LIMUN

LICEO'S MODEL UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

Topic B: "Dealing with media censorship and manipulation"

Written by: Mariana Obregón Bremer

I. COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

The United Nations General Assembly, also known as the UNGA or GA, is the main policy organ of the organization. Each of the 193 Member States represents an equal vote on international decisions regarding worldwide conflicts. Each year, on the third Thursday of September, leaders descend on the UN headquarters in New York City for the annual debate. Here, countries, whether big or small, have the opportunity to use their voice on influential issues. The UNGA has the ability to make recommendations to other sectors of the UN, make membership elections, and censure states that violate the principles of the United Nations.

II. HISTORY OF THE TOPIC

A. Introduction to the topic

The rise of technology has caused drastic changes in our behavior. For instance, it has increased efficiency and facilitated productivity in labor and educational sectors. It

additionally has abided us with accessible means of information and communication, such as news sources and social media. Throughout the years, there has been notorious advances in such kinds of media; users and innovators have learned to navigate and enhance its utilization. This consequently has surged large scales of abuse and manipulation attempts in order to narrow down the public's perception and forcefully deviate their thoughts on particular issues. Situations such as unwanted presidential elections, inciting violence, and the appearance of the terms "shadow-banning" and "cancel culture" have all unequivocally made an upsurge in the public because of media vilification.

B. Evolution of the topic

Censorship refers to the removal of certain content on the media that's considered objectionable and offensive for the public. Such content may be related to religion, ideologies, movements, etc. The decision to block information in the media is made primarily by displeased individuals, idealistic groups, or even the government itself. Censorship isn't something recent. In fact, it has been relevant since the second World War; the Nazis disintegrated anything related to Judaism, even people. Fortunately, society nowadays has learned from its past mistakes, though not thoroughly.

As previously mentioned, social media has become a manipulative tool used by those that strive for a particular objective, such as gaining followers, exposing information, stating one's opinion, etc. Those that own such objectives influence the algorithm to reach their desires. Some, though, may mean to cause no harm, considering they benefit from the platform purely to express their sentiments on a particular subject. However, those that aim to pull strings on the

audience's minds should be considered the peril of social media.

Today, especially during times of crisis, social media users must navigate the platforms cautiously, for they are highly exposed to eventually encountering various manipulated content or even so-called deepfakes (adjusted videos or audios). Today, falsified media has been incredibly accessible, and in most cases, barely noticeable. Individuals or groups behind manipulated media have worked with alternative and advanced implements, such as artificial intelligence and precocious photoshopping. Instagram is a platform known to rely on AI to control the algorithm, something that impacts what the audience is able to see based on their likes and searches. In other cases, historic events are also manipulated to avoid present, unwanted accusations, such as US president John F. Kennedy's assassination; it is claimed that the assassination wasn't made by a random armed person, but by the government itself wanting to get rid of a great possible threat. Hence, In brief, media manipulation and other kinds of strategies that distract users from their surroundings consequently distortions reality. What they aim is to control a mass of misinformed people who depend on the reality that was subconsciously implemented in their minds by the media.

Furthermore, distinct maneuvers are additionally utilized to control people's views on specific topics. What is most commonly known to occur nowadays is to cancel a particular person for his or her beliefs or for past accusations. The person could be part of a minority or could be incredibly powerful, such as the president. Regardless of their social stance, people have the capacity to accuse their voice, and platforms, to protect themselves, permanently block them

without question. This has inevitably caused quite a lot of controversy among the public, considering platforms are violating freedom of speech rights. They claim the truth mustn't be played with. However, others respond to these claims, saying it's necessary to get rid of opinions that could essentially cause harm to users' perceptions. By magnifying the situation, something is obvious: eliminating information or publishing it undoubtedly impacts the public. Therefore, is censorship the best option to control that impact? Or is it violating society's rights?

C. Relevant events so far

President Donald Trump is banned from Twitter

On January 2021, Twitter permanently banned the President of the United States from the platform. The reason behind this decision is for supposedly having incited violence, something that trespasses the rules of the application. This caused frantic movement within the app, considering the counteracting power between Twitter, an ordinary application, and the President, the ruler of the country. However, it was later discovered, specifically last year, that this was no easy decision. Trump was later unbanned as soon as Elon Musk took power on the platform. Following that situation, files containing the discussions to ban Trump were exposed to the public by the President himself.

Constitutional vote in Chile targeted by coordinated hashtag campaign before election

As soon as violent, nationwide protests against social and economic inequality began in Chile in October 2019, a negotiation between the country's political parties occurred to end the crisis. They discussed replacing the 1980 constitution,

established during a dictatorship, with a new and increasingly diplomatic constitution. A meeting was held for citizens to approve or disapprove of this decision, however, an unexpected twist took place. A right-wing media manipulation campaign took over Twitter to express its utter disapproval. They continuously posted hashtags on the platform rejecting the new constitution, along with a torrent of misinformation. This effectively confused Chileans about the intentions of this new constitution before the official election.

<u>Scientists against the COVID-19 vaccine get censored</u>

As soon as COVID-19 vaccines surfaced, many skeptical scientists decided to dig deeper. Many began to claim the vaccine causes blood clots and heart failure, taking into account the rapid increase of deaths because of the vaccine. In addition, the fact that vaccinated people, even with three doses, could get sick, also elevated their suspicion. This provoked sentiments of alarm within the world and many citizens were rejecting to get vaccinated. While the number of COVID-19 cases skyrocketed, the government insisted on people to get vaccinated. To stop doubt and misinformation from spreading, scientists touching the issue were being permanently removed from social media. As an improvised alternative, many began exposing the vaccine even further in their own media.

III. CURRENT ISSUES
A. Panorama

Today, most countries believe media manipulation should absolutely not occur. Any attempt to deviate an audience's opinion, could jeopardize an important situation or even a crisis. There's evidently a global consensus that demonstrates

the rejection of any mention of politics, religion, ideologies, or anything that could generate massive and unsought movements in technological platforms. As previously stated, the media has been an easily used source to rapidly form alliances and enemies; it's a tool that possesses such power over people's minds. In general, the majority of the countries obviously strive to avoid conflict regarding preconscious manipulation. However, by noticing the grade of influence the media owns over society, in some cases, even the government has taken advantage of it over its citizens.

B. Points of view

United States of America

The U.S. has been predominantly a victim of media censorship and manipulation. Having immense power in possession, there are always indirect battles and disputes occurring within technological platforms (especially Twitter). Additionally, considering the evident polarization between democrats and republicans, tension is always present. Both sides aim to dominate the country's ideologies and functions, though their ideas mutually and vastly repel. Therefore, Americans are continuously adapting to surging opposition regarding a particular topic; it's incredibly difficult to avoid. Although middle ground is reachable, those polarized opinions can simply never be in harmony. Something extremely influential on the dominance of ideologies is the government and its senators; their stance defines the country's actions and decisions. Censorship is positively viewed by democrats, while it's negatively viewed by republicans. The fight continues.

Iran

Censorship in Iran is primarily used to maintain stability in the country. It works to prevent unapproved reformists, Counter-Revolutionaries, and religious ideologies, from spreading their hazardous beliefs. Currently, Iran is bearing a worrying, political conflict; protests are unfortunately frequent against the unfair treatment of the Morality Police and the government itself. However, Iran contains severely limited access to international newcomers. Hence, journalists who desire to conduct research on the situation aren't allowed to step foot in the country. The information about the protests relies solely on the tapes that citizens manage to take. In addition, ever since the rise of technology, the Iranian Republic has had complete control of it, meaning the flow of information in satellites is scrutinized by the government before airing it. Angered citizens had tried to destroy satellites, yet the media is still carefully guarded.

South Korea

South Korea has bared many cases of rumor mongering and censorship. Several of those are linked with international relations. For instance, in 2008, intense protests broke out against the transportation of American meat in South Korea because many rumors claimed it was contaminated. Additionally, disinformation has caused tension in the government as an important conservative figure named Yook Seok-youl voluntarily left office for being falsely accused of harmful actions. To take measure, South Korea has increased military mobilization to remove any kind of manipulated information in the media. Today, South Korea is one of the most technologically surveyed countries in the world. Even if freedom of speech is mostly respected, the government engages in

active internet censorship based on three laws: the Nation Security Law, the Basic Press Act, and Article 21.

<u>Australia</u>

The Australian government claims those that misinform in the media, most of the time, they do it unintentionally. Although it's misleading, the government ensures the people behind it mean no harm. Nonetheless, whenever it's done maliciously, it creates deep impact, especially within democratic matters in the government, as it hijacks political stances. Therefore, noticing how media misinformation also affects other countries, Australia is open to foreign interference and pacifically resolve the problem regarding the impact it has on elections, though most of the time, foreign influence affects Australia negatively, politically-speaking. Yet, even though Australia aims to evade damage within the government, the country is largely accused of media censorship, as it desperately withstands wide scale, foreign and non-foreign media misinformation.

IV. UN & EXTERNAL ACTIONS
A. UN

The Human Rights council has recently developed Article 19 in July 2021. Led by Brazil, Tunisia, the United States, Sweden, Nigeria and another 70 co-sponsors, the article aims to completely stop the violation of human rights within online platforms. Censorship is ruling the internet, and it has become an increasingly evident issue since the COVID-19 pandemic. With this article, the organization has built the following resolutions that protect freedom of expression: cease internet shutdowns and other kinds of censorship with the help of collected and analyzed data, and achieve net neutrality (treat

equally all kinds of information regardless of its origin). Although measures have been taken, in the end, users are still being censored.

Regarding media manipulation and misinformation, the UN is still combating the situation. Since the pandemic began, loads of false rumors infested the internet. As a resolution, the UN aimed to dominate the internet with accurate information. Therefore, that same year, the UN launched a COVID-19 Communications Response Initiative purely based on science, solutions, and solidarity. These actions were and still are conducted by the World Health Organization.

B. External Actions

YouTube

Noticing how media manipulation has strongly affected diplomatic elections, YouTube published new policies to the action. These consisted in banning anything that could be misleading or threatening to the public eye regarding presidential elections. YouTube also has the potential to ban anything that expands supposedly false information or rumors. Since then, YouTube has been a largely restricted area for content creators, though manipulated media still spreads rapidly, and it can't be stopped easily.

Twitter

Twitter also launched new policies similarly to YouTube's, yet Twitter's are more thorough. The policies provide guidelines that warn precisely why Twitter could remove particular content. In addition, contrary to YouTube's policies, Twitter doesn't ban all misleading content altogether. They analyze what's shown and whether it poses a threat to public safety. If

so, the platform banishes the content, otherwise a warning will appear before the content is played. With this, the decision to risk the user's stance will now rely on solely him or her.

V. CONCLUSION

In brief, according to evidence, censorship has been a topic of great interest and controversy since the appearance of technology and advanced media platforms, especially as soon as this decade began. People have learned to take advantage of technology to create movement within the world, whether it'd be sharing one's opinion on a particular topic or convincing someone to deviate their path on a specific situation. To solve this, the content is most frequently removed from the platforms to avoid any harm within the public's stance. Some strongly suggest censorship is unequivocally incorrect, considering it completely violates freedom of speech. In other words, this side considers the government wants the truth to be concealed, so people can remain purely in their favor. On the other hand, others claim censorship is necessary to avoid any political or external conflict or cause any unwanted triggers within the public. Nevertheless, the topic is still at stake and a decision must be made; is censorship really necessary?

VI. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- Does your country approve of censorship?
- Is censorship the best solution to uncontrollable media manipulation?
- How does your country manage media misinformation?
- What events are affected because of media disinformation?
- How can your delegation know if the information in the media is true or false?

- What measures can be taken besides censorship in the media to avoid misinformation?
- Why is censorship considered a violation of freedom of expression?
- How can your country deal with unexpected setbacks in its organization because of media manipulation?
- Besides the government, how can media platforms take action?

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