

Concept High Level Session IGF 2017

Tuesday, 19 December 2017, 10am – 1pm (3h)

1. Title:

The impact of digitisation on politics, public trust, and democracy

2. Brief Description/Objective:

The digital space, as a cornerstone of the public policy space, can be a great enabler for democratic discourse and participation, as well as inclusive policy-making. At the same time, the misuse of the digital public policy space can lead to the distortion of truth, mistrust in public information, and misrepresentation of public opinion.

This session will discuss both the opportunities and the challenges that digitisation brings to the digital political sphere, the public trust, and democracy. Discussions will revolve around ways of strengthening the benefits of democratic participation and inclusion via digital means, limiting the negative impact of the misuse of the public policy space, and rebuilding trust among online users.

The session will also address the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders. It will look at issues such as government policies aimed at creating more inclusive policy-making processes through the use of digital tools, the responsibility of Internet intermediaries for the dissemination of fake news and false news that can influence political processes, and the elements that can help rebuild trust among users. Also, the session will discuss the role of media actors in a democracy and the implications of the ongoing structural change in the media ecosystem. Most importantly, the session will look into whether and how digital literacy, education, and awareness-raising could be the key towards empowering citizens not only to take advantage of digital tools, but also to deal with the challenges related to the misuse of the digital public space.

'Good stories', 'bad stories', and lessons learnt will be explored as part of the discussions.

3. Agenda:

- Introduction - 10 min
- Part 1: Benefits - 75 min
 - Remarks from first group of panelists (6 people, 2min input each): 15 min
 - Discussions: 60 min
 - The discussion will seamlessly combine initial remarks with interactive reactions from the audience/participants
- Part 2: Challenges - 75 min
 - Remarks from second group of panelists (6 people, 2min input each): 15 min
 - Discussions: 60 min
 - The discussion will seamlessly combine initial remarks with interactive reactions from the audience/participants
- Conclusions and wrap-up - 20 min
 - The organisers will distill the conclusions of the discussion in a set of short key 'messages', which will be presented to the participants at the end of the session.

4. Policy Questions:

- Part 1: Benefits

What are the benefits that digitisation brings/can bring to political processes, democracy, and the public trust? How can they be leveraged? How can digital tools be most effectively used to strengthen democratic participation and restore public trust in the online space? Who can make this happen?

- Part 2: Challenges

What are the challenges that digitisation brings/can bring to politics, democracy, and the public trust? How can they be addressed, and by whom? What are the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders? How can we ensure that digital tools can be trusted as key resources for democratic participation and inclusive societies? Can digital literacy, education, and awareness-raising be the key towards empowering citizens to deal with the challenges related to the misuse of the digital public space?

In answering these and other related questions, the session will seek to explore case studies and concrete examples of success stories, good and bad practices, and lessons learnt.

5. Host Chair and Moderator:

- Host Chair: Philipp Metzger, Director General of the Swiss Federal Office of Communications
- Moderator: Talk master of Swiss Television SRF [tbc]

6. Panelists:

The aim is for the session to include panelists from all stakeholder groups and different viewpoints relevant to the debate (government, human-rights perspective, ramifications of social media platforms, and the viewpoint of civil society). Geographic and gender diversity will also be kept in mind. Ideally, there will be 12 panelists and one moderator.

7. Plan for in-room participant engagement/interaction:

Each of the two main parts of the session will begin with a round of short interventions from the panelists, and will be followed by an interactive discussion with in situ and online session participants.

8. Remote moderator/Plan for online interaction:

Interventions from online participants will be given equal priority as to those from the physical audience. Onsite and online moderator will coordinate closely. To broaden participation, online interaction will rely on the WebEx platform. Social media (Twitter and Facebook) will also be employed by the online moderators who will be in charge of browsing social media using some hashtags (to be defined). The organisers will try to facilitate multilingual online moderation.

9. Connections with other sessions:

Workshops on how the political sphere, public opinion and democracy are being transformed and challenged by digitisation should feed into this session.

10. Desired results/outputs:

- Documentation of both 'good stories' and 'bad stories' reflecting the impact of digitisation on politics, democracy, and public trust.
- Conclusions and recommendations in the form of shared "messages" on how to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities that digitisation can bring to the public sphere.