Module 3: The impact of online harmful practices on the electoral cycle and tools to tackle them

[00:00:18] **Speaker 1** Welcome to the mother of three of the massive open online course and information and elections in the digital ITR. This course is organized by the Knight Center for Journalism in Memory Girls with the support of unions and the NDP. I'm very happy that you're here today. My name is Alberta Peterborough, an electoral expert at Thomas School and the lead instructor of this course today. In this module, we will analyze the impact of harmful practices on elections and the possible responses to tackle and mitigate their negative effects. We will review the diverse strategies and techniques used to spread disinformation, misinformation, hate speech and other harmful practices. We will talk about the main targets of disinformation within the electoral cycle, and we will start to see how to articulate solutions and responses to these challenges. For that, we will need to review revising the link between the electoral cycle, the electoral calendar and operational. So let's talk about the strategies and techniques to spread this information. First of all, we need to be familiarized with the strategies and techniques to spread this information. There are many, but we will address five of the main strategies to spread this information misinformation and money information. We will see coordinated incenting behavior, information, operations and influence campaigns, the computational amplification of disinformation, false or misleading narratives and misleading. Misleading visual content. Let's start by coordinating authentic behavior. Coordinating authentic behavior takes place when actors coordinate among themselves to mislead people regarding who they are and what they're doing. This method has been widely exploited for political gain worldwide during the recent years, and coordinated, inauthentic behavior online can make use of fake profiles, anonymous users, trolls and bots. These elements can individually harass, provoke or intimidate other real users. The goal of coordinated and authentic behavior the different goals of the coordinated behavior are to generate more traffic and or to silence certain opinions, depending on the motivations of the instigators, and to influence public opinions and ultimately impact on decision making. Something that is particularly sensitive for electoral and during electoral processes. But what isn't wrong? Basically, a troll is a person or a user that systematically harass other users online. And for that, it can be construed as a troll. These kind of users provoke disturbed attack other users with digital tools, with with view to create a strong reaction or silence. People trolls seek out emotional responses and often are hidden behind anonymity. Another way of disturbing this is distributing disinformation, misinformation and disinformation is called information operations. Information operations, and take the collection of tactical information and dissemination of propaganda in order to try to gain competitive advantage. A similar concept is that of influence campaigns which try to achieve a strategic, strategic and geopolitical outcome like electoral result. The computational amplification of disinformation with micro-targeting bots or fake accounts try to promote and share certain kinds of of content. So these amplification impacts, for instance, in what we saw during the first module day, the viral contents, it's part of the can be part of our computational amplification of this information. And also we need to understand the concept of micro-targeting here. What is micro-targeting? It's a new form of political advertisement that typically involves monitoring people's online behavior and using the collective collected data related to the concept of big data that we saw on more than one, sometimes in breach of other data, and display individually targeted advertisements or content or propaganda. False and misleading narratives aim to pass like news articles or documentary content to look like real contents. They are really published to mislead, deceive or give incorrect information. With the idea of creating and confusing or equally confusing ideas or destabilizing the users, these include ideological, extreme, hyper partizan or aspirational content as well as various forms of propaganda in order to catch

your attention. The false or misleading narratives are often accompanied by videos, photos, excessive capitalization, emotionally charged words and pictures, and also of logical premises. We have seen many of these strategies for disseminating disinformation, misinformation and money information during the COVID pandemic. But what about misleading visual content? Much of the information that circulates on social media, on the Internet and on platforms is visual photos, videos, memes. And that can be particularly persuasive visual content that's more often to share and fever overtakes by social platforms algorithms. In addition, we humans. Humans process visual content faster, often leading to emotional responses, which diminishes the probability for them to use analytical skills. Furthermore, it can be up to impossible to trace the source of some images. So now we saw how we tried the strategies of dissemination, and now we will take a link to the main targets targets of disinformation, misinformation and disinformation during the electoral cycle. First of all, we would say that one of the main targets are electoral bodies, electoral regulators, electoral related government institutions and other electoral stakeholders. The goal is very simple to discredit the electoral institutions and undermine and interfere with the electoral process. These can go from spreading misleading information about the voter registration process to the independence of and transparency of a given electoral commission announcing even announcing final results that may stipulate only on the networks or denouncing imaginary fraud. Another objective of of disinformation, misinformation, misinformation campaigns are candidates. This aims at dissuading political actors to run as candidates or to bully them to make them resign. False information about women candidates spreads faster and more intensely than disinformation about women candidates. Gender bias. Disinformation is often used to shame and deter women to participate in politics or even to go to vote. Another target of disinformation and misinformation campaigns. And of course, depending on the electoral system, can be political parties, political groups or even independent candidates. Depending on the electoral system and the legal framework, some political parties, candidates or political groups might have less resources for this for their political campaigns than others. Of course, this depends on the country and the context and the and the legal framework. But that makes some that could be that could make some political actors more winnable than other actors. Because if there are actors that can invest more money and more resources in disinformation and misinformation, campaign to undermine the and the other the other candidates that can create unbalance in the political equation and the inequality in the access to political participation. To sow disinformation might be not only a way of having of creating political propaganda, influencing, influencing the voters, but also to destabilizing and generating inequality between different, different candidates and different political groups. When the target a minority some members of some rebel groups. It's also basically to dissuade people from particular groups to run as candidates or or to make them resign if they are already candidates. Women of rebel groups might be targeted during elections by disinformation, seeking also to fuel intolerance and social polarization. When the target search engines, media outlets and citizen journalists. The goal is to undermine most of the times. It's to undermine media media's reputation and its reputation and to discredit them. So in that way, they would also the information share by then is going to be discredited. Among these target women face gender specific risks besides those in Dubai by everyone. So they are also they are also more vulnerable to reputation attacks or the use of private information to destabilize them or to discredit. When the citizens and voters in general are the targets of these campaigns, the goal is also to manipulate them, to make in order to influence their decisions, either to go to war, not to go to war, to just to have fear that something is going to happen, be terrible just to go to the polling centers or to participate as political agents or as polling staff, etc.. Again, there are differences between how women and how men can be influenced or reached by this kind of propaganda and manipulation. Well, we will continue

with model three after a short break. Do you find. Well, let us continue. Happy to see you back. Now we are going to talk a little bit about the electoral calendar. Every electoral cycle is translated into a complete electoral calendar. The electoral calendar informs all the stakeholders. The key dates for a given electoral process. The electoral cycle approach and the electoral calendar are the keystones of an electoral management operational plan and the pillars for planning and electoral related actions and activities, including the initiatives to prevent and tackle disinformation. Misinformation. My Information and hate speech. Electoral operational planning is usually done by the literal authorities, and it shows how and when each activity is going to be carried out. Each activity needs to be targeted at the objectives stated in a strategic way and then be reflected on the budget. Having adequate financial resources is critical not only for implementation but also to be prepared for contingencies. We're going to see now how to tackle disinformation, misinformation and more information. But for that, we need to have in mind not only the idea of the electoral cycle, but the fact that this electoral cycle is going to be adapted to a particular electoral calendar and all operations will be put in place after strategic planning. So the ways to tackle disinformation, misinformation and disinformation need to be integrated in this operational planning process in advance. First of all, for implementing solutions. I'm looking for measures and ways to tackle misinformation and disinformation campaigns and hate speech, and everyone needs to be involved at every level. Effective measures require a range of responses for multiple actors. Measures can have different levels of impact and be designed for short, medium and long term periods. Responses to tackle disinformation can be organized in four categories preventive measures, identification, fact checking and monitoring measures. Regulatory and regulatory measures. And corrective or containing corrective measures. Preventive measures are things that we can do before having all the information we have been looking through the last three models. We know there are different kinds of challenges that we will need to face when preparing for electoral for that particular electoral cycle. So during the preventive measures and in relation with the notice we already have, the identification and monitoring measures can take place once the the the the processes are already in place. And containing corrective measures can also be implemented during that period. After that part that usually coincides with the post-electoral period, we will try to revise regulatory and regulatory measures and to start strategizing for the next electoral review. Let's do a recap of Model three. During this module, we have addressed strategies and techniques to spread disinformation. Misinformation. Money, information. The main targets of disinformation within the electoral cycle. The relevance of the electoral calendar and its connection with the electoral cycle. While electoral operational planning is critical for predictable processes and to tackle disinformation, misinformation and money information. And we try to look forward to what you said. Most of the main responses to tackle this issue. On the next morning, we will continue to examine in detail the four categories of responses, and we will in particular focus on the preventive ones. Thank you very much for being there. See you next week in module four by.