

Privacy and Ethics – use of the Internet and social media

An interview with Elvira Perez and Ansgar Koene, senior researchers in Horizon

Working in the area of privacy and ethics involving the use of the Internet and social media, a topic very much in the public domain, this Horizon research strand has attracted a huge amount of interest from different areas of society. We talk to [Elvira and Ansgar](#) about how their research has diversified into numerous connected themes, and how they aim to influence policy and the way organisations treat our personal data online.

How did this strand of research start off in Horizon and how did it develop?

Horizon was awarded funding from the [Economic and Social Research Council \(ESRC\)](#) for a project called [CaSMa](#), Citizen Centric Approaches to Social Media analysis. The idea behind this project was to look at social media - the way it's being analysed, how the data is being accessed – but importantly, this project prioritise the perspective of the users of the social media instead of the platforms or service providers. Specifically, the ethical questions around: do people know how their data is being used, are people comfortable with the way the data is being used, do they feel that they have enough control over their data?

We approached the research from different angles: Elvira pursued youth participation on digital matters through a process called 5Rights Youth Juries; and Ansgar researched consent issues and how the companies, platforms and engineers who make the systems use the data.

Tell us about the 5Rights Youth Juries and how you engaged young people in the process?

CasMa has a citizen centric approach, but we realised that young people are usually excluded from these debates and there was a need to promote youth civic and political involvement. In addition, we felt there was a need to include young people as they will be the future employees of Google and Facebook, and they may be the most cost effective way to influence society over the longer term. So we collaborated with [5Rights](#), the [University of Leeds](#), and many other organisations to promote the rights of children and young people online. The result is the 5Rights Youth Juries, an engagement activity to provide children and young people a say about their digital rights on the Internet. At the Youth Juries participants are asked to consider, debate, and share ideas about the future of the Internet while providing useful facts and a safe space to discuss, reflect and deliberate about online data management, online trust, the right to be forgotten, and other Internet-related issues. The juries are a form of focus group but much more dynamic, with creative prompts or scenarios that can be either real drama, video clips, or news that trigger debates <https://youtu.be/DKLkWi2z4u0>

More than 200 young people have attended our youth juries - *"It made me think about how it would be if the Internet would not be around, how different it would be."*



What is the focus around the consent issues and what has the research led to?

Our interest derived from questioning on how social media data is being used, and whether people are aware of this, know what they are giving consent to, or even have enough information to make those decisions. A clear indication of how this is not the case is most terms and conditions are too long to read and the language too difficult to understand; also there may be clauses stating the right to use data for research purposes, where this research is not sufficiently defined.

From further discussions the [UnBias project](#) was generated, aiming to work with young people to further understand how aware 'digital natives' are about algorithm bias, their attitudes and main concerns and recommendations when interacting with such systems. This information will help us to better understand the way young people interact with such systems and identify youth-led solutions for teaching critical thinking toward digital information systems. It will also provide a youth/user perspective on possible need for changes in the design standards or the regulations pertaining to digital information systems.



[UnBias blog](#)

What has been the impact of your research, and how have you disseminated the outputs?

Our main aims are influencing policy, the way industry deals with personal data in provision of services, and promoting digital literacy in young people and the wider population. We don't want technology to guide us, we have to guide the technology to work for us - and technology is continually evolving. At this point in time we can influence the ethical design of that technology and we can only do this by generating debate with all stakeholders - users, policy makers, industry. We are providing the methodology to generate the debate that will influence the way that technology is driven by society.

As an example, we have translated the insights from our research into responses to a number of parliamentary inquiries. One was the House of Lords Inquiry on Online Platforms and the Digital Single Market in Europe, which had questions relating to how online platforms and the algorithms control the information that people receive, as well as specific questions on terms and conditions and privacy issues. Our response was incorporated and cited at various points in the final report. <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldecom/129/129.pdf>

Further responses included to the [Investigatory Powers Bill: technology issues inquiry](#), as a result of which we were contacted by the National Crime Agency who carried out a future-scoping exercise to better understand people's concern about how the police use online data during criminal investigations. We also submitted evidence to the Children and the Internet Inquiry by the

Communications Committee of the House of Commons and received a request from Baroness Beeban Kidron, 5Rights Founder, to follow up on this. <http://www.parliament.uk/children-and-the-internet>

Another element of the UnBias project that is building a network of collaborators for future research and impact is the stakeholder group that will contribute to the UnBias project through workshops and online activities around education, design standards and policy recommendations. We aimed for about 20 key people, but already have over 50 signed up! This demonstrates their perception of UnBias as a useful platform for engaging in current and relevant issues of importance to their own organisations. The stakeholders currently include members of: The European Commission, The Council of Europe, The European Data Protection Service, the Data Protection Authority in Germany, IEEE, Facebook, Google, The Digital Catapult, SMEs, various NGOs, The Internet Society, schools and a range of academics, many from internet/technology law area.

In addition we have been collaborating with Kate Green, a PhD student at the Horizon Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) to create an [open educational resource \(OER\)](#) that can be tailored to tackle the issues we are researching (algorithms, data privacy, digital rights), and the methodology for others to use and apply. This platform supports the creation of a community of practice where professionals reflect, provide feedback, share and provoke debate.

In addition to the OER, a key output has been the report '[The Internet on our Own Terms: How Children and Young People Deliberated about their Digital Rights](#)', launched at the House of Lords on the 31st January 2017, which describes the work carried out in the 5Rights Youth Juries. The report outlines the ground-breaking research process and policy suggestions, straight from the mouths and imaginations of the young participants, and aimed at Ministers, Industry, Educators and Business.



We communicate to non-scientific communities through our project blogs, and have published articles in The Conversation. One article "[Facebook's algorithms give it more editorial responsibility –](#)

[not less](#)” was picked up by Business Insider UK. This resulted in an invite to speak at the Belfast Solicitors Society CPD training event, as the legal profession is recognising the need to gain understanding of algorithms, particularly in relation to law suits on false statements. Another article [“With the Peeple app you will be judged by the crowd – whether you like it or not”](#), resulted in an interview with the BBC and a subsequence mention on the BBC News website. We also provided expert comments on the BBC Radio 5 live programme. Another of our articles featuring in The Conversation [‘We asked young people what they want from the internet of the future – here’s what they said’](#) was picked up by [The Independent](#). All [publications](#) can be found on the CaSMa website.

And the future?

Further Youth Juries are on the agenda – artificial intelligence applied to autonomous weapons to stimulate discussion with military and older adults who have experienced World War Two; and a “parents jury” about social media and games addiction in their children.

We have also been looking at providing in a digital format all the information that a young person needs to know when they are arrested and read their legal rights by the police, as currently there is no easily accessible way to access this complex legal information.

We will lead a discussion on “framing the policy thinking around fake news” at the European chapters meeting of [the Internet Society \(ISOC\)](#). The purpose of the chapters meeting is to identify the key agenda points that ISOC will pursue on Internet Governance this year. The results of this discussion, together with the analysis of our first UnBias stakeholder engagement, will directly contribute to the evidence we will submit to the [Commons select Committee inquiry on Fake News](#).

In recognition of the significant role that development within industry, and self-regulation via industry standards, will have on the algorithmic systems that people use, we are engaging with the IEEE Standards Association to develop a standard on Algorithm Bias Considerations. The PAR (Project Authorization Request) was sponsored by the IEEE Computer Society and approved at the start of 2017, designated [P7003 Algorithmic Bias Considerations](#). Over next two years the project Working Group, chaired by Ansgar, will develop the standard with the aim of describing specific methodologies to help system developers certify how they worked to address and eliminate issues of negative bias in the creation of their algorithms.

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution progresses and Digital Economy becomes synonymous with The Economy, the citizen perspective on these technologies, as explored in the CaSMa and UnBias projects, is becoming increasingly central to ensuring a fair and equitable future.