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WHISTLING AT THE FAKE THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF WHISTLEBLOWERS IN COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

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





Project Overview

During the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the reaction of the general public has been characterized by information received from trusted sources. Accordingly, inconsistent or incorrect information colors decision-making processes and mitigation responses by public authorities and private institutions.

Contextualized against the background of the pandemic, by adopting a multidisciplinary approach, this project aims to address the gap of citizen comprehension of the forms, means, and impacts of misinformation and disinformation, and empower the general public with the tools through which to identify fake news, including appropriate responses to such behaviors.

Further, the project will consider the role and effectiveness of whistleblowers as a means of exposing hostile information activities and increasing public resilience to acts of this nature, before making recommendations that organizations may enact in order to further protect and encourage such disclosures.

Considering the importance of public unauthorized disclosures and whistleblowing, a focus on these areas is critical, including considering methods to encourage knowledgeable insiders to identify and report pertinent information, and understand specific risks and instances of retaliation when reports of hostile information have been made.

By identifying and demonstrating the means and mode of spread of misinformation and disinformation, and how this affects individuals' perceptions and decision-making ability, the project aims at increasing knowledge, awareness, and understanding amongst citizens on methods of identifying false information, and providing a set of practical suggestions individuals may be able to use when countering false information, and other hostile information activities more broadly.

Additionally, this project will act as a springboard in identifying deficiencies within the contemporary understanding regarding disinformation, how it spreads, and its destabilizing effects, and therefore prompt and direct future academic activities in the battle to combat these phenomena.



Project Deliverables

The deliverables of the project will work to increase citizens' knowledge, awareness, and understanding of hostile information activities, to increase societal resilience to such actions through directing future research, and to produce content of enduring value which can be shared widely, with a wide range of applicability. The deliverables will be hosted on a dedicated online platform specifically designed around the outcomes of the project.

These will include:

- A website to host the material relevant to the project (to maximize visibility and dissemination the website will be online for a minimum period of three years);
- Three blog articles identifying the research outcomes published on relevant online platforms (e.g., OpenDemocracy, The Conversation, The Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Ethics Blog, and so on);

- A poster competition for early-stage researches (e.g., doctoral students), postgraduate and graduate students, with a prize for the first three candidates, and the publication of the best posters on the project website;
- No. 1 podcast/expert interviews, to inform on how to support in identifying and combatting disinformation;
- Two online roundtable discussions and with relevant experts (e.g., academics, practitioners, members of civil society organizations, and so on) to be video-recorded and published on the project website;
- An online final international conference where the project outcomes will be presented and discussed;
- An analytical report with recommendations entitled "The critical role that whistleblowers play in countering disinformation."

Project Timeline

The following chart illustrates the proposed timeline of the project:

Activity	Expected Timeframe for Completion
1. Creation of the project website	End of month 1
2. Blog Article no. 1	End of month 1
3. Analytical Report	End of month 2
4. First Thematic Roundtable	End of month 2
5. Blog Article no. 2	End of month 2
6. Podcast/Interview	End of month 3
7. Second Thematic Roundtable	End of month 3
8. Blog Article no. 3	End of month 4
9. Poster Competition	End of month 5
10. Final Conference	End of month 5



Project Objectives

The proposed project presents a new and novel perspective on addressing mis/disinformation. Specifically, through the mixed medium of recorded round table discussions with relevant experts to be published on the project website; and the production of a brief analytical report entitled "the critical role that whistleblowers play in countering disinformation" which will include a range of practical recommendations for identifying and disclosing hostile information activities, it will be possible for citizens and other critical stakeholders to increase their knowledge, awareness, and understanding of ways to counter disinformation, propaganda, and other hostile information activities.

This will be further supported through an open call aimed at the development and publishing of posters from early-stage researchers, postgraduate and undergraduate students highlighting specific scenarios of potential mis/disinformation.

Project Strategy and Methodology

- The specific knowledge base of the project will be provided by an analytical report with recommendations focused on "the critical role that whistleblowers play in countering disinformation". Such a study will inform and be used as the foundation of and basis for the debate/events that will be held within the project.

- Due to the wide scope of sources, the primary focus will be on the sources of information that for their nature exert the most relevant impact on society. Such sources mainly fall into two categories:

- 1) commercial claims by corporations through advertisements, press releases, or wider statements, and

- 2) statements by governmental officials or high-level authorities, including ministers, senior civil servants, political advisors, governmental reports, and others in positions of authority.

- The project will include a podcast and two thematic roundtables, which will be held online and during which scholars, practitioners, operatives, and representatives of civil society will provide crucial opportunities for further discussion and feedback. Also, a final conference will be held online to disseminate and discuss the final findings of the project.

- To increase the impact and awareness of the research, impact partners will be identified and announced during the project.



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