principal tools used on a daily basis.<sup>2</sup> These technologies incorporate digital technologies (internet, social media, cloud computing algorithms, Big Data), electronic devices, communication networks, computer-based technology and others. Statistics reveal that the number of internet users on a worldwide scale is 4.13 billion<sup>3</sup> (approximately half of the world's population)(many of these technologies function through or in collaboration with the internet), and the number of smartphone users is 3.5 billion<sup>5</sup> (smartphones and other electronic devices ensure access to the internet); both numbers exemplify the reach and expansion these technologies have had over the century. All of this demonstrates that ICT and CT became inherently social as they form part of everything, and, that they have and will continue to change and modify the world as time

progresses.<sup>6</sup>

Companies realized that world dependency on technology would only continue to grow with time and adapted their business models and the way their products were designed accordingly. They developed tools such as Persuasive Technology<sup>7</sup>, Growth Hacking<sup>8</sup> and Design with Intent<sup>9</sup>, and further applied these techniques to accomplish their main goals: 1. Engagement, 2. Growth and 3. Advertising.<sup>10</sup> Their business model shifted to one in which the user's attention became the product, and the advertisers that needed or wanted that attention became the clients.<sup>10,11,12</sup> From this business model, problems such as disinformation, polarization and threats to democracy due to social media arose.<sup>10</sup> Disinformation grew at a worldwide scale through social media and the growth of fake news. Studies show that algorithms that control the feed favore the propagation of false information substantially.<sup>13</sup> While studying Twitter, MIT researchers “found that falsehood diffuses significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth, in all categories of information, and in many cases by an order of magnitude” (Dizikes, P. 2018). Since 50% of users along the internet use social media as a source of information, the failure of companies to revise and fact check information spread through their platforms resulted in the biggest crisis of disinformation the world has ever seen.<sup>15</sup> Polarization also reached record numbers, specially in countries where political elections were being held and where political issues, such as protests, were taking place. According to Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist who has studied the negative effects of social media on human behaviour over the past few years, polarization in social media became possible due to three factors: the implementation of liking features, sharing features, and the algorithmization of feeds. The liking feature promoted the evaluation of posts based on a subjective “likeness”; with time people began to unconsciously post to get as many “likes” as possible and it became a “popularity” contest. Subsequently, the sharing features allowed users to spread all kinds of posts they found. Naturally, this became a primary vehicle for the propagation of hate and political speeches. Additionally, the algorithmization of the posts that were shown to users with the goal of engagement, allowed radical ideas to reach people in a way that had never existed before.<sup>16</sup> Threatened democracies surged as a result of disinformation, polarization, and the use of social platforms as a destabilizing vehicle and a mass manipulation tool. Some examples would be hate and violence towards the Rohingya minority in Myanmar sparked through Facebook,<sup>17</sup> political discord seeded by social media in Hong Kong<sup>18</sup> and the fall of democracy in Philippines due to polarization and disinformation through once again, Facebook.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the use of regulations and guidelines could have prevented all this from happening. Policymakers and governments ignored this until very recently, and even with that, little progress has been made. The technological business argues that it can regulate itself through internal policies and regulations, but the truth is that there is no such thing as autoregulation. To prevent the further development of the issues and the further uprising of more problems, policies, regulations, and

guidelines should be established to an international standard pushing tech giants into changing their business model and beginning to develop technology more humanely.

## UNITED NATIONS INTERVENTION

No past actions have been taken by the United Nations or any other non-governmental organization. However, technologists like Tristan Harris and Jaron Lainer, are fighting to inform and to create policies and regulations in the US.

## POINTS TO CONSIDER

- All countries manage technology differently
- Regulations and guidelines would have to be made in a way they work for all countries
- Regulations and guidelines must not prevent technology from progressing

## QUESTIONNAIRE

- A. What is my country's position?
- B. What are my country's policies?
- C. What can my country do to solve this issue?
- D. Which countries can my delegation work with?
- E. What are three possible solutions?
- F. What has been done to solve the problem?

## USEFUL LINKS

Center for Humane Technology

<https://www.humanetech.com/>

The Social Dilemma

<https://www.thesocialdilemma.com/>

The Impact of Digital Technologies. (United Nations)

<https://www.un.org/en/un75/impact-digital-technologies>

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