

The distribution of disinformation and “Fake news” on social media has become one of the most significant features of contemporary political and social discourses. Disinformation can have direct and short-term impacts on opinions and practices - such as voting in elections or vaccinations. Additionally, constant spreading of disinformation can result in disrupting the basic civic premise relating to the feasibility of constructing a common social truth, which is an important foundation for the existence of civil and political democratic institutions and relationships.

Countries such as China, Singapore and Egypt have developed various legal and policy tools in recent years to deal with disinformation. These tools are based on the assumption that governments can and should determine the truth, as well as the assumption that governments can and should control the flow of information on social media. In contrast, democratic societies, which seek to avoid centralized control over public discourses, find themselves a bit helpless in the face of this phenomenon. This difficulty stems, in part, from a lack of language and vision to describe the role of social media in a democratic societies. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, have grown and developed by commercial for-profit companies, but have created an infrastructure with wide-ranging public characteristics and implications. We believe that policies that seek to deal with the existing pathologies of social media should begin in in-depth discussion on the institutional role of social media in a democratic societies. Liberal Western order is based on a set of common assumptions or socio-political imaginaries. We have a common idea of the "ideal type" of the various civic institutions, such as the press, the police or the citizen. These ideal types serve as guides to legislators, judges and regulators, and make it possible to critic institutions, when the gap between the institution's imagined purpose and its actual conduct is particularly large. In the workshop, we will seek to open a new interdisciplinary discussion of the roles and purpose of social media in democratic societies.

The Federman Cyber Center in collaboration with the National Security Research Institute has been investigating the phenomenon of disinformation and fake news in the past year. We believe that formulating a perception of the role and purpose of social media in democratic societies, is a key analytical tool in analyzing the problem as well as designing ways of dealing with it. In the upcoming workshop, we will therefore bring together experts from various fields, with the aim of thinking together about an ideal type of social media in democratic societies.