D1.15 NGI Research Topic Analysis III

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1.0 Introduction

The continued emergence of digital media and its role in everyday life have caused terms with new meanings, practices in the public discourse with new challenges and shifted the power in the social and political arena. One of the topics that contain such changes is *deplatforming*. While it is by no means a new practice to ban speakers from expressing their views and ideas, the term deplatforming has once again gained attention in the wake of the suspension of prominent politicians such as Donald Trump, former US President, back in January 2021 on both Twitter and Facebook (Byers, 2021). Deplatforming is an effective method of limiting the influence of certain groups and individuals and has triggered discussions and concerned reactions among the public and in the political arena (Fahy et al., 2021).

This report is based on the third in a series of expert workshops with leading internet researchers. The workshop had the title "Deplatforming life" and intended to discuss deplatforming as a power relationship on both an individual and systemic level. The topic of deplatforming has been chosen based on a previous study presented in the report *D1.8 Final social media analysis report & visualisations* (Nissen et al., 2021). Further elaboration on the choice will follow in section *2.3*. The aim of the report is to present the results of the workshop, which are based on discussions about challenges on the internet and their potential solutions. In addition, the results will inform the second selection of NGI key topics, *D1.10*. Finally, through qualitative inputs, the deliverable will inform the European Commission and support the processes of the Next Generation Internet initiative.

1.1 Purpose and Scope

The report builds on discussions and findings from the final of three expert workshops conducted by Aarhus University as part of NGI Forward, *Work Package 1: Topic Identification*. The workshop aimed to gather insights from stakeholders within the field of Internet Research to comment on the future development of the internet and potential solutions for the challenges it depicts. This deliverable rests upon and further develops the outcomes from the two previous reports: *D1.13: Value-driven Future Internet: A Social Science Perspective I* (Møller & Bechmann, 2020) and *D1.14: NGI Research Topic Analysis II* (Sørensen, Nissen & Bechmann, 2021). The frame of the workshop calls for discussions on how and if the internet should avoid concentration around a few large platform conglomerates. Moreover, it invites

the underlying question of what we as individuals and society can do about it, especially in the light of regulation.

2.0 Methodology

The following section aims to outline the qualitative approach to qualify the data and the derived results of the workshop. Moreover, it presents the reasons for the choices made before, during and after the workshop.

2.1 Venue and Participants

The two previous workshops were held as part of the annual Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) conference, whereas this recent workshop was an independent, single event. It has not been possible to have the same format as the two previous workshops, as the 2021 conference is after the publication date of the current report. As AoIR members got contacted with an invitation to attend the workshop (on June 22, 2021), the target group remained the same. Through the already established network of AoIR, an international and interdisciplinary academic association of internet researchers, it was possible to get access to multiple academic experts in the field of internet research (AoIR, "About", n.d.). The number of participants was lower than in the previous workshops, as this one was not a part of a big event. However, it is plausible to assume that the attendees might have greater motivation for participation and interest in the topic as they have signed up for it as an independent event.

As mentioned, the participants were all part of the AoIR community but to get a better idea of their background, they were asked, before the workshop, to provide a written bio. The bios gave an overview of the attendees and their academic background, including their field of expertise. A total of 26 researchers from universities across 13 countries registered as participants (see list in appendix A). Among the participants, the following research fields were represented: Information Studies, Media & Communication Studies, Journalism, Political Science, International Relations, Law, Computer & System Sciences, Technology and Sociology. The variety of fields indicates that internet research is not limited to a specific branch but is an interdisciplinary domain of inquiry. Therefore, we would argue that it was beneficial to use the workshop as it allowed for collaboration and knowledge exchange between the experts across academic disciplines, which was considered helpful in order to achieve actionable outputs.

2.2 Experts, Workshop, and Panel Discussion

As just outlined, we combined the workshop method with the target group of experts. Expert interviews are a widely used qualitative method often aimed to achieve reliable information and professional assessments of a research topic (Döringer, 2021, p. 264). Therefore, we invited experts in internet research to participate. But to achieve the dynamic of a group discussion, the workshop format was used instead of interviews. The workshop contributed to an interacting and collaborating environment that allowed for debate on the topic. And, as the aim is to generate actionable outputs, the workshop format was considered suitable to perform a problem solving and solution-oriented approach to the issue (Ørngreen & Levinsen, 2017, p. 71). The discussion groups in the workshop were kept relatively small to allow everyone the chance to be heard and give room for elaboration and comments on each suggestion and idea (ibid., p. 72). The following panel discussion worked as a method for collecting data from a pre-recruited set of people (in this regard, recognised researchers within the field of Internet Studies). A moderator managed the debate and asked questions to the panellists and the participants (audience). The purpose of the panel discussion was to share recent research, findings and knowledge on the topic and encourage dialogue and scholarly exchange (Desrayaud, 2017).

2.3 Structure

The workshop had a three-section structure, as shown in the model below.
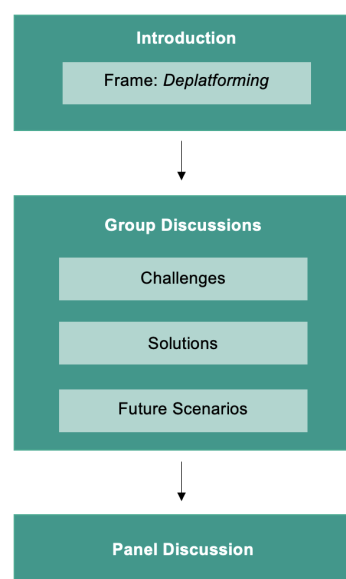

Figure 1: Outline of the workshop

The purpose of the first section was to present the frame of the discussion: Deplatforming. The choice of frame is elaborated upon at the end of this section. The introduction frame was followed by the main activity of the workshop: group discussions. These discussions consisted of 1) a debate on the current challenges of digital platforms, whereafter the focus shifted to 2) solutions concerning the regulation of the internet and lastly, 3) a discussion on future scenarios. However, none of the groups reached and discussed the last part, future scenarios, in-depth. Only one group touched it briefly. Therefore, the few statements regarding this are integrated into the section about the solutions. The workshop concluded with a panel discussion consisting of the following leading researchers within the field:

Geoffrey C. Bowker	**Hanna Krasnova**	**Ben O'Loughlin**
Professor of Informatics at the *University of California, Irvine*	Professor of Business Informatics esp. Social media and Society at *University of Potsdam*	Professor of International Relations at *Royal Holloway, University of London.*
Director of the *Values in Design Laboratory.*		Director of the New *Political Communication Unit.*
Expertise: Information Systems and Critical Infrastructure.	Expertise: Social Media and Society.	Expertise: International Political Communication.

As shown above, the three researchers have different areas of expertise. Thus, this provided different takes and perspectives on the topic of deplatforming.

The choice of frame topic, deplatforming, was based on previous research presented in the report *D1.8 Final social media analysis report & visualisations* (Nissen et al., 2021). In this report, a seeding list was made based on the "Charter of Human Rights and Internet Principles" (2019), published by the Internet Rights & Principles Coalition (IRPC), based at the UN Internet Governance Forum. One of the goals was "to build a basis for filtering down social media datasets" (Charquero-Ballester, 2021, p. 1). When used on Reddit data, a series of different subreddits were identified that, in some way or another, focus on the relation between human rights and the internet. The workshop chose to focus on just one of the

identified subreddits, Antisocialmedia. Through further qualitative examination, two related subreddits were selected as the frame for the workshop. The communities were, besides Antisocialmedia, DeFacebook and DeGoogle.

DeFacebook - expel Facebook from your life
r/DeFacebook

DeGoogle - expel Google from your life
r/degoogle

AntisocialMedia
r/antisocialmedia
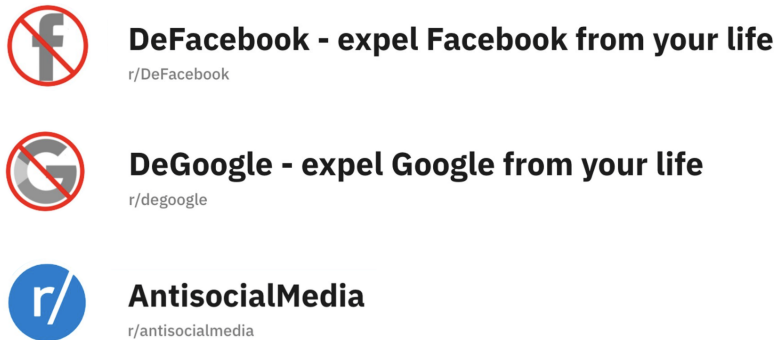
Figure 2: Communities on Reddit

Though the report identified several subreddits, we chose to only focus on the above mentioned to have a delimited frame in order to generate more specific outputs and get in-depth with this topic and not only briefly cover several different topics. The identified Reddit communities cast a view on self-deplatforming: a user-driven move away from digital platforms. In other words, the communities shed light on the agency of the user – the action of moving away from or being critical towards the big digital platforms. The frame presented deplatforming as a two-sided term: on one hand, it relates to the just described actions of the user limiting the power of the platforms by, in a sense, deplatforming their own life. On the other hand, the concept covers the acts of the platforms: suspending or removing individuals or groups from their platform (Rogers, 2020, p. 213-214). Thus, deplatforming covered two separate topics related to the current relationship between daily life and digital media, which is considered essential in terms of the development of the internet.

3.0 Key Outcomes

In the following, the results from the group discussions and the panel discussion are outlined. First, an introduction to the identified challenges follows and then a presentation of the associated solutions. There is no distinction between the statements from the group discussions and the panel discussion. Thus, the arguments are outlined simultaneously in the report to uncover similar and contradictory perspectives between experts in the field. All the statements throughout the chapter are based on the participating experts and in a few examples supported by other literature. The three speakers in the panel discussions are called by name, as we have their consent to do so, while statements from the participants are kept anonymous throughout the report.

3.1 Challenges

The point of departure in the group discussions was the ever-increasing number of people using market-leading online platforms, such as Google and Facebook, and examples on deplatforming: both in terms of platforms removing and suspending users from their sites and users boycotting the digital platforms. In this part of the workshop, the participants were asked to discuss the challenges linked to the use of digital platforms within the frame of deplatforming. As the report chooses to maintain a focus on deplatforming, parts that are outside the frame are excluded to ensure a streamlined output.

3.1.1 Centralisation or Decentralisation – a Democratic Angle

As the digital market is concentrated on fewer and fewer players, giant companies such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon have taken monopoly-like positions. Whether this is problematic or beneficial in terms of democracy was the centre of discussion in all the groups and worked as a frame for discussing the challenges further.

One group addressed centralisation and decentralisation as a complex dilemma: on one side, they argued that few platforms could create a greater extent of social cohesion as it makes it easier to share things, positions, and ideas with each other. In line with this, one participant stated that the current discourse in the UK is that everything that limits fragmentation has a strengthening effect on democracy. Then, he drew a parallel to public service broadcasting – saying that "It might not be perfect, but at least it coheres people". And further explained that the alternative, having a more fragmented internet, may prevent the desired social cohesion

and feed anti-democratic movements and activities. Hence, a participant described it as a fear of moving away from the big platforms because it might make conversations more difficult and lead to social fragmentation in society. On the other hand, the groups also discussed how the move away from centralisation, and the big tech conglomerates, could challenge the current power relations and the business model many firms rely on e.g., in terms of surveillance capitalism, a term coined by Shoshana Zuboff, which describes an economic order that harvest human behaviour for monetization (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8). A decentralised network is thus perceived, by the participants, as a procedure to limit the power of big tech companies. In addition, it could forestall the power of the platforms and the lack of values such as privacy and control over information, which all groups agreed is destructive. Thus, the discussion addressed the dilemma of centralisation and decentralisation: wanting the connectedness and cohesion that the platforms provide but condemning the business structure and the power of the big tech companies.

3.1.2 Lack of Transparency and Consistency

The power of the digital platforms in terms of deplatforming – controlling who can say what and where they can say it – was a returning topic of discussion, especially as constituting a threat to democracy and the human right to freedom of speech. In this regard, the participants referred to the tech companies' capability of silencing individuals and groups through removals of their accounts. One group discussed the lack of consistency and transparency in the actions of deplatforming and named it a central issue. To describe one of the challenges linked to deplatforming, O'Loughlin presented an introductory study from the UK on *deplatforming politics*, namely how political candidates are deplatformed from social media services. He described how an unexpected topic was revealed from a survey about sexual harassment and various forms of discrimination during the election of political candidates, namely: The experience of deplatforming. The group of politicians who had experienced deplatforming was not from extremist parties but relatively mainstream ones. When politicians lose their platform, they lose their mouthpiece – they are silenced and disabled and, in the light of that, unable to run a political operation (Fahy et al., 2021). He further described that social media platforms, besides news media, are indispensable and the candidates' most direct way to reach potential voters and the general public since nearly no one actively seeks information on the politicians' websites (according to the study). O'Loughlin criticised the lack of transparency around the processes of deplatforming since it makes

discussions and decisions about these issues impossible as no one, except the tech companies, knows what is *really* happening.

One group discussed the same issue and stated that it has democratic consequences that tech companies so easily can ruin a politician's future in terms of chances of being elected as it distorts democratic principles. Moreover, they argued that there are little the politicians can do, as they stand against private companies with economically powerful forces. These examples highlight the role and power of social media in political campaigns and their domination as a means of sharing information. In addition, it sheds light on the lack of transparency on the side of the companies, which is considered a big challenge among the participants.

3.1.3 The Processes of Standard Setting

Related to the above challenge, Bowker stated that processes around the standard setting of the internet are, and will be, a core site of politics in the next 20 years. Platforms operate under their own standards while also assigning to standards established by external organisations, such as the EU (ConsortiumInfo.org, "What is a SSO?", n.d.). By processes, he referred to how standards get set, what is written into them and who has a voice in amending and stipulating them. He argued that, as the situation looks now, the big tech companies invest large amounts of money trying to control legal standards, which has resulted in a view and voice heavily skewed towards the big players – the tech companies that legislators seek to control. What is missing is a genuine critical voice at the standard setting level, according to Bowker. In line with that, several participants inveighed against policymaking done in collaboration with the tech companies. In addition, O'Loughlin stated that he had been part of several forums and committees with lawmakers and people representing various tech companies and has lost faith in these standard setting processes. Therefore, a challenge is the processes around standard settings, more precisely, the people, organisations and forces involved.

3.1.4 Convenience and Reach Prevents Users from Deplatforming

Is it possible for the user to move away from the platforms? That was a central question discussed in the groups, which frames deplatforming from a user perspective. Regarding the answers, convenience was named the one thing that prevents users from deplatforming services like Facebook and Google. One group argued that people are unwilling to trade off the conveniences digital platforms bring and thus problematised the investment in, and

dependence on, the major platforms. These platforms offer a sense of community, which will be lost if leaving the platform. That means leaving social media platforms can cause the exclusion of particular communities or subcultures. Another group also shed light on how groups and communities aiming to organise people, debates, etc., can have a difficult time deplatforming the big social media platforms because of the reach they accommodate since the reach is crucial, especially for activist groups. But at the same time, one participant argued that these groups face a dilemma as they do not want the surveillance of the platforms. This statement draws a line back to the two-sided discussion on centralisation – social cohesion versus surveillance. Thus, a central challenge is the convenience and reach the platforms offer regarding accessing information, getting information, and communicating as it prevents the use of alternative services.

3.1.5 Governing Self-Interest

The above notion might point towards a broader challenge in the relationship between users and platforms. Namely, that self-interest might trump values such as privacy and ethics. Krasnova and co-authors have researched public attitudes toward stricter regulation of online targeted political ads. Their findings suggest that people's attitudes (here: Democrats and Republicans) towards stricter regulation of targeted political ads are not only a result of privacy concerns but can also be fueled by people's beliefs about partisan advantage. In other words, this may suggest that people might be willing to trade-off privacy against other competing interests, specifically political self-interest (Baum et al., 2021). Seen in context with the point on the convenience of using the platforms, it might be a fundamental challenge that users are only willing to challenge the nature of the platforms as long as it does not detriment their self-interests.

3.2 Solutions

In the second part of the discussion, the participants were asked to discuss and develop potential solutions to the identified challenges. We incorporated two categories of solutions in the discussion: "user-driven" and "legislation-driven". Thus, this section aims to obtain specific and actionable inputs to the challenges described.

3.2.1 The Answer is Not the Users

Although the workshop incorporated the two just mentioned categories of solutions on par, there was a consensus among the participants that the answer to the challenges identified in

the previous section was not the users. Though several participants had suggestions for user-driven actions, such as using alternative platforms and directly deplatform services like Facebook and Twitter, they agreed it is not the way. Several participants highlighted the difficulty of making user-driven solutions as everyone is invested in digital platforms today, relating to the earlier identified challenge of convenience. Instead, they pointed to the legislators and a need for regulatory interventions to achieve an actual change in the market. As one participant put it: "I don't see how users will be able to force a change to how these companies do business". Another participant joined the statement and further argued that a private company does not commit to democracy; its only commitment is making money. Thus, he pointed out that the aim of the algorithms of the platforms is not to provide the user with meaningful information. Instead, they aim to keep the user on the platform as long as possible. In other words, the companies are on the chase for the user's attention as a means to make money – also referred to as the attention economy (Kessous, 2015). And more participants stated that the only way to change that is to rethink or restructure the big tech companies' business plans through governmental regulation.

3.2.2 National or International Legislation

While the experts agreed on the need for legislation-driven solutions, what level this legislation should appear on was a matter of debate in two of the three discussion groups. They discussed whether international or national legislation is most beneficial. One group argued that country-specific legislation is advantageous as countries have different needs and issues as cultural, moral, and legal standards vary between states and regions. But as discussed in another group, this level of legislation is problematic because of the complexity and limitlessness of the internet. One participant argued that international codes are essential when working with multinational companies that operate in more than one country and thus brought an example: In theory, a Google Search in the EU does not show the same results as in the US due to regional restrictions. But the fact that an EU citizen can use a VPN – a service that encrypts data and hides the IP address – and access Google from a location outside the EU and thereby get other results underline the need for an international approach. Despite individual state responses such as the two recent legislative initiatives from the European Commission, the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA), it does not address the global character of the internet, which proposes international legislation. In other words, solving a problem in one country or a block like the EU does not solve the challenges. However, another participant argued for the importance of the recent EU initiatives because it

proves the possibility of regulating the companies and can serve as inspiration in other countries to follow suit.

Several researchers support the above notion of international legislation and name structural regulation as a necessary tool to limit the firms and the business models (Sabeel Rahman, 2018; Khan, 2021). What specific kind of legal regulation this should imply varied in the group discussions: One participant advocated for proscribing the business model of the digital platforms, and another proposed a requirement for the companies to give their users a choice to opt-out of the targeted content. A third participant suggested forcing companies to provide the users with an understanding of why specific suggestions are made and what data the recommendations are based on. In other words, more transparency. A participant, furthermore, shed light on how to ensure compliance with the law and regulations and thus condemned monetary penalties – and stated that nothing could change as long as legislators proceed with only monetary punishment (e.g., not imprisonment) as the companies have enough money for these purposes. Though the set of proposals for specific legal regulations differed, there was a recognition among a large number of the participants that international cooperation is vital to deal with the challenges of digital platforms and to support European values such as transparency and privacy.

Furthermore, one of the groups pointed at the United Nations (UN) as the "logical place" for international cooperation regarding the internet and digital platforms. Another participant named, more specifically, a UN entity, The Internet Governance Forum. Though in this discussion, the term "logical" implied that it will be beneficial to start the cooperation at the UN, but the participant also commented about it not being done to a rewarding or necessary extent.

3.2.3 Citizen Assemblies

The processes of standard settings were identified as a challenge in terms of how they get set, what is written into them, and who has a voice in them. Bowker stated that he once was attracted to the idea of citizen assemblies, which can be described as a form of civic participation: randomly selected panels that contribute to informed advice, propose solutions, and develop recommendations that affect the decisions made at a political level (Patriquin,

2020). However, he ended up criticising the process as it can be generally suborned itself. He pointed towards examples where the industry has made better presentations than the people in the government, which skewed the process in the end. Despite that, O'Loughlin still pointed towards citizen assemblies as a practice for examining policy objectives and presented them as a method to draw the public towards engaging in the issues. That echoed another group discussion that encouraged the involvement of the public in developing a regulatory framework or providing solutions. O'Loughlin argued that the public could consequently put pressure on politicians to act on the challenges of the internet as they would then get more informed and engaged. Thus, a suggested solution to develop a more human-centric evolution of the internet is the implementation of citizen assemblies.

3.2.4 Heightening Digital Literacy

The focus on the citizens/users and them being a part of the political process continued. In this regard, digital literacy was a returning topic in the workshop discussion as well as the panel discussion and primarily concentrated around two target groups, namely 1) the children/young people and 2) politicians. In addition, it is relevant to add that digital literacy is not a new topic nor a new solution; it has been present in the two previous workshops and prioritised on the list of NGI topics (Møller & Bechmann, 2020; Sørensen, Nissen & Bechmann, 2021). That digital literacy is a recurrent topic in all three reports underlines the emphasis on its continuing relevance and importance in the initiatives related to NGI. As opposed to the other reports, the discussion in the recent workshop presents an additional perspective on it, more specifically in the way it addresses certain target groups, which will be covered in the two following sections.

Improving Digital Literacy Through Education

The educational sector is evoked by several participants as part of the solution to improve critical digital literacy. Bowker stated, as part of the panel discussion, that critical media studies should be an integrated part of the education system for students in secondary school (11-16 years) and conceivably primary school (5-10 years). The argument for implementing it in education lies in the technical and political questions we are facing today. Bowker explained: "If the big political questions are very technical, we need citizens that understand what is at stake". The enormous role of digital platforms and the derived technical questions make it crucial for citizens to understand the consequences of using the platforms and how specific values play out on them. According to the panel discussion, a beneficial place to start this is in the education system among children. In addition, the children are the actual users of

the next generation internet, which emphasises why it is crucial to have this target group in mind when developing guidelines or initiatives regarding the future internet. Krasnova also agreed on improving digital literacy through education and further specified how digital literacy goes beyond technological understanding and technical skills – it has to involve a range of social, psychological, and ethical perspectives too. She suggested going a step deeper and approaching the psychological implications of tech use, such as hate speech, cyber-bullying and warping of the image of reality. In addition, O'Loughlin referred to previous experience with the target group of children and highlighted their high level of abstraction and how he experienced children as fast learners in the light of understanding the values behind different social media use. Thus, declaring that it is desirable and doable too.

Hence, heightening digital literacy among the youth through the education system was a prioritised and actionable solution to many of the challenges of the internet. A change and solution that can ensure that citizens are primed to understand what is at stake and thereby critically engage with the digital platforms and the political issues surrounding them. Despite the priority of legislation-driven solutions, the two above-described solutions, citizen assemblies and heightening digital literacy, point towards the importance of user involvement but frame the need for facilitation by legislators to have an effect.

Digital Literacy Among Politicians

As shown above, there was an agreement on the importance of digital literacy. However, this does not only include children. While discussing solutions to the depicted challenge of deplatforming, one participant explained how committees have tried to propose suggestions regarding regulations. But what the committee faced was politicians who were not literate about the internet and its implications itself. The participant further explained how that makes it hard to have conversations and thereby develop potential solutions to the challenges deplatforming composes. The lack of understanding and knowledge raised the following question in the discussion: "Is there a need to improve the digital literacy of the people we would trust to have the power in a democracy?". Another participant joined the statement and additionally criticised politicians buying into the black box argument; that algorithms are too complex to explain. This results in sustaining a lack of transparency in the working of the algorithms. With the recent leak of the "Facebook Files", it has become evident that Facebook knows a lot more about itself than they are sharing publicly (Horwitz, 2021). Besides, one participant stated that accepting this argument prevents obtaining consistency and transparency in how the companies do business. Heightening digital literacy among

politicians was a solution discussed in one of the three groups and was introduced to equip politicians for the processes related to standard settings. Moreover, it will ensure knowledge on one of the most far-reaching political issues and thereby securing critical proficiency in the dialogue between politicians and stakeholders.

3.2.5 Outside User-driven and Legislation-driven Solutions

In one of the groups, the participants came up with a solution outside the two categories: user-driven and legislation-driven solutions. They argued how traditional media has the potential to create discourses that can generate movements away from the global, dominant platforms. Moreover, one participant gave the example that news media can help to bring an idea of what is working in different countries and how. This suggestion draws attention towards the journalists and their agency and role in society and consequently democracy. However, the group stated that it is challenging to carry the solution out as news media and other traditional media are invested in and dependent on the platforms as well as the users. Research shows that a large part of news organisations is making considerable investments in social media, which means many news organisations rely on social media platforms to generate traffic and reach the audience (Cornia et al., 2018). Nevertheless, it is a compelling topic of discussion outside the framework presented in the workshop and brings agency to other actors in society.
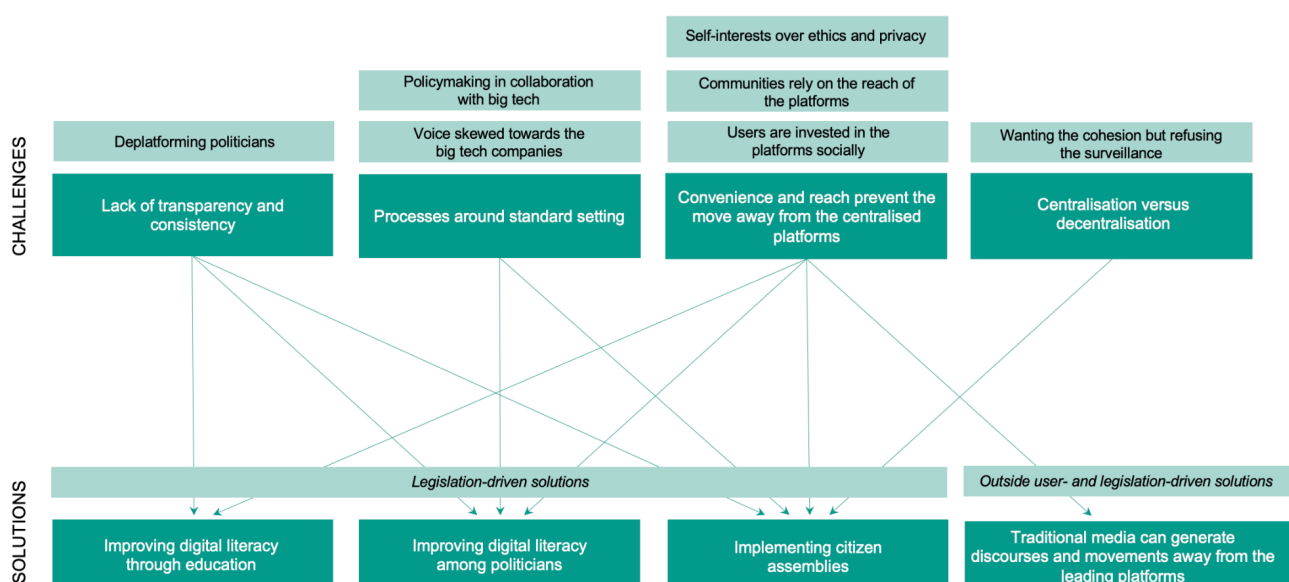

Figure 3: Overview: Workshop Results

The model above is a visualisation of the workshop results and provides an analytical overview of the connections between the challenges and solutions.

4.0 Discussion of Solutions

In this section, the suggested solutions in the workshop will be related to other cases about the same or similar topics to comment on each solution.

A solution that came up in the workshop was the implementation of citizen assemblies. Though in no way a new practice, citizen assemblies have had a rise in recent years in Europe and have been used to guide decision-making concerning public policies (European Commission, 2021). In the workshop, it was argued to be a particularly beneficial solution to the issues concerning the democratic harms of digital technologies. Moreover, it was argued that it can be an effective process to engage the public in the current issues relating to the power of the big tech firms. Canada has recently, more accurately in 2020, established a citizen assembly to accommodate the challenges associated with digital technologies. The Canadian citizen assembly consists of a randomly selected and representative body of 42 Canadians, which aims to examine and provide informed recommendations on the regulation of technologies to "both protect democratic expression and shield people from hatred, misinformation, and exploitation" (Canadian Citizens' Assembly on Democratic Expression, p. 22, 2021). This example goes hand in hand with the suggested solution in the workshop and could advantageously function as a course of action for developing a human-centric, next generation internet. As it is an ongoing project with a timeline of three years (April 2021 - March 2023), it would be interesting to return to the project when it is in its final phase to seek an evaluation of the processes and the outcome itself (ibid., p. 4).

As stated in the workshop, there was an agreement on the need to increase critical digital literacy in general – however, there was a proposal to specifically target an effort towards the politicians. There was a perception among some of the participants that there is a lack of understanding of the intricacies and nuances of technology in the governments to hold the tech industry accountable. This lack of critical digital knowledge among politicians means that the governments are likely not able to initiate well-informed legislation and engage in advanced and complex discussions about the current digital issues. This echoes a report made by researchers at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center *Building a 21st Century Congress: Improving Congress Science and Technology Expertise* (2019). The report highlights the shortfall of congressional expertise in the USA, "in legislation and high-profile hearings, Congress has appeared unprepared to reckon with emerging technologies and their effects on society" (Miesen et al., 2019, p. 1). The report is based on interviews, surveys and

focus groups with more than 140 stakeholders (former and current members of Congress, congressional staff members, scientists, lobbyists, activists, researchers, and policy experts) and focuses on potential actions to address the existing knowledge gaps. The report suggested the following solutions to close the gaps: 1) create a legislative support body focused on science and technology issues, 2) hire additional science and tech talent in personal offices and committees, 3) address broad structural gaps by increasing its funding, and 4) external resource providers need to produce information in formats Congress comprehends and values (Miesen et al., 2019, pp. 9-12). Although the report is based on the United States, it echoes the discussion in the workshop, which did not necessarily have an American point of departure. However, the contextual difference may be significant. Therefore, the solutions presented in the report can not necessarily transfer in a ratio of one-to-one, as there are different factors at play in the US and the EU. Instead, the outcomes from the report can work as an inspirational answer to the question of how to improve critical digital literacy among politicians, namely through extensive collaboration with science and technology experts. The report does not necessarily argue for educating the politicians, as proposed in the workshop, but instead to involve science and tech experts in the processes of policymaking to equip the politicians for the matter and ensure well-informed legislation.

In line with the above, a solution proposed was to make digital literacy practices a part of the education system, already from early childhood education, to empower young people to be citizens in a digital world. Moreover, there was a focus on what kind of digital literacy this involves; it was argued that it should include but also move beyond technical skills and understandings and include critical, social, and psychological perspectives of the use of social media. In an article, Associate Professor, Jaigris Hodson underlines the importance of teaching children the non-neutrality of digital platforms. In this regard, she states that assessment skills are beneficial – critical thinking and reflexivity is crucial when assessing content and sources on the internet to understand unconscious biases, social connections, and the emotions at play when processing information (Hodson, 2020). That echoes the debate of the kind of digital literacy the participants suggested in the workshop – namely a focus on the critical and psychological aspects of the use of digital media. This issue becomes even more essential in the light of the recently revealed documents that show Instagram's ill effects on the youth (Wells et al., 2021). The documents revealed Facebook's internal research on its photo-sharing app's negative consequences on young users e.g., that Instagram makes body images worse for one in three teen girls and. Facebook has downplayed Instagram's harmful effects and has made the research unavailable to the public

as well as academics and lawmakers (ibid.). That case underlines the importance of teaching children the harmful aspects of the use of social media and not only limits the education of digital literacy to technical skills and knowledge.

This section should not be seen as a statement of these solutions being necessarily the most important or the correct ones, but rather a point to similar actions that have been implemented and/or prioritised before.

5.0 Conclusion

The report seeks to examine current challenges at the intersection of human rights, democracy, and the internet. It builds on findings from a workshop with internet researchers. The identified challenges in the workshop and panel discussion all relate to the power structure of the leading digital platforms. The four main issues identified during the workshop was 1) the lack of transparency and consistency in the actions of deplatforming concerning the big tech companies. 2) the processes around standard setting and regulations, which highly accommodate the tech conglomerates. And 3) the challenge of users being too invested in the platforms, which has a connection to the last challenge, 4) namely that self-interest might trump values such as privacy. However, the discussions mainly focused on potential and actionable solutions. In these discussions, the user-driven solutions were deemed less decisive by the participants. Instead, they argue for an extensive focus on legislation-driven solutions in the building of the future internet, as those are considered most effective to receive actual change on a measurable scale in society. Several suggestions came up during the session, firstly: whether national or international legislation is the best approach in terms of the current challenges of the internet. Some participants contended that national market sensible proposals are most beneficial, while the majority felt the need for an international approach in terms of the size and the invisible boundaries of the internet. In continuation of that, and in terms of more specific outputs, the workshop discussed and developed the three following solutions:

- Improving digital literacy among politicians
- Improving digital literacy through education
- Implementing citizen assemblies

Though the participants agreed on the need for legislation-driven solutions and not necessarily user-driven, the output reveals a focus on the users in the legislation initiatives, whether it is about literacy or assemblies. The second and third mentioned solutions aim towards the same objective: engaging the public in current issues to put pressure on politicians and the structure of today's internet to achieve changes, which is the core of building the next generation internet. The discussions on solutions reveal both essential values for developing a more democratic and resilient internet and the work that is considered crucial in achieving the values. In this way, the workshop has generated actionable approaches to the development of the next generation internet going forward.

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Appendix A: List of Participants

Countries:

USA (8), Germany (3), England (3), Canada (2), Israel (2), Netherlands (1), Brazil (1), Oman (1), Sweden (1), Denmark (1), India (1), Australia (1), Ireland (1).

Universities:

- Cambridge University
- Copenhagen Business School
- Queen Mary University, London
- Edith Cowan University
- Fedelral University of Bahia
- George Mason University
- Kiel University
- McGill University, Montreal
- Ruppin Academic Center
- Ryerson University
- Sapir College
- Stanford Law School
- Stockholm University
- Sultan Qaboos University
- Trinity College Dublin
- University of Amsterdam
- University of California, Irvine
- University of California, LA
- University of Hyderabad
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- University of Illinois
- University of London
- University of North Texas
- University of Potsdam
- UT Austin
- [Independent]

Research Fields

- Digital Media
- Information Society and Open Data
- Communication and Media
- Communication Studies
- Information Studies
- Economics and Political Science
- Politics
- Journalism and Technology
- Information Systems
- Computer and Systems Sciences
- Media Studies
- Informatics
- Sociology of Technology
- Technology, Society Politics
- Law and Communication
- Information Sciences, Technology Ethics
- Professional Communication
- Management, Politics and Philosophy
- History of Computational Media, Music/Sound Studies, and History of AI

Deplatforming life:

Moving away from big platforms

AARHUS UNIVERSITY   DATALAB CENTER FOR DIGITAL SOCIAL RESEARCH   NGI FORWARD

Programme

15.05 - 15.15 Welcome talk by Anja Bechmann, Director of DATALAB

15.15 - 15.20 Platform critical communities - presentation NGI Forward research

15.20 - 15.30 Question 1: Challenges

15.30 - 15.45 Question 2: Solutions

15.45 - 16.00 Question 3: Future scenarios

16.00 Break (5 minutes)

16.05 - 16.12 Hanna Krasnova

16.12 - 16.19 Ben O'Loughlin

16.24 - 16.31 Geoffrey Bowker
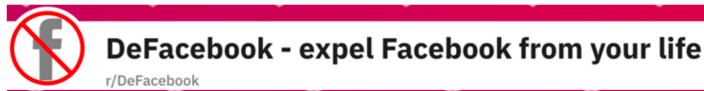
16.31 - 17.00 Question and discussion

2

Moving away from big digital platforms

"Deplatform" or "Deplatforming" is an interesting frame, as it covers to separate, interesting topics related to the current relationship between daily life and digital media:

1. On one hand it describes the act of boycotting a group or individual through removing the platforms (such as speaking venues or websites) used to share information or ideas

2. Moving away from and being critical of big digital platforms.

3

DeFacebook - expel Facebook from your life
r/DeFacebook

DeGoogle - expel Google from your life
r/degoogle

r/ AntisocialMedia
r/antisocialmedia

About Community	About Community	About Community
Expel Facebook from your life. You deserve to live a sustainable, private, self-sufficient and independent life, don't let anyone take this from you.	Expel Google from your life. You deserve to live a sustainable, private, self-sufficient and independent life, don't let anyone take this from you.	Dedicated to antisocial behavior on social media, censorship, control of media, cyberbullying, filter bubble, privacy and psychological effects of social media.

4

Question 1: Challenges

- **What advantage are there for moving away from the current market leading digital platforms?**

- **What are on the other hand the disadvantages?**

5

Question 2: Solutions

Legislation driven solutions	User driven solutions

6

Question 3: Future scenarios

- **What will be the outcome of the continuous challenges linked to digital platforms?**

7