CHALLENGES

MediaFutures 1st Open Call

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Challenge 1: Viral Complexity

Accounting for the complexity of coronavirus through data literacy

Description

The coronavirus pandemic is a complex threat for our society. In recent months, citizens have become accustomed to the infections per day curve, generally presented through dashboards and infographics based on data visualization. Also, there has been a notable increase in scientific empirical research proposing advanced models on the spread of the virus and studies of the impact of the pandemic on society. In this way, data has become a key resource to (1) understand the scope and scale of the crisis we are living through, (2) develop interventions to mitigate the impact and spread of the virus, (3) evaluate the effectiveness of such interventions. On the one hand, this is perhaps the global crisis in which we have witnessed most explicitly the power of data to generate shared knowledge. On the other hand, this crisis has also shown the large inequalities that exist in society regarding data access and skills, as well as the complexity of many concepts from public health and statistics for non-expert citizens.

In the context of the coronavirus and misinformation, there is an urgent need to engage and empower citizens with data literacy. However, working with data is always more complex than one usually assumes. While simple ways to express data are required for those without the skills, simplistic approaches often contribute to misinformation and misinterpretation of complex phenomena. Furthermore, information can easily be deliberately presented in a biased or misinforming way to promote a certain viewpoint. Therefore, data literacy should rely not only on elements that facilitate the understanding and exploitation of data-based resources, but also on mechanisms for scientific and technical rigor and, in the face of the crisis of misinformation during the pandemic, the promotion of transparency, reproducibility and critical thinking. As a society, just as we develop techniques to protect ourselves from the pandemic, we need innovative and inclusive data literacy strategies to account for the complexity of the coronavirus crisis and thus combat the infodemic.

Data

Applicants can use any dataset or combination of datasets, from those provided by MediaFutures, other open data, or data they have sourced themselves. To demonstrate the viability of the project, applicants should have a clear outline for the data they will require, including feasible strategies to access these data both technically and legally.

Datasets that may be useful to address this challenge include:

- COVID-19 datasets from political and scientific institutions
- COVID-19 related datasets from Wikipedia
- COVID-19 charts/infographics/dashboards from political and scientific institutions
- Data from preprints of scientific articles about COVID-19
- Social media posts sharing scientific articles about COVID-19
- Online news articles about COVID-19 (including comments/discussions)

Expected Outcomes

Projects should address any of the issues surrounding the management of how citizens receive and engage with (mis)information about coronavirus in innovative ways. That could mean developing software or hardware to address these issues; artworks to highlight various aspects of them; or combinations of both. Applications must include details on how these outcomes will be achieved during the six-months acceleration/residency programme.

In the context of coronavirus, potential outcomes of projects could be:

- Novel user interfaces to engage with data
- Mechanisms to monitor the genesis and (re)use of data
- Data-driven accountability of scientific production and political interventions
- Gamified strategies for data storytelling and exploration
- Representations of complex data resources with understandable metaphors

Challenge 2: Building Bridges

Reintegrating society by bridging communities

Description

Most media is privately owned, and thus led by intransparent business and political interests, which make misinformation attractive; Clickbait is one of the problems. Social media especially is widely perceived as a public community space, but it is really a space of individual interests. Social media was meant to be about sharing and building bridges, but that is not always the effect it has; instead it often leads to radicalisation. As an infrastructure, it is focused on broadcasting views and quick reactions, rather than about dialogue and deep engagement. Media is consumer- and not knowledge-driven. Consequently, both traditional and social media favour strong messages and quick judgements. This leads to an ever increasing 'us. vs them' rhetoric, that is further helped by people looking for a sense of belonging, and wanting to be parts of communities, encouraging or pressuring them to agree with controversial ideas even if they are not fully on board with.

Existing technology, such as recommendation and personalisation algorithms, further intensify the problem, when online interactions are limited to people in filter bubbles that share the same mindset, and effectively prevent citizens from being confronted with opposing views. Technology also cannot address community needs if the communities are not involved in their development. Only a small number of people are involved in the development of the technology, with most 'only' using it. This further leads to the platforms themselves often not acknowledging issues of minorities or discrimination.

This challenge seeks platforms, tools and artworks that help find ways to help build bridges between opposing views within and across communities, reconnect society, and encourage new connections. We want to encourage dialogue instead of confrontation, and knit together social fabric that has been torn apart by constant confrontations. We believe that open source and community driven innovation are one way to enable platforms and communities to better accommodate diverse views.

Data

Applicants can use any dataset or combination of datasets, from those provided by MediaFutures, other open data, or data they have sourced themselves. To demonstrate the

viability of the project, applicants should have a clear outline for the data they will require, including feasible strategies to access these data both technically and legally.

Datasets that may be useful to address this challenge include:

- Social media data - such as users & conversations in facebook groups, twitter networks, or reddit posts, from online communities of COVID-19 deniers or conspiracy theorists
- Government data on cases, impact on regions and communities
- Data on misinformation from fact checking platforms, such as Poynters' dataset on [coronavirus fake news](#)
- Data collected or produced by citizens, which may be highly localised data, or interviews with individuals holding opposing views.

Expected Outcomes

Projects should address any of the issues surrounding the fragmentation of society in the context of coronavirus in innovative ways. That could mean developing software or hardware to address these issues; artworks to highlight various aspects of them; or combinations of both. Applications must include details on how these outcomes will be achieved during the six-months acceleration/residency programme.

Potential outcomes of projects could be:

- Platforms or tools that establish new channels for dialogue
- A process or set of processes that build connections between opposing views
- Artworks or platforms with a strong visual narrative
- Innovations that actively engage communities who are not traditionally involved in developing technology
- Marginal models or algorithms to prevent exclusion
- Artistic works that show what connects us instead of what divides us
- Artworks or platforms that enable storytelling with coronavirus

Challenge 3: The New Media-tors

Reimagining and rebuilding the role of mediators to tackle misinformation around coronavirus

Description

Coronavirus is one of the biggest threats to global health in modern history. Beyond the threat of illness or death, and the impact on our global economy, there is more at stake: Widespread misinformation leads to increased danger for vulnerable populations, and mistrust in institutions. As Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), said "We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic". Many countries have seen demonstrations against protective measures, such as face masks and vaccinations. The connections between these protesters and populist movements or conspiracy theorists makes them not only a threat to global health, but also to democracy itself.

Both traditional and new forms of digital media, as well as new social media platforms, thrive on conflict. They can be responsible for encouraging polarisation and extremism by favouring provocative or negative content, amplifying the most extreme voices and positions, escalating conflict, or spreading conspiracy theories. On top of this, with the influx of new and overlapping research results, available information and stories online, audience attention is a limiting factor in the consumption of information about the pandemic.This makes it all the more important for mediators to communicate clearly both about the sources that they use, and their interpretations.

We want to strengthen the role of trustworthy mediators - whether they're journalists, scientists, politicians, libraries, social media networks, influencers, artists - who can help reduce misinformation, rather than increase its spread. Mediators can moderate polarising views, and help citizens to engage with and understand information in a non-reactionary way. Mediators can also help manage the flow of information, and should do so in a way that follows an attention economics approach, and recognises human attention as a scarce commodity. This can help prevent citizens from being overwhelmed with information in the ever-changing situation relating to coronavirus.

Data

Applicants can use any dataset or combination of datasets, from those provided by MediaFutures, other open data, or data they have sourced themselves. To demonstrate the

viability of the project, applicants should have a clear outline for the data they will require, including feasible strategies to access these data both technically and legally.

Datasets that may be useful to address this challenge include:

- Data on the reach or /influence of different information sources, such as audience size or levels of consumption
- Data on browsing habits and where people's attention is being directed, such as screen time and number of time they look at their phone, or recommendation algorithms
- Data on access to information about the pandemic, such as Wikimedia page views and edits
- Data on time spent online before and during the pandemic, and exposure to misinformation due to increased time spent online

Expected Outcomes

Projects should address any of the issues surrounding the management of how citizens receive and engage with (mis)information about coronavirus in innovative ways. That could mean developing software or hardware to address these issues; artworks to highlight various aspects of them; or combinations of both. Applications must include details on how these outcomes will be achieved during the six-months acceleration/residency programme.

Potential outcomes of projects could be:
- Apps or services that make transparent how mediators work
- Artworks that break down conceptions of "them" and "us"
- Tools, services or artworks that encourage openness to new information
- Visualisations of information flows

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Challenge 4: Open Challenge

MediaFutures seeks to support novel, unconventional ways for people to engage with journalism, science, and democracy, in both the arts and economy. While most of our challenges are focusing on a particular problem, this open challenge offers a platform for innovative, creative, and impactful ideas which do not fit elsewhere in our open call.

Description

Misinformation is the issue at the heart of MediaFutures. While coronavirus - the focus of this first call - is the most current issue, with widespread misinformation leading to increased danger for vulnerable populations, and mistrust in institutions, it is not the only one. We want to keep the door open for more general approaches to this issue. Many countries have already experienced misinformation before the virus: Connected to ongoing election campaigns, new populist movements, and other threats to democracy, or undermining the effectiveness of vaccinations. These issues are linked to several causes, such as lack of trust in governments and science; insufficient science education; and lack of transparency in traditional media, especially with regards to the sources and reliability of data. We are looking for novel solutions to support and strengthen quality journalism, science and science education, transparency and democracy, to help counteract the negative effects of misinformation across society, and help build trust in scientific and democratic institutions.

Data

Applicants can use any dataset or combination of datasets, from those provided by MediaFutures, other open data, or data they have sourced themselves. To demonstrate the viability of the project, applicants should have a clear outline for the data they will require, including feasible strategies to access these data both technically and legally.

Expected Outcomes

Projects should address any of the issues surrounding misinformation in innovative ways. That could mean developing software or hardware to address these issues; artworks to highlight various aspects of them; or combinations of both. Applications must include details on how these outcomes will be achieved during the six-months acceleration/residency programme.

This is not a challenge for incremental ideas. Instead, it provides an opportunity for truly transformative work, which can be applied over a wide range of issues, and has the potential to totally reinvent a process, or find a solution for a previously unsolvable problem. This

means that we will consider only those applications that are real game changers, with high impact, that clearly unlock unrealised value in data and can articulate that value in a meaningful way.

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