



Undue Influence, Internet and social networks

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Agenda



- Case study 1
- Case study 2
- Case study 3
- Digital profile of Belgium (2019)
- Access to information profile (2016)
- Missions of the Centre d'Information et d'Avis sur les Organisations Sectaires Nuisibles
- Evolution of sectarian organisations towards the Internet and social networksTracks?

Case study: 1

An applicant is concerned about his partner, who after the death of a loved one, dived into the Internet every day/night.

Through her "virtual research", she is convinced that she is surrounded by perverse narcissists who want to hurt her. She is approached by an organisation that she meets in person after a few weeks.

Isolating herself, she leaves her close circle and her work to find "the only people who really understand her" on social networks and by video conference.

The applicant is appalled by the speed and ingrained nature of this transformation
(less than 2 months).

⇒ **Filter bubble and echo chambers**

Case study: 2

An applicant is concerned about a relative who is involved in the activities in Belgium of a mega-church located in Africa.

The sermons, transmitted via the Internet with an access code, are listened to by groups of followers gathered in private homes.

The different groups interact with each other via video conference, pastors perform "miracles" remotely and the financial contributions of the followers are transferred by secure payment.

⇒ **Virtualisation of contacts**

⇒ **Dematerialisation of hazards**

⇒ **Anonymisation of actors, fragmentation of actors**

Case study: 3

An applicant (computer scientist) is concerned about his partner attending a personal development organisation.

She spends large amounts of money to access the various levels of training that are secret, and now only visits other participants located in Belgium and other European countries.

All are constantly contacted by mail (day/night) to participate in training courses and invited to interact exclusively between participants through the same means.

⇒ **Virtualisation of contacts**

⇒ **Dematerialisation of hazards**

⇒ **The applicant provides more information about the organisation than CIAOSN has**



Digital profile of Belgium (2019)



- 94% of the Belgian population uses the Internet
- 65% of the Belgian population is active on at least one social network
- 77% of the over 13s is active on at least one social network
- Belgians spend an average of 1 hour 31 minutes per day on social networks

Access to information profile (2016).

According to a 2016 study conducted via the Internet and based on more than 50,000 responses collected in 26 countries by the Reuters Institute for Journalism Studies at Oxford University (United Kingdom):

- 51% of respondents now use social networks to access information;
- For 12% of them, this source is the first choice - a rate that reaches 28% among 18-24-year olds;
In this age group, social networks are replacing television (24%) as a priority source;
- Facebook is used by 44% of respondents, 2 X more than YouTube (19%) and 4 X more than Twitter (10%).

Centre d'Information et d'Avis sur les Organisations Sectaires Nuisibles (CIAOSN)

Statutory tasks



Information to the public

Required or own-initiative **opinion** by public

Recommendation to public authorities

Collaboration with the Administrative Coordination Cell (ACC)

Independence

Objectivity

Statement of position

Evolution of sectarian organisations towards the Internet and social networks

⇒ Evolution of the recruitment/affiliation process

- Tunnel effect of algorithms: filter bubbles and echo chambers
- Virtualisation of contacts
- Dematerialisation of hazards and responsibilities
- Modification of the profile of the actors (anonymisation, fragmentation, influencers, etc.)

⇒ How to inform the public?

- Difficulty in finding and cross-checking information (new expertise, knowledge, etc.)
- Difficulty in identifying new deviations? (encryption, etc.)
- Speed of information flow: "*false information flows 6x faster than real information*"
- All age groups?



Tracks?



⇒ Fact checking: some leads but very complex!

⇒ Spiritual checking?

⇒ Prevention: digital pedagogy?

- All age groups
- Digital Public Space (150 EPN in Wallonia)

⇒ Communication work with public life actors

- <https://www.disinfo.eu/>
- <https://www.invid-project.eu/>

Sources

- <https://www.xavierdegraux.be/belges-digital-statistiques-2019>
- https://www.lemonde.fr/actualite-medias/article/2016/06/15/les-reseaux-sociaux-prennent-une-place-croissante-dans-l-acces-a-l-information_4950771_3236.html
- <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/>
- <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6380/1146.full>



Questions?