

DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

(dis-)connected

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(dis—)connected

EDITORIAL

Simon Ant

One world, one net, one vision was the title of the 2019 United Nations Internet Governance Forum hosted by Germany. At the end of that year, the International Telecommunication Union estimated that nearly half of the world's population is offline.¹ The internet seems to offer endless information and a global network of communication; but if we listen to civil society's growing critical voices, we do not yet have a unified net or vision but rather there are deep digital divides throughout the web.

As Germany's oldest intermediary organisation for international cultural relations, ifa supports cross-border exchange, knowledge transfer and networking between civil society actors through its CrossCulture Programme (CCP). The steadily growing network in North Africa, West, Central, South, and Southeast Asia, in countries of the Eastern Partnership, Russia, Germany, and, increasingly, in Latin America and the Caribbean is ifa's point of contact for helping civil society actors face the digital divide and build bridges to create a more just digital sphere.

At the second Digital Civil Society workshop in autumn 2020, CCP brought together key stakeholders from German civil society, CCP fellows, and alumni for in-depth discussions on the digital divide. The findings of the first workshop, supplemented by additional perspectives, have been compiled in this issue and present global perspectives from civil society actors.

DIGITAL ACCESS

Nearly half of the world's population remains offline², but this applies mainly to less prosperous regions. At the same time, there are huge differences within regions, such as the divide between rural and urban areas. Remote areas are often left behind with limited connectivity. But even if the infrastructure is present, the cost of using the internet can be an unbreachable barrier in some cases, as was demonstrated by a survey conducted by the Alliance for Affordable Internet.³ Often the slowest internet connection is also the most expensive, meaning that people from regions with little income spend large proportions of their monthly salaries to pay for limited volume and speed.

THE DAY THE INTERNET SHUT DOWN

In 2020, the civil society organisation Access Now and its #KeepItOn coalition documented 155 internet shutdowns in 29 countries around the globe.⁴ Internet shutdowns are ordered – mostly though not exclusively – by the state and local governments, denying many people access to the internet and deepening the digital divide. Furthermore, state actors use technology to increase surveillance over vast parts of the population. Critical voices, journalists and activists are under severe pressure, as the excessive use of the NSO Group's spyware Pegasus has shown, which has been used to spy on journalists like Jamal Khashoggi who was murdered.^{5,6} Increasingly, profit-oriented tech companies comply with the demands of state actors, restricting their services because they are not willing to endanger their business in that country's market. Under such circumstances, human rights activists often only rely on what civil society has to offer, such as the Tor network, a tool which – despite limited resources and other downsides – claims to offer *one net*.

ONLINE DISCRIMINATION

And yet, even when the finest hardware and a high-speed internet connection are available, and the state does not hinder access, people are sometimes still forced to stay offline. Online hate is a serious phenomenon that can target anyone, but certain societal groups are especially affected. Women who speak out online as well as people from marginalised communities are often insulted and even receive threats to their life in a hostile social media environment. A survey of 14,000 young women from 22 countries showed that 58% faced online harassment or abuse, resulting in mental or emotional stress, and finally to less online activity.⁷ Unsurprisingly, men are 21% more likely to be online than women.⁸

DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

In this context, civil society actors are increasingly pointing to the divides that make access to the digital sphere unequal and calling for efforts to bridge them. But who do we mean when we refer to digital civil society? As the digital transformation penetrates all areas of life, it is no longer sufficient to think of a small group of associations that have a deep technical understanding of digitisation. Instead, the term includes experts as well as digital pioneers and newcomers who are confronted with the digital divides and are willing to find solutions to overcome them.

OBJECTIVES

The CrossCulture Programme's focus on digital civil society has four objectives:

- Promote knowledge transfer: Share new, proven digital programmes, methods, and instruments. Discuss and adapt tools to meet the needs of relevant social and political contexts in different countries.
- Promote diverse perspectives: Give civil society organisations in Germany access to regional expertise as well as to the networks of the CCP fellowship holders and vice versa.
- Strengthen multipliers: Empower fellowship holders in their role as activists and multipliers.
- Promote networking: Foster international networking and cross-border knowledge transfer. Enable non-European perspectives to contribute to current debates, ensuring more diverse and inclusive solutions.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

This publication is a collection of a variety of outlooks, recommendations, and input from the participants of the workshop and others. On the subject of digital access, CCP alumnus Camilo Olea speaks about the digital divide in Mexico and how his organisation is providing access to indigenous rural communities. The German NGO Superrr demands an open digital infrastructure and more open-source software for a more inclusive digital sphere.

Ali (name changed), a Bangladeshi journalist and CCP alumnus, gives an overview of the current state of free speech in Bangladesh. CCP alumna Hend Kheiralla from Sudan shares her view on the role of social

media during the Sudanese Revolution and the impact of the internet shutdown.

Having experienced severe discrimination online herself, a CCP alumna from Jordan talks about her experiences and the impact of attacks as well as strategies for dealing with them. Love Storm, a German NGO that focuses on countering hatred online, suggests specific measures we can start using directly to create a safe and inclusive online space for everyone.

We wish you a good read!

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- 4 »#KeepItOn: Fighting internet shutdowns around the world«, Access Now, accessed on July 29, 2021, <https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton>.
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- 7 »Free to be online?«, Plan International, accessed on July 29, 2021, <https://plan-international.org/publications/freetobeonline>.
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We try to stay up to date on ideas, concepts, topics, and technologies related to digital civil society. If you have any feedback, advice, or questions, please let us know: crossculture@ifa.de





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CIVIL SOCIETY:
LET OUR
HACKERS
CHECK

ZOOM.



DIGITAL ACCESS



» WE BRING THE INTERNET IN A BOX «

Camilo Olea



Mexico is a divided country; especially rural communities suffer from poverty, corruption, and a lack of basic resources. By providing them with access to the web, CCP Fellow *Camilo Olea* wants to improve education, support financial independence, and eliminate the digital divide.

On the index of The Alliance for Affordable Internet (a4ai), Mexico has ranked among the top ten for infrastructure and access for several years. What is your take on the state of internet infrastructure in Mexico?

There is good connectivity in parts of the country, but there are large areas without access to the internet. There are a few reasons for that. For one, Mexico is a very divided country. We have a saying that there are two Mexicos. The modern Mexico that you see in cities like Mexico City and the one we call Deep Mexico (»México profundo«), which consists of the indigenous communities and millions of poor people. Probably half of the country lives in poverty, many of them in extreme poverty. Also, you have to keep in mind that Mexico is a big country with lots of people. At least half of the Mexican population lives in rural areas where there is very bad or no public infrastructure at all. They have no internet, some of them don't have access to a phone, water, or electricity. So, while there is very good connectivity in the richer parts of the big cities, there are large areas of the country that don't have access.

Your organisation Kaanbal Innovación Social is working on bringing the internet to rural communities. Why is it important for those people, in particular, to have access to the internet?

There is a lot of poverty in rural areas. For many people, education is a way out of poverty. The internet provides opportunities for education and for people to sell their products. For example, we brought internet connectivity to a very small rural community in Quintana Roo called »Los Jueves«, where a cooperative of Mayan women called »Muuch Kaab« (Mayan for »united bees«) produces honey from an endangered bee species. Our organisation collaborated with the NGO Internet Society to secure a grant, which allowed us to pay for the infrastructure to bring internet to the cooperative. After everything was up and running, they were able to reach new markets thanks to the internet – and eventually increased their sales by more than 60%!

The way ahead will be to enrich those rural communities, give them better access to fundamental services and rights such as access to internet connectivity, better health services and basic infrastructure like telephone or electricity and, of course, better work opportunities so they don't have to leave their communities.

Internet infrastructure is one of the areas where governments can make a big difference. Why doesn't the government solve this issue?

Unfortunately, there is a lot of corruption in Mexico. So while there are good intentions, the help often doesn't get to the people who need it. Also, there are just too

many poor communities. I would say it is a mixture of corruption and not enough resources to cover all the communities.

But there are some effective programmes. The telecommunications office has a programme that is working on internet for everyone. We are collaborating with them to get more communities connected. It's a good programme, but the funding is increasingly being cut.

One of the first ideas Kaanbal Innovación Social came up with in the past few years was the Internet-in-a-box. Could you describe how it works?

My colleague Pedro Gonzalez and I are both engineers from Cancún. Almost six years ago, we started »Kaanbal Innovación Social« in our city. Kaanbal is the Mayan word for »to learn«. Our first aim was to bring information and education to remote rural areas.

Using open hardware and software – in this case a Raspberry Pi computer and RACHEL/Internet-in-a-Box – we developed the platform PuntoWiFi, which can be filled with information from Wikipedia and other websites for education or health and is accessible with cheap smartphones that even the remotest villages usually have. The idea was to bring a selection of important internet sites to areas with no internet access at all.

Our first mission was to bring this device to rural schools, but we found that other people in the communities were interested, too. Now, the whole community knows how to access and use the platform.

Since then, we have been working with different organisations to not only bring rural communities the Internet-in-a-Box but also the whole internet. We are cooperating with the government as well as private companies such as a big mining company that aims to connect remote villages where a lot of their workers live.

Over time, we have evolved into a social NGO that looks for innovative solutions to different social problems such as a lack of work opportunities. We also act as a social project incubator, helping and supporting social entrepreneurs in rural communities.

What problems do you face in Mexico?

One of the things I've learned is that you can't do this alone. You must look for funding and allies such as the government, other NGOs, or private enterprises. I do a lot of networking and try to get people to listen and join the cause. Unfortunately, Mexico is a country where many people don't care much about the poor. So, it's difficult to get support for your goals. Slowly but steadily, we're growing and finding more allies to help more communities.

Do you work with other NGOs in Mexico that have goals similar to Kaanbal's? Do they face the same problems? Are there ways to connect and help each other?

People in Mexico tend to work in closely knit groups. A popular way of thinking here is more or less »Why should we join others when we can do it on our own?« There are other NGOs in Mexico who work in a similar field; but it is difficult to get them to work with us. I have the feeling that things are different on an international level. I loved working with ifa, and I hope we can do more together in the coming years. One of my main plans for this year is to get together with other NGOs and figure out ways to collaborate. Currently, my main source of income is private work with commercial clients; I would love to change this and be able to make a living from social work with our NGO and others.

Where do you get support and funding for your projects?

We are lucky that at the end of last year we were recognised as a non-profit organisation, making donations to us tax deductible. So donating now appeals to a lot of individuals and companies, which means more funds. Funding works in different ways for various projects. When we work with the government, aid comes in the form of infrastructure and equipment; when we work with private companies, we tend to get funds. After almost six years, we're now ready to start paying some people in the organisation for their help.



CAMILO OLEA-GARCÍA is a digital marketing and e-commerce consultant, project manager and a teacher of entrepreneurship & innovation. He is also the co-founder and CEO of the Mexican NGO Kaanbal Innovacion Social, which aims to empower rural communities through education and digital connectivity. He was a CCP Fellow in 2020 at Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst. www.kaanbal.org

Since the beginning of 2020, Covid-19 has put the world on hold – how did you and Kaanbal adapt to this situation? Have you found new ways of working and connecting to the communities?

Our main aim is to bring education to the people. But schools in Mexico have been closed for almost a year now, so some of our devices are not being used – because they're in the schools. The projects we planned with a mining company in the provinces of Chihuahua and Sonora as well as our plans with the telecommunications office were delayed; for months we couldn't get to the communities for health security reasons. But on the other hand, we learned that our devices can be put to good use even now. Some teachers take the portable device with them to visit their pupils and connect with them through the platform and phones. During the pandemic, we've learned a few things about our work and especially about how people are using our devices and what ideas they have.

What is your future vision for the internet in Mexico and globally?

I also work with the NGO Internet Society whose aim is to bring the internet to everybody in the world. That is what I want to keep working on: bringing education and internet connectivity to everyone and reducing the digital gap. But that isn't the end of the story. If you bring the internet to a community that has never had any access, you will create new problems. People can very easily misuse the resource because of a lack of training. It is very important to educate people on how to use the internet. You have to teach them how they can benefit educationally and economically. The whole world should be connected, but people must also be taught how to use the internet and its benefits. Another important part of my vision is: Keep the internet open. Stop the division of the internet into different platforms, the excessive collection of data, and the domination of the internet by a few companies and make it easy for everyone to have access to basic rights such as identity services, financial inclusion, education and communication.

Interview by
Carsten Görig



OUT IN THE OPEN: HOW OPEN-SOURCE SHAPES OUR DIGITAL FUTURE

*Elisa Lindinger
and Julia Kloiber*

In contrast to the products of big tech companies, open-source software is mostly available for free and intended to be shared and altered by a global user network. *Elisa Lindinger* and *Julia Kloiber* from *SUPERRR* offer insights into the development of open source and how it could help create a more inclusive digital future.

The use of contact tracing apps has been widely debated in the ongoing fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In Germany, the government commissioned the companies SAP and Deutsche Telekom to develop the warning app for COVID-19 based on open-source software. But what does open source actually mean?

While the term open source is usually associated with technology, it is first and foremost a legal construct. The concept of open source was invented in the context of software, but it has since spread to other, non-technological fields as well. Open-source means that a product is licensed in a way that allows everyone to view, use, alter and redistribute it. The term *licence* is not used in the same sense as it is for proprietary software products, for which users must first pay a licence fee; instead *licence* refers to a set of legal terms that define certain aspects concerning the use of software, e.g. whether it may be re-used in closed-source software. Open-source software is royalty free.

The concept of open-source software licencing was created in the 1980s, when software production shifted from academia – where software was habitually shared and co-created – to private companies that tried to maintain control over their software products by patenting parts of them and reserving rights of use and distribution. The Free Software Movement¹ tried to preserve a culture of collaboration and software sharing by defining the first licence model: The GNU General Public license (GPL).² It guarantees the right to use, inspect, alter and redistribute code, as long as the result, if published, is subject to the same licence model. Today, there are many similar licences that are commonly referred to as *free* or *open-source licences*.³ They have become so common that there are even some humorous licences, such as »Beerware«, which allows anyone to use the code but asks people to buy the developers a drink if they find it useful.⁴

Open source, however, has always involved much more than just the legal aspect of sharing software code. It goes hand in hand with an ethos of working out in the open and collaborating freely with people around the globe. This has led to a unique ecosystem of people and organisations contributing to the same software project: companies, freelancers and volunteers work loosely together, mostly self-organised.⁵

Even though we might not know it, most of us use open-source software everyday: Many popular browsers like Chrome Firefox and Safari use open-source rendering engines. Of the top ten websites on the internet, only two don't run on Linux, the most-widely used open-source operating system.⁶ Linux also drives cutting-edge research; not only are the 500 largest supercomputers world-wide based on the Linux kernel, even the helicopter Ingenuity that landed on Mars with the Perseverance Rover in February 2021 runs on Linux.

The idea of open source has spread to other fields as well: Creative commons is an open-licence model for creative works that would otherwise be copyrighted, such as images, texts or even datasets⁷. In recent years, the open hardware movement has also been growing, proving its potential at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when makerspaces all over the world produced much-needed face shields for medical staff.⁸

Contrary to common belief, an open-source licence does not mean that you can't make a profit – customers just pay for different things compared to proprietary software. Instead of paying for an off-the-shelf solution, open-source businesses create value by adapting the code to the needs of individual customers, or by providing it both as an open-source product (for free) or as a payable service.

TACKLING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Open-source software and the open-source model of collaboration will not magically overcome the digital divide that has been entrenched for decades. But its principles address a number of underlying challenges. While proprietary software producers decide which features and functionalities to implement in their products, often focussing on western markets, open-source software may be adapted to work in different contexts. It can be translated into any language or can correctly display writing from right to left or top to bottom. It usually needs less memory and computing power and therefore works more efficiently with older hardware, which in turn becomes obsolete less quickly.⁹

But resources are needed to make such alterations. Since many open-source communities are still based in the global north, the adaptation of non-western writing systems and languages often has low priority. Therefore, some open-source communities are pushing for a more diverse field of contributors. Programmes like the Rails Girls Summer of Code¹⁰ organise paid internships for aspiring female software developers from around the world to join an open-source project. It helps that there is an abundance of open-licence teaching material online to get started with coding. However, most of that material is only available in English – and students still need access to a computer to learn.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN OPEN SOURCE

With reports emerging daily about digital surveillance, unlawful data collection, manipulation of public opinion on social media, and discriminating algorithms, civil society organisations are pushing for the wider use of open-source solutions, since one of the big advantages of open-source software is transparency. Its code can be analysed by external stakeholders for intentional backdoor and security issues; the results can be evaluated for correctness. With transparency comes trust: After a heated debate between researchers, software developers, tech companies and political stakeholders at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the German government decided on a contact tracing app that was open-source instead of the proprietary, closed-source solution it had banked on earlier. Even though the usefulness of these applications is under debate, the code behind the German application was not only adapted by several other countries, it could also be made interoperable with applications developed in other countries without much ado. This made it possible to trace infections across borders.

If this practice caught on and more public spending went towards funding open-source products, it could boost the open ecosystem in an unprecedented way. While it is not known how much money countries like Germany spend on software licences, it is clear that a large part goes towards proprietary software licences, the price of which is dictated by private companies. Changing providers would entail changing the entire IT setup currently in use. A move towards open-source software in the public sector would make the sector more independent and at the same time foster competition in the software market.

Open-source software is still mostly used where it remains unseen – on countless servers, airplane entertainment systems¹¹, and even cars¹² –, but it has the potential to make public IT more independent, public spending more sustainable, and to provide more transparency in a time when digital technology pervades every aspect of life. Not only can it serve as a means to alleviate the digital divide, but it is also the easiest – and perhaps the only – way for us to co-create a just digital future.

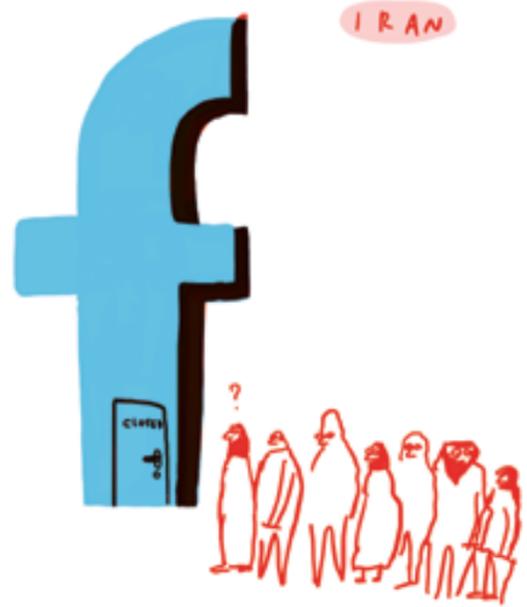
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ELISA LINDINGER AND JULIA KLOIBER are working at the intersection of technology and society. In 2019, they founded the Berlin-based nonprofit SUPERRR Lab to develop visions and projects with the goal to create more equitable futures. In their research work they study the social implications of technology, and in their advocacy work they challenge the power and purpose of technology in society.



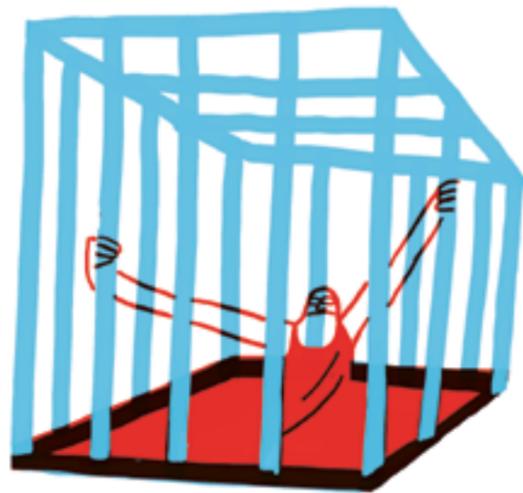
THE DAY THE INTERNET SHUT DOWN



FACEBOOK → CLOSED.
WE NEED IT FOR THE PROTEST.
(OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA DIDN'T
WORK DURING THE DEMONSTRATIONS)

IRAN:

DO YOU KNOW,



WE CAN GO TO JAIL
FOR A FACEBOOK-POST.



BANGLADESH:
SAME HERE

WHICH DIGITAL RIGHTS SHOULD BE GUARANTEED?

»I think the most important rights are freedom of speech in the digital space, data protection rights, and the right to privacy, which includes not being under government surveillance. Another important right is to have access to digital space (including the right to know how to connect to the internet using various devices, which might be difficult for non-digital generations) and access to free knowledge«

ANASTASIA TARASOVA, RUSSIA

»Digital rights are basically »good old« human rights in the context of the digital era. The most important rights are online privacy and data protection, freedom of expression, protection from discrimination, freedom of assembly, association and participation.

Regarding the violation of digital rights, one of the biggest challenges I see for Ukraine are data privacy and data protection. Several months ago, private data was leaked which was stored by a government agency. Of course, I feel unsafe in this situation.«

OLEKSI LYSKA, ARMENIA

WHAT IS CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE?

»It is civil society's role to influence the enactment of relevant laws in collaboration with lawyers and representatives in parliament, when possible, to initiate educational projects, to fight for cheap access to digital knowledge, and promote projects providing free, or at least cheap, access to knowledge, to make human digital rights violations publicly visible, and to help victims defend themselves and protect their freedom.«

ANASTASIA TARASOVA, RUSSIA

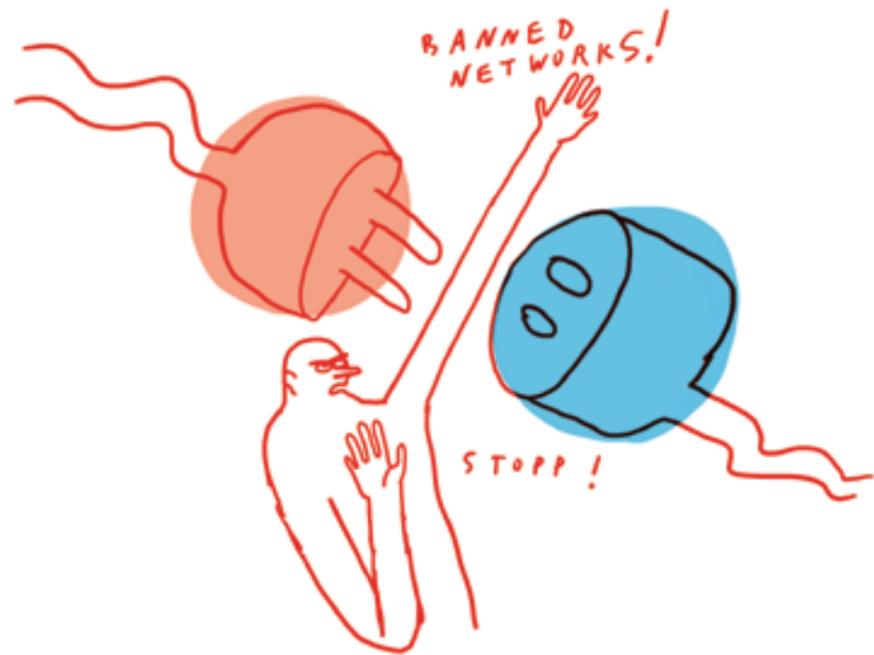
»With regard to civil society's role concerning digital rights, I do not see a principal difference compared to »traditional« rights. Civil society's functions are the same: protection, raising awareness, civic education, and civic activism.

The following steps should be taken in order to improve the digital rights situation in Ukraine: strengthen civil society organisations, combat digital illiteracy, and foster civic education. To support civil society, the government and international foundations could conduct awareness raising campaigns and capacity building measures and financially support projects proposed by NGOs.«

OLEKSI LYSKA, ARMENIA

CROSSROADS ON THE DIGITAL HIGHWAY

Ali



The internet-savvy youth in Bangladesh is becoming more and more vocal about social issues and injustice in their country, while the government uses vague laws to arrest critical voices. What Bangladesh needs is more knowledge and funding for secure digitisation says *Ali*¹.

Bangladesh is at a crossroads. It is undergoing rapid development which will define the country's policies and outlook on the topics of digital security, activism and journalism. In addition, the country is on its way to realising what it calls its Vision 2021, a goal set by the government to achieve the status of a middle-income country and to digitalise infrastructure and services, thus increasing the use and accessibility of digital technology all over the country². This strategy is fondly referred to as >Digital Bangladesh< and much of it has been achieved with large scale projects being implemented in both the public and private sector.

There are more than 165 million mobile phone subscribers in Bangladesh, many with social media access, so online activism and citizen journalism are on the rise. But the question we need to ask is whether Bangladesh is ready to secure and protect its citizens' rights and freedom in the digital arena?

Bangladesh is seeing the rise of a young generation of people born in the 1990s and early 2000s who are very aware of their country's socio-political issues. They are vocal about their civil rights and liberties. Recently, social media has sparked a lot of activism and social uprisings on issues like rape, gender, abuse against women and children, and traffic safety. Much of this has been inspired by movements elsewhere in the world where social media was used to mobilise people for protests.

THE DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

But the government response to these protests, activism and journalistic reports has sometimes been very controversial, especially when criticism of government policies on various issues is involved, much to the distress of activists, journalists and international human rights bodies. Bangladesh introduced its first information and communications technology (ICT) law in 2006, which included the much debated Section 57. This subsection was very vague in its definition. According to an Amnesty International report, it has been widely used to arrest more than a thousand people, including journalists, student activists or politicians.³ With support from international bodies, civil society and journalists have been protesting against Section 57. In October 2018, the government of Bangladesh introduced a new law, the Digital Security Act (DSA), which they claimed to be an update that would ensure the security of digital devices. But it contains provisions for non-bailable offences which have resulted in serious humanitarian issues in recent times.

There have been several high-profile arrests based on these two laws, most notably the arrest of the inter-

nationally acclaimed activist and journalist Shahidul Alam under the ICT law; he was accused of spreading propaganda and false information about the government. Another recent incident that has sparked protests from youth, student politicians and activists is the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in jail in February 2021.⁴ Ahmed was arrested under the DSA and was denied bail several times despite concerns about his health. Another arrestee in the same case, cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore, has been granted bail following Mushtaq Ahmed's death, although he was denied bail several times before that. Bärbel Kofler, Germany's federal human rights commissioner, has called on the Bangladesh government to conduct an independent inquiry into Mushtaq's death.⁵ According to Human Rights Watch Asia Director, Brad Adams, »[t]he new Digital Security Act is a tool ripe for abuse and a clear violation of the country's obligations under international law to protect free speech«.⁶ Human Rights Watch has also described the law as overly broad and vague with potentially harsh penalties which might result in less freedom of speech and more self-censorship on the part of journalists and activists.

The unfortunate reality is that there are no viable security strategies for activists and journalists. There have been protests from liberal and left-wing student movements and newspaper editors, but they have been in vain. A few lawyers like the barrister Jyotirmoy Barua have been fighting tooth and nail to protect the rights of activists and people in general, but civil society hasn't been very active or able to convince the government to hear their views on this topic. Journalists, activists, and also the employing news agencies often lack knowledge of digital security and personal safety, making them vulnerable when working on sensitive issues. Dissemination of this knowledge must become a priority to keep people active and safe.

THE CHALLENGE OF SHUTDOWNS

Other worrying incidents have been the internet shutdowns, or more specifically social media shutdowns, that have been happening in Bangladesh in recent years, especially in situations where the authorities were abusing their power to curb protests or activities that it believed targeted its policies or laws. In cases of social media shutdowns, there have been ways to circumvent them and access these media via various tools such as the TOR network, VPN, and secure messengers; but most people lack the knowledge needed to do so. Circumventing an internet shutdown, by contrast, would be a completely different matter. It's possible to do, of

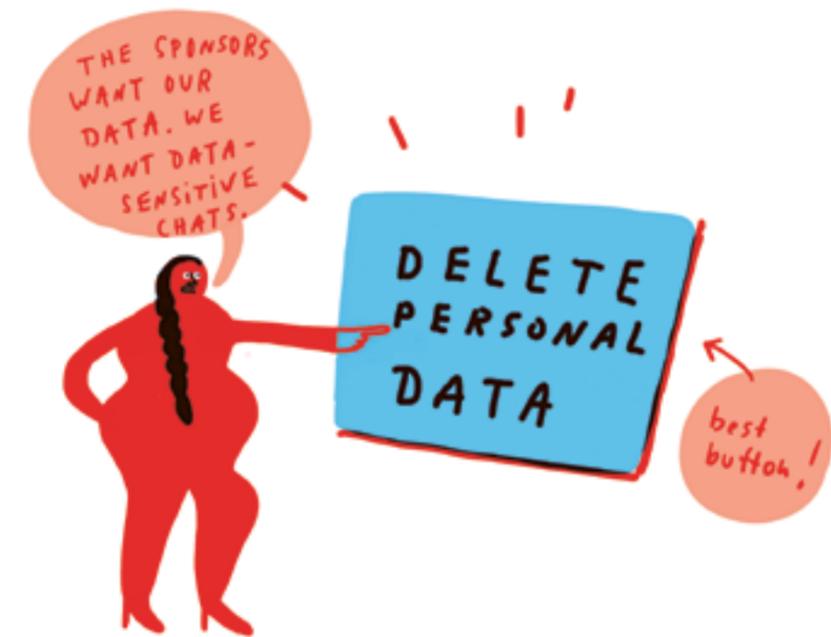
course, and some methods were used during the Arab Spring when the internet was shut down in that region. But it would require dedicated systems run by tech savvy people who prioritise protecting people's rights and interests over business interests.

It will become increasingly easy for governments to control the internet in the future as many countries are forging connections with tech giants like Facebook and Google. In addition, digital reconnaissance and interception technologies are developing rapidly and being used by agencies and organisations like the NSA, CIA and their counterparts in other countries. The control and management of data is the main struggle in this millennium; whoever controls data and information will be able to control the world and its people. Will the governments work for the people who elect them, or will they fight for their own interests? And what role will the large tech corporations play who have already been criticised worldwide for violating people's trust and rights for the sake of gaining profit? Only time will tell, but civil society should be involved in deciding which route we will take.



ALI (name changed) is a documentary photographer and digital security trainer based in Bangladesh who works on issues like climate change, women's rights and social media's impact on society. He also works as a visual consultant for different international organisations and NGOs. He absolved his CCP Fellowship in 2019.

- 1 *name changed
- 2 Lutfar Rahman. »Digital Bangladesh: Dreams and reality«, The Daily Star, March 10, 2015, <https://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/24th-anniversary-the-daily-star-part-1/digital-bangladesh-dreams-and-reality-7311>.
- 3 »Bangladesh: New Digital Security Act is attack on freedom of expression«, Amnesty International, November 12, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/bangladesh-muzzling-dissent-online>.
- 4 »Arrested in Digital Security case, writer Mushtaq Ahmed dies in jail«, Dhaka Tribune, February 25, 2021, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/02/25/charged-under-digital-security-act-writer-mushtaq-ahmed-dies-in-jail>.
- 5 Arataful Islam. »How is Bangladesh's Digital Security Act muzzling free speech?«, Deutsche Welle, March 3, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-is-bangladesbs-digital-security-act-muzzling-free-speech/a-56762799>.
- 6 »Bangladesh: New Law Will Silence Critics«, Human Rights Watch, September 24, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/24/bangladesh-new-law-will-silence-critics>.



HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS OR INTERNATIONAL FUNDING ORGANISATIONS HELP CIVIL SOCIETY TO DEFEND DIGITAL RIGHTS AND BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE?

»Russia is a member of the European Council, so we can at least unite and appeal to the Human Rights Court, which still has jurisdiction over the federal courts, to get some justice there. The Russian institutions still obey its decisions. Considering the deepening political isolation, our government might leave the European Council one day (in a worst-case scenario), then there would be no court other than international courts to get justice. International councils are helpful as they allow us to network, consult, and inform each other of different violations or best practices.«

ANASTASIA TARASOVA, RUSSIA

»In Germany, having a stable internet connection, including sufficient bandwidth, and digital equipment in good condition is clearly a precondition for full economic and social participation. This has been especially true during the current coronavirus pandemic.

Bridging the digital divide on a global scale no longer means building basic infrastructure as more than 90 per cent of the global population live in areas with mobile broadband network coverage. It is rather about building an affordable, accessible, and safe information environment for everybody.

Social media companies should be encouraged to take effective steps against the spread of misinformation and disinformation on their platforms.«

ALEXANDER MATSCHKE, GERMANY

» WE COULD NOT IGNORE THE REVOLUTION « *Hend Kheiralla*

In 2018 Sudan was shaken by a civil society revolution. Social media and digital storytelling were important sources of information during the protests as well as a way to connect to the world. CCP Fellow *Hend Kheiralla* not only joined the protests on the streets but also shaped the online narrative.

In December 2018, people in Sudan started holding sit-ins and street protests against the rule of Omar al-Bashir, who had been in power for over 30 years. Al-Bashir was overthrown in April 2019. That summer, a plan to return the country to democracy was agreed on. What was the reason for the uprising?

The reign of al-Bashir was characterised by corruption and social divisions. Nothing improved. We had lots of ethnic conflicts, a civil war, and, in 2011, South Sudan separated from Sudan. Everything was falling apart; Al-Bashir seemed only to care about some parts of Sudan, leaving other regions underdeveloped. People became fed up. Al-Bashir could either improve, or he had to go. From December to April, people took to the streets. At first, they were afraid. I remember people coming out in small numbers, not actually believing the protests would happen. But the tensions grew. In December, people in the town of Atbara started protesting and even burned down a government building. At the same time, our currency was going down, inflation was rising, and living in that situation was just awful. We had protests before, all of which were suppressed. So this time there was a lot of fear of that happening again, but it didn't stop people from marching, even though people had lost their lives or disappeared in the past, and some are still missing.

How did you personally experience the revolution?

I am Sudanese, so I felt the same anger and frustration as everyone else. At the beginning, I was afraid to go out. First, I told myself to watch how things unfold, but seeing my friends go out and march encouraged me to go out myself.

One of the most intense experiences for me was the sit-in in front of the Ministry of Defence. That was one of the most dangerous places to go because it was the army headquarters. But people went anyway. We joined them when we first heard about people going there and realised that it was actually happening.

Another important thing for me was the increased acceptance of people from Darfur, where I come from. For a long time, a war was fought in this region of Sudan, fuelled by Bashir, and there was racism against people from that region. Now I suddenly heard people chanting »We are all Darfur«.

My work was also very important for me at that time. I work for Andariya, a digital storytelling platform. Its aim is to tell positive stories about Sudan and Africa. We want to show the positive side of our countries and not talk about politics or religion. When the revolution started, it was difficult to tell positive stories and not take sides.

We started a project called #RevolutionInNumbers where we collected data about the revolution. These data included the number of articles written on the revolution and the protests in Sudan. We looked at data from the ground, trying to find out how many people were wounded and killed and how, as well as how they were targeted in the first place. This data allowed us to write detailed stories about the revolution.

This is how I experienced the revolution: Through data, numbers, and by being on the streets in Khartoum.

»Protesters were directed through social media«

What was the role of social media in the Sudanese Revolution?

Reporting and updates were shared on social media. We were constantly on our phones to see what was happening and get warnings about dangerous areas. People were directing the protesters through Twitter and Facebook to keep them safe.

Providing footage was also important so people could show the outside world and the people in Sudan what was going on. Most things happened in Khartoum, so footage connected the Sudanese people everywhere and encouraged people watching from home. We showed them what was happening on the streets, because government media didn't report on it.

Social media also played a big role for the diaspora, Sudanese people living outside Sudan. They drew worldwide attention to what was happening in Sudan. They began using hashtags such as #SudanUprising and #IAmTheSudanRevolution and setting up digital media campaigns. During the internet shutdown, they became the voice of Sudan by keeping up the momentum and reporting. Another important thing the diaspora did was fundraising. During the sit-in, for instance, the diaspora coordinated fundraising campaigns to collect funds in support of the sit-in and provide shelter, water and food for the protesters.

What role did pictures on social media play?

For me, pictures are good and bad at the same time. Pictures are very important for sending messages, but they never show everything that is going on. I remember one picture of a woman on top of a car that has become very iconic. It quickly started trending. In Sudan women are oppressed, so seeing this woman chanting on a car was amazing. She represented something for the Sudanese women. But the revolution was more than just chanting on top of a car; it was brutal and violent.

What challenges exist for social media actors in Sudan?

During the revolution, social media in Sudan was restricted by limited internet access and a lack of digital marketing tools for creating content. The government strategy of shutting down the internet was an infringement of digital rights, something that social media actors need to continuously advocate for. Like most people who work online, we got away with a lot of our reporting though, because, at first, the government didn't invest much in monitoring social media. They targeted the established media, the newspapers, TV stations and journalists. You could do a lot more online than what was possible in traditional media.

»Hate speech mirrors offline events«

You worked on a lexicon of online hate speech in Sudan. Could you tell us about its origin and where it is being used?

The lexicon is pretty new and has different goals. People wondered why we made a hate speech lexicon. We were accused of having a political agenda. But Andariya and our partners at Peaceteck Lab, who funded the project, wanted to show the effects of hate speech and how it triggers violence. We wanted to educate and provide a database for different uses.

In some ways, hate speech only mirrors what is happening offline. A lot of the words and phrases we found were much older than the current conflict and were just being used in a new setting. We researched the conflict, its political background, and the oppression of women and collected things we thought are hate speech.

Working on the hate speech lexicon was eye-opening. I learned why a lot of women hide their faces or don't post online, and how racial issues in Sudan manifest through hate speech.

It was important for us to point out the differences between hate speech and insults. In Sudan, a lot of insults



HEND KHEIRALLA works as a project manager at the digital platform & cross-cultural enterprise *Andariya*, which covers stories from Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda from an independent and diverse perspective. As a storyteller, Hend wants to break down stereotypes and taboos about Africa and Europe and promote mutual understanding. She absolved her remote CCP Fellowship in 2020 at Thomson Media.

are racist. When someone calls you a slave or westerner, it is very offensive. We found out why that is and put it in the lexicon.

The lexicon is for learning about what hate speech is. But we also think it could help countries that have laws against hate speech, or it can be integrated into the educational system. It can also help companies like Facebook and Twitter to identify hate speech.

You mentioned that there was an internet shutdown during the revolution – what kind of effect did the shutdown have?

Even during the shutdown, some internet providers were still working, the expensive ones used by the government and big companies, so only few people had access and providing information took longer.

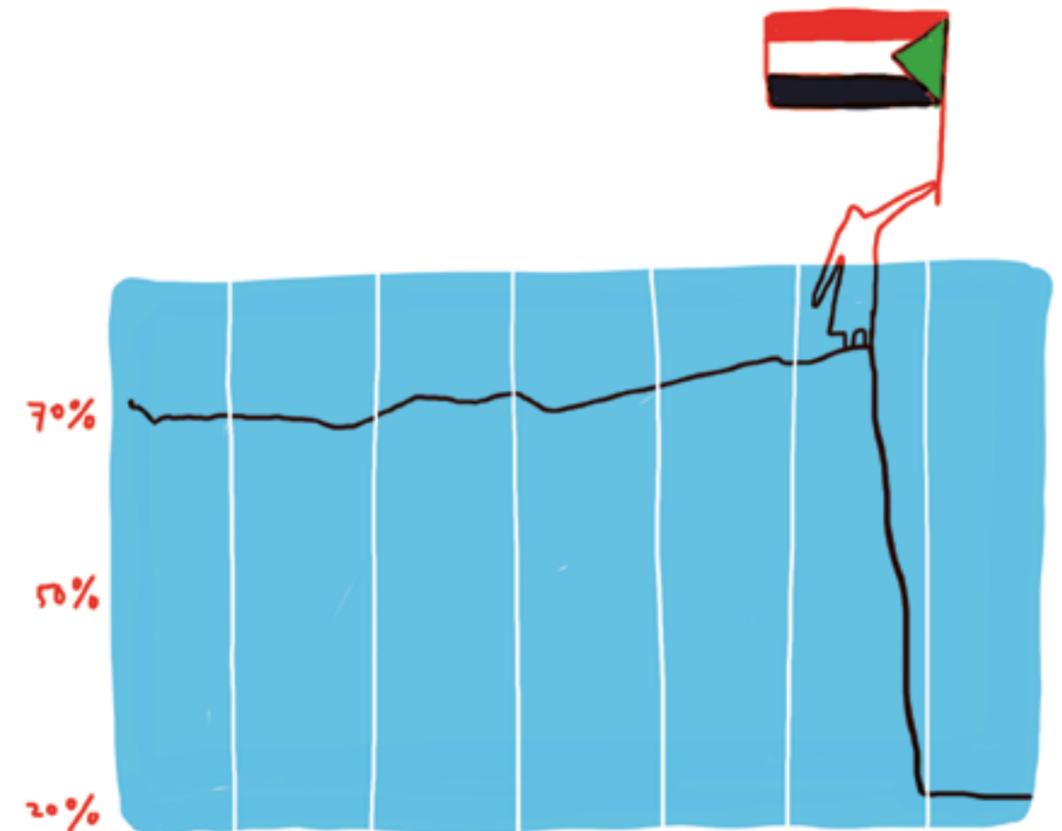
The first thing we noticed during the internet shutdown was how important social media was for us. Suddenly we were ignorant of what was going on. Everyone was afraid to go out. But we found ways around it, though they were difficult and slow. For instance, you could use your phone for reporting, but social media is much faster than phoning or sending text messages, and it reaches more people at once. Sometimes it is important to see things unfolding hour by hour. That was what social media did and what was missing during the shutdown.

How did the shutdown affect you personally?

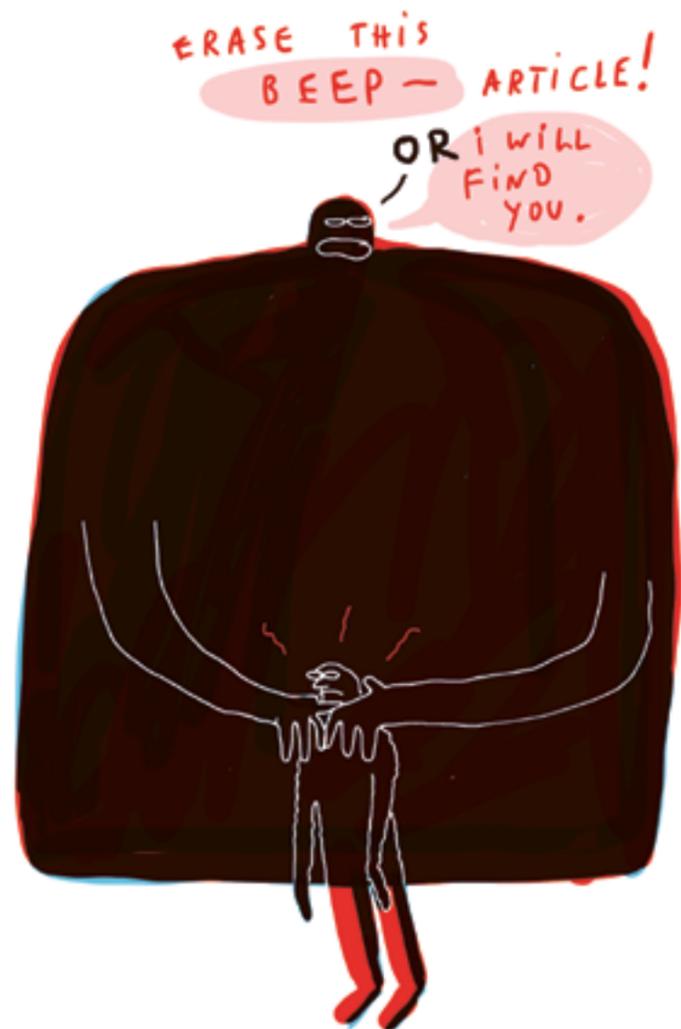
It was very damaging on many levels. I went to sleep, and when I woke up there was no internet. At the same time there were reports of a massacre on TV in which people had been killed. I couldn't check on my friends. It was very confusing, like someone switched off the lights and suddenly you were in the dark and didn't know what was happening. And at the same time you want and need to know.

It really shows you the power of the government. But it also shows you the influence of social media and how afraid the government really was.

Interview by
Carsten Görig



DISCRIMINATION ONLINE



WHAT SOCIAL GROUPS IN YOUR CONTEXT ARE PREDOMINANTLY AFFECTED BY HATE SPEECH? IS HATE SPEECH CREATING A DIGITAL DIVIDE?

»I think hate speech creates a digital divide in different regards: First, it allows perpetrators to easily hide and remain anonymous. Second, some of the victims are not able to defend themselves because they are not familiar with or do not have access to the internet. Another reason could be that they lack the motivation to counter the attacks because they are afraid or tired of offline and online discrimination. Therefore, it is crucial to develop empowerment strategies to overcome the invisibility of perpetrators and the fears of victims.«

DANIEL TONN, GERMANY

»Anyone who does not conform to societal norms can become the victim of hate speech, be they women, trans-genders, sex workers, ethnic or religious minorities. People who constantly face hate speech also experience mental health and self-esteem issues, and that directly affects their participation as responsible citizens. They cannot perform well because everyone around them is telling them they aren't good enough.

Being queer is still considered a big taboo in my society. Anyone can come under attack if they defy or question patriarchal norms and values. Hate speech is creating a digital divide as people have turned social media into a place for deciding who is right and who is wrong.«

ALI ABBAS, PAKISTAN

PEOPLE OFTEN CAN'T
TELL THE DIFFERENCE



BETWEEN CONSTRUCTIVE
CRITICISM AND HATING.

I'M AFRAID OF
GOING BACK ONLINE.

I DON'T WANT TO GO
THROUGH IT AGAIN.



THE POWER OF FEAR

*Anonymous**



WE NEED TO BE SAFE IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE.

Speaking out online always takes courage, but as a woman in Jordan, it might even be life-threatening. One of our CCP Alumna speaks about her own experiences, the waves of hatred she has encountered and the importance of self-care.

In 2020, the year the Covid-19 pandemic began, cases of domestic violence and so-called »honour killings« skyrocketed in Jordan.¹ Like any normal person who feels repulsed by such horrific acts, I took to social media platforms to talk about women's rights in a country that does not even grant women the right to life. From previous experiences, I expected some backlash since women's rights are one of the three topics that are »forbidden« in public discourse (religion and politics are the other two). But what I did not expect was the degree of harassment I was subjected to and the hatred that some people expressed in their attempts to stop me from talking about such issues. I was attacked each time I commented on a story about a woman killed by a male relative who thought that was the best way of dealing with a »disobedient« woman. Or a woman beaten by her husband to the point of permanent injury. I was attacked in comments and private messages, threatened with physical and sexual assault, or told I would be doxed² and my personal data hacked and published. I was called the rudest and most derogatory names: a »slut« and a »whore« who »wants to destroy society's morals and conservativeness«. The least unnerving harassment was in the form of men telling me to go back to where I belong, by which they meant the kitchen, and women who accused me of being against god for demanding that women have the right to choose how to live.

FEELING TRAPPED

I felt trapped, like those women for whom social media is the only place where they can try to save themselves and their children by writing online about the abuse they suffer and posting videos to document what is happening to them. They hope that doing so will put pressure on the government to do its job and protect them. Still, they are attacked on social media or accused of making things up.

I tried my best to ignore the hate and focus on writing and raising my voice against what women in my country go through, but I was naïve to think that it would not affect me. I underestimated the power of fear. Even though I am currently not in Jordan, I was still afraid that someone would try to follow through with their threats. I felt helpless and hopeless, reading horrible new stories about women suffering or dying and not being able to help them or stop it from happening again. My mental health took a deep dive at this point. I started having anxiety attacks and I lost the ability to focus on my studies and work. I became depressed, and my thoughts went to a very dark place. Once I reached that point, I knew I needed help. Through the support

of a dear friend of mine who stood and still stands by my side, I contacted the mental health department at my current university. Thanks to them, I am now improving.

During my healing journey, I deactivated all my accounts on social media. It was a hard decision because it felt as if I was betraying the women who are suffering and cannot find help. It felt as if the people who attacked me had won, and I would sometimes imagine them laughing proudly that they had silenced another woman. But I also know that if I want to get better, I need to eliminate the source of pain and hurt, at least until I am strong enough to fight again. The idea of reactivating those accounts still scares me.

So, I decided to take a different approach to talk about women's rights issues in Jordan and the Arab world. I created fake accounts as a male user, joined the pages and groups I was part of with my real accounts, and started posting, commenting, and supporting other activists. It was not much of a surprise to see that I had much better experiences this way. I was still attacked by other users saying that I was destroying the moral fabric of society. But the attacks were not as vicious as they were when I was using my original accounts with a female name. Another thing I noticed was that the attacks were not about my body or looks, and derogative words were missing. I also noticed that the replies to my comments were now more like a conversation, as if people were willing to discuss the topic with me now that I appeared to be a man and not some »angry« and »ungrateful« woman. The validity and credibility I suddenly gained just by taking a man's name was shocking, and it shows how deep sexism and misogyny are rooted in society. Private messages lacked the horrific threats and honour shaming that used to bombard my original accounts. The ridiculous and sad thing is, even if I was attacked on my fake accounts, it usually included attacking imaginary women in my family – such as my mother or sister – with degrading names. The main point I took from this experience is that it really is a lot safer for a man to live in my country and the Arab world in general than for a woman. Even in a digital society on social media platforms.

»YOU BROUGHT IT ON YOURSELF«

One could ask where are the government and women's rights organisations when women are being harassed on social media? My answer is: they are doing almost nothing when it comes to the pain and suffering women go through in real life, so why would they care about

what happens on social media? When I talked to some people about what I was going through, their comments were of the »you brought it on yourself« type. Their solution was to stop talking about these things. They consider abuse and harassment natural responses to any discussion or criticism.

The Jordanian government passed a law against cybercrimes, claiming that it is to ensure a safe digital environment for its citizens. That turned out to be untrue. The law is mainly used to shush those who the government sees as »the enemy« and to arrest anyone who dares to criticise its performance and policies.³ Another problem is that passing a law does not necessarily mean it will be applied, as we can see with many human and women's rights laws, where the laws only exist on paper.

Traditions and religious teachings have a huge influence on the way people behave and interact with each other in Jordan. Unfortunately, in both, women are often considered to be less human than men, which is reflected in the belief that men should have the power to control women and decide how they live their lives, or if they can live at all, since »honour killings« are deemed a way of removing the shame that a man thinks is brought on by the behaviour of one of the women in his family. Such killings are promoted by society and ignored by the law.

Traditional views are also the source for the hatred and misogyny women face on social media and in the digital world in general. I believe that we can only tru-

ly change how women are treated in real life and on social media if people start criticising the things they grew up to believe about women and themselves and acknowledge that women, too, are human beings with equal rights and harassing women should bring shame not power. I hope that humanity, compassion, and empathy along with reason, justice, and equality will be the sources for education, regulations, and laws in Jordan, so that regardless of gender, religion, sexual orientation, race, or origin, we will all be truly equal citizens.

- 1 Kristine Anderson »Daring to Ask, Listen, and Act: A Snapshot of the Impacts of COVID-19 on Women and Girls' Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health«, accessed 4 June, 2021, https://jordan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/20200511_Daring%20to%20ask%20Rapid%20Assessment%20Report_FINAL.pdf.
- 2 Doxing (or doxxing) is the practice of revealing personal information about someone online without their consent. Methods employed to acquire the information may even include hacking or social engineering.
- 3 »2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Jordan«, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, accessed 4 June, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/jordan/>.



ANONYMOUS is a CCP alumna and participated in the workshop on Digital Civil Society. She is originally from Jordan.



IN JORDAN A 14 YEAR OLD GIRL
WAS KILLED BY HER BROTHER.



FOR SETTING UP A
FACEBOOK-ACCOUNT.



FOR WOMEN RIGHTS

WHAT ARE IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS FOR COUNTERING HATE SPEECH?

»To counter hate speech, I think we need to create alternative narratives for basic values that tell us what is right and wrong. We need more educational institutes to develop and implement the kind of studies that are important in everyday life rather than discussing what Newton was thinking when an apple dropped. We need to work on our literacy rate and be watchful of religious fundamentalism. We need radical and progressive versions of religion. If all these steps are taken gradually and persistently, I believe there is hope that we can curb hate speech.«

ALI ABBAS, PAKISTAN

»It is necessary to make what's referred to as the majority society sensitive to hate speech. Civic education plays a key role. It is important to learn what hate speech is, what forms exist, and what impact it has. Moreover, the perspectives and experiences of those affected by hate speech need to be included in the learning process, for example in the form of personal encounters.«

DANIEL TONN, GERMANY

LOVE-STORM AGAINST ONLINE HATE

LOVE-Storm



Have you ever seen an aggressive post online that incited hate or attacked another person? If you spend over one hour per day on the internet, it is very likely that you have. Unfortunately, two out of three internet users usually don't do anything against such incidents. Some are afraid that they, too, will be attacked. Others are just shocked and don't know how to act. Too many feel uncomfortable and just scroll further. Only a few agree or join the hate, often just for the »lols«, but they are the ones who remain visible. As a result, people targeted by online hate perceive attacks as a form of group violence. While an individual attack is disturbing, it becomes devastating when it feels like everyone else has read it and agrees or did not speak out in defence of the victim. LOVE-Storm was founded in 2017 to change this. We teach witnesses and targets of hate speech how to react to attacks. With the help of our training platform, over 1,000 people per year go from being haters, targets and bystanders of online hate to identifying strategies to

- empower the targets of hate,
- mobilise the audience against hate and
- stop the hate by non-violent means.

In 2020, LOVE-Storm used an online training room to train a group of CrossCulture Fellows and Alumni in digital conflict transformation. From summer 2021, a multilingual online learning platform against online hate (funded by the EU/ERASMUS+) will give international trainers access to this online training room so they can conduct their own roleplays against online hate. While LOVE-Storm is increasing its engagement to stop hate, it is up to all of us to take initiative in order to actively stop online hate. This can be an overwhelming task, which is why we would like to share ten tips for standing up against online attacks.

10 TIPS FOR STANDING UP AGAINST ONLINE HATE

01 DON'T LOOK AWAY!

When nobody speaks out against online hate, the offenders feel empowered. Observers become discouraged and accept hate as a new social norm. A simple »No, I disagree« helps to break these patterns.

02 STRENGTHEN THE PERSON UNDER ATTACK

Hate attacks are aimed at repressing certain opinions and people on the internet. Support the victims so that they stay online and take part in discussions.

03 SEEK HELP

Ask your friends and any witnesses for help when you or others are attacked. Tell them what you need and how they can support you.

04 SUPPORT COUNTER-SPEECH

When other commentators oppose hate speech, support and thank them. »Like« their constructive comments and tell them what you like about them. They will feel bolstered and continue to stand up for a friendly atmosphere on social media platforms. Let's stop online hate together!

05 STAY CALM

Do not get carried away by using violence yourself. At worst, observers could show solidarity with the actual hater. Keep in mind: you are beautiful. Aggressiveness may make you look ugly. ;-)

06 DON'T LET THE HATE TOUCH YOU

When you are attacked, recognise that the hatred is not directed against you personally but against a figment of the attacker's imagination. You are only the trigger on which pent-up hatred is discharged.

07 SET CLEAR LIMITS

It is almost impossible to change people's minds in online chats. But you can stop the attacks. Set explicit boundaries! Show attackers that their hate is not acceptable. Tell them »I have nothing against you, but your behaviour is making me sad. If you really want to talk, your attacks have to stop.« Only enter into a dialogue when the attacks stop.

08 WRITE YOUR OWN SCRIPT

Attackers expect standard responses and use them to control the discussion. Don't play their game; instead, offer trolls and other aggressive commentators alternative interpretations and actions. For instance, you could make a point of obviously ignoring or constructively misunderstanding an attacker by saying: »That reminds me of ...« and then talk about something totally different. With a little luck, attackers may use these »bridges« to leave their destructive behaviour behind and become constructive group members.



LOVE-STORM is a training and learning platform dedicated to fighting online hate speech and discrimination. The goal is to empower internet users to establish a civil courage movement on the web.

09 PREPARE YOURSELF

Fight, flight or freeze – these are instinctive reactions to (verbal) violence. By rehearsing possible reactions in advance in training sessions, you can practice different response strategies. These will help you to bypass your instincts and react effectively in the moment of an actual attack.

10 GET ORGANISED!

Arrange with others to provide mutual support in case of emergency and set up an alarm system. Find or start anti-hate speech groups in your country. Network with other groups, train together and win more allies to respond to attacks.

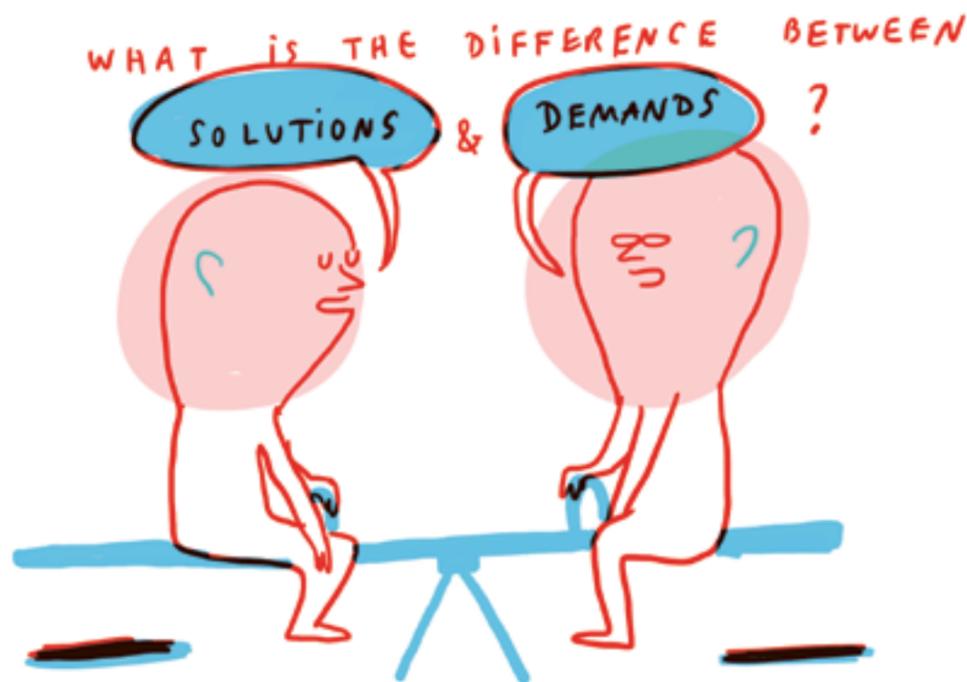
Want to learn more? Order online training? Create a training programme against online hate in your country? Go to: <https://love-storm.eu>.



IN DIGITAL HEAVEN
THERE SHOULD ALWAYS
BE AN EXIT.

LOOK BEYOND THE SCREEN AND START CLOSING THE DIVIDE – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Simon Ant and Malina Becker



ACCESS FOR ALL

- *Be inclusive* – Often digitisation is an opportunity for the inclusion of marginalised groups because access barriers are reduced. For instance, Wikipedia made it easier for many people to get access to knowledge. However, such examples often conceal the fact that digitisation leaves many people behind. As a result, societal divides are increasing. The interview with Camilo shows how digitisation is rapidly progressing in the more privileged parts of Mexico while poorer rural communities are being left even further behind. To resolve this issue, more funds are needed to support small initiatives that are well connected with local communities. Those initiatives are able to take local conditions into consideration and actively include their communities in the digital transformation.
- *Cut the costs* – Access to the worldwide web should come at a fair price for everyone. Countries with low connectivity often have the highest prices for accessing the internet. To ensure equal access worldwide, we must aim to guarantee good connectivity at affordable prices. Furthermore, digitisation can only benefit everyone if the people working on the digital transformation supply chain receive fair salaries. International legal frameworks can stop the increasing gap.
- *Open up* – Many of the digital devices and infrastructure we use every day are collecting our data. Lots of the software and processes are intentionally untransparent so as not to endanger the data-mining mechanism that generates revenue for big tech-companies. Open-source software, by contrast, is inherently transparent and encourages the public to find errors and voice criticism. An inclusive digital world needs to be transparent in order to allow everyone to raise concerns. Do you want to be part of a more open digital world? Then consider replacing proprietary software with open-source alternatives. LibreOffice, Firefox or even the »deGoogled« Android custom ROMs such as /e/ from the e-foundation are only a few examples.

STAY CONNECTED

- *Safety first* – Civil society activists are often targets for surveillance by states and companies. If you are active online, it is important to familiarise yourself with basic (or even advanced) digital security practices to keep yourself, your co-workers, and sources safe. You can find more information in our previous publication on digital security.

- *Open digital borders* – Internet shutdowns are an increasingly severe phenomena, keeping certain areas or even whole countries from participating online. Civil society, however, is not exclusively at the mercy of national or local governments that are most often responsible for the shutdowns. With their project #KeepItOn, Access Now documents internet shutdowns around the world, informs the public, and advises the people affected.
- *Knowledge is key* – Digital literacy must be promoted worldwide to help people use the internet, make their own contributions, and distinguish between fake and real content. Nowadays, an understanding of social media is often key for participating in social activities. It is also important to be aware of the influence images and information can have and not to misuse or be misled by them. Social media have the power to bring people together but also to deepen divides. Therefore, digital literacy should be taught at school. Civil society organisations such as the Mozilla Foundation or Digitalcourage have already created curricula that are available online.

ONLINE HATRED

- *Algorithm of hatred* – Hatred and disinformation spread fast online, and sometimes lead to violence. Some people believe that the for-profit model of social media platforms encourages the spread of hatred because, sadly, hate posts are getting more attention, are clicked on more often, and are keeping users on the platforms for longer. Platforms like Facebook hide the underlying algorithm that decides what content is more visible than others. To better understand the algorithm, the NGO AlgorithmWatch studied data donated by Instagram users to uncover the company's algorithms. However, Facebook threatened to take the NGO to court. Unable to engage in legal proceedings against a billion-dollar enterprise, the small NGO called off their project. This is alarming because transparency is key in order for civil society to take part in deciding how social media platforms affect us. That is why organisations such as AlgorithmWatch must be supported in their efforts against bullying tech-giants. Civil society should be more strongly included in the construction of digital infrastructure to keep the for-profit model from inciting hate and disinformation.
- *Support the victims* – Hate speech often targets marginalised groups. Especially women, but also members of minority groups, face hatred and discrimination online. It is important to offer victims support, online and offline, and spread information on how to report misconduct. It is also important to

IFA AND ITS CROSS-CULTURE PROGRAMME

encourage fellow net users to speak out by offering online training on civil courage and how to avoid or tackle discrimination online. However, people need to understand the difference between measures aimed at combatting hate speech and instrumentalisation and attacks on free speech and online access.

- *Don't act like a saviour* – Education and digital literacy are key here. When acting and speaking out online, it is important to be aware of the mechanisms and currentness of online discussions. Educate yourself regularly on current societal debates regarding sensitive topics and inclusive and non-discriminating language. Be an ally, but do not speak for marginalised people. Also, do not expect people who experience discrimination to educate others; it is the responsibility of all of us to stay informed and be inclusive.

HAVE WE PIQUED YOUR INTEREST? FURTHER READING ON THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

- Mozilla's Internet Health Report offers different perspectives on the current state of the digital world, combining research and stories from around the world.
- Digital Civil Society presents recommendations from multiple civil society organisations, mostly from Germany, that fight for independent digital infrastructure and open access to knowledge. The initiative was started during the beginning of the

Covid-19 pandemic, during which digital communication and infrastructure was extensively expanded.

- If you are looking for an alternative to Google and the Apple smartphone OS that uses open-source software, /e/OS might be interesting for you. The e-foundation offers an Android OS, but instead of pre-installed Google apps, /e/ integrates open-source software alternatives.
- AccessNow and the #KeepItOn coalition of more than 240 organisations from 105 countries around the world are fighting internet shutdowns using various methods, such as grassroots advocacy, direct policy-maker engagement, technical support, and legal interventions.
- The NGO AlgorithmWatch is committed to watching, unpacking and analysing automated decision-making systems and their impact on society. In 2021, they reported that they were forced to shut down an Instagram monitoring project after Facebook threatened to take them to court. In the same year the two whistleblowers, Frances Haugen and Sophie Zhang, confirmed that Facebook algorithms are dangerous as they fuel the spreading of hatred and fake news.¹
- The Mozilla Foundation published a curriculum on web literacy. It aims to promote digital skills that will help us live and work in today's digital world.

¹ Karen Hao. »The Facebook whistleblower says its algorithms are dangerous. Here's why.«, MIT Technology Review, October 5, 2021, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/10/05/1036519/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-algorithms>.

With its CrossCulture Programme (CCP), ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) is working in partnership with the Federal Foreign Office to build strong civil society networks between Germany and the rest of the world. Since 2005, professionals and committed volunteers from the fields of culture, education, science, arts and media have benefited from the opportunities provided by work-related stays either in Germany or in CCP partner countries.

- *Strengthening civil society:* With the CCP Fellowships, the CrossCulture Programme funds around 125 professionals and committed volunteers from more than 45 countries each year. During two to three months of professional exchange in host organisations in Germany or in CCP partner countries, participants deepen their expertise and acquire intercultural skills. In turn, the host organisations benefit from the expertise, regional knowledge and networks of the CCP Fellows. Upon returning to their home organisations, the participants bring their experiences gained abroad into their everyday working life. Work placements are currently being offered in the following areas: policy & society, media & culture, human rights & peace, and sustainable development. From 2019 to 2023, the focus will also be on civic & citizenship education, digital civil society and climate justice.

- *Networking civil societies:* Civil society organisations from Germany and from a CCP partner country are supported by the CCP Synergy programme as they work together on a collaboration and create a lasting network. Funding for short stays is provided to employees of the two cooperating organisations. Aims of the cooperation can be the development and the expansion of joint projects, publications or events. The programme encourages the direct exchange between organisations and helps to bring together civil society actors across borders in order for them to learn from each other.

- *Intensifying collaboration:* With travel grants and regular seminars, workshops and symposia, the CCP Alumni programme promotes the professional development of hundreds of CCP Alumni worldwide. Since 2005, the programme has been helping participants build upon their established partnerships and networks. Travel grants are available to alumni to attend conferences, work on small joint projects and undertake fact-finding missions. In addition, CCP appoints volunteer representatives in the respective countries to act as contact persons in cooperation with alumni, the German Embassy, ifa and other interested parties. Together with the CCP, they organise regular alumni network meetings on topics of regional and professional interest.

For more information about the programme, please visit: www.ifa.de/en/fundings/crossculture-programme

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

CCP FELLOWSHIPS 2 – 3 months

Fellowships for professionals and volunteers

Cultural exchange, professional development, networking and knowledge transfer

NETWORKING CIVIL SOCIETIES

CCP SYNERGY 7 – 30 days

Promoting collaboration between civil society organisations

Developing cross-border bilateral partnerships between organisations

INTENSIFYING COLLABORATION

CCP ALUMNI individual

Travel grants and networking meetings for CCP Fellowship alumni

Individual training and networking



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»Digital Civil Society« is one of the focal topics of the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen's (ifa) CrossCulture Programme (CCP), including its CCP Fellowships and thematic workshops. The 2020 workshop for CCP Fellows, alumni and other experts focused on the topics digital access, the global divide in accessing the internet, and online discrimination. This publication is the product of this global cross-cultural collaboration. It presents personal commentaries, best-practice examples and recommendations for action.

ifa supports civil society actors worldwide in their advocacy for democracy and peace, encourages dialogue within civil society and contributes to the protection of minorities and persons at risk.

With the CrossCulture Programme Fellowships, ifa supports the interlacing of German and foreign civil society actors from the cultural, educational, scientific, artistic and media sectors in more than 45 partner countries. The goals for participating fellows and organisations are to broaden their expertise, share and acquire intercultural skills, and learn from each other.

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY