2024

Microsoft-UCD Digital Policy Programme

A special report prepared for

Microsoft Ireland
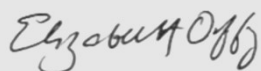
March 2025

Thank You

Dear Ciarán,

On behalf of UCD Foundation and UCD Centre for Digital Policy, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for Microsoft's support and partnership. Your generosity allows us to drive important research and engagement in the ever-evolving field of digital policy.

We are pleased to share with you some of the significant achievements and highlights from 2024, as outlined in this report. From the publication of key research papers and white papers to the launch of impactful events and collaborations, the team has continued to push forward in advancing knowledge, influencing policy, and engaging with a wide range of stakeholders.

The Centre's success is due in no small part to your commitment to the Microsoft-UCD Digital Policy Programme, and we are excited to continue our work with your invaluable support. We look forward to further milestones in the coming year and to keeping you informed of our progress.

Thank you again for being an essential part of our journey.

With sincere appreciation,

Elizabeth Duffy
Associate Director, Stewardship & Operations

Report on Microsoft-UCD Digital Policy Programme

By Professors Colin Scott, Eugenia Siapera, and Assistant Professor Elizabeth Farries

Microsoft-UCD Digital Policy Programme

The Microsoft-UCD Digital Policy Programme aims to equip government officials with the skills and expertise needed to revise current legislation, create new laws that safeguard society, and establish a relevant framework for organisations to function within. We are committed to advancing UCD Centre for Digital Policy's initiatives and educational programs in the European Union by expanding our team, research, educational offerings, and shared outputs.

In Year 3 of this partnership, the Centre operates with three key groups: the Central Team, the Advisory Board, and Centre Membership, maintaining the same structure as in Year 2.

Our Central Team remains composed of two Directors: Professor Eugenia Siapera and Dr Elizabeth Farries, an Executive Advisor: Professor Colin Scott, an Ad Astra Fellow: Dr Marco Bastos, a Postdoctoral Researcher and Newman Fellow: Alexandros Minotakis, and a PhD student: Jet Klokgieters.

The Advisory Board includes representatives from academia, civil service, civil society, and industry. We are fortunate to retain, among others, Frances Fitzgerald MEP, Barry Andrews MEP, Jean Carberry, Assistant Secretary EU, Andrea Renda of CEPS, along with affiliates from Microsoft, Meta, Amnesty Tech, and Digital Action.

Our Centre Membership continues to grow, drawing on multidisciplinary expertise in media, communications, law, politics, and computer science.

2024 Progress Update

January 2024 Highlights

17 January: Centre Members Dr Susan Leavy and Dr Abeba Birhane were appointed to the Irish Government's AI Advisory Council, marking an important step in their contributions to AI policy and governance.

26 January: A submission on disinformation was presented to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport, and Media. The submission addressed current understandings of disinformation in the literature, the limitations of media literacy as a solution, and offered five key recommendations, including the implementation of monitoring and transparency measures and promoting a society-based approach beyond regulation.

18 January: Dr Abeba Birhane and Dr Elizabeth Farries contributed to an Oireachtas submission on Policing Facial Recognition Technology, focusing on ethical, legal, and practical concerns related to its use.

24 January: The Digital Policy II class commenced, held every Wednesday from 2-4 pm, continuing the Centre's educational efforts in the field.

Guest Lecturers in January:

- Ciaran Conlon (30 January)
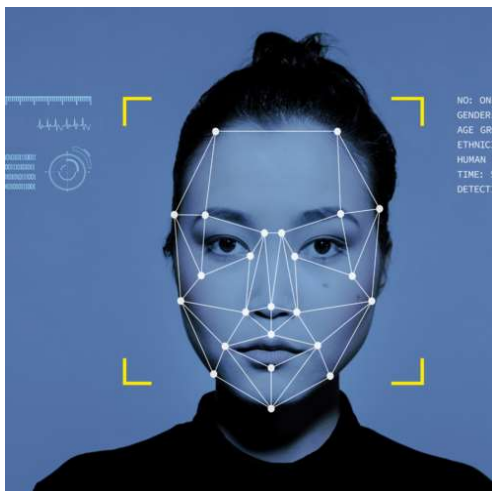- Ronan Costello & Sinead McSweeney (7 February)

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February 2024 Highlights

6 February: We welcomed our first visiting fellow, Hunter Vaughan, a Senior Research Associate at the Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy at the University of Cambridge. Dr Vaughan's research focuses on the intersection of film and environmentalism. He is the author of *Hollywood's Dirtiest Secret: The Hidden Environmental Costs of the Movies* (2019) and co-editor of *Film and Television Production in the Age of Climate Crisis* (2022). Additionally, he is the founding editor of the *Journal of Environmental Media*, co-Director of the AHRC-funded Global Green Media Network, and co-PI of the Sustainable Subsea Networks project.

New Adjunct Assistant Professors: We are pleased to announce that Ronan Costello and Siobhan Cummiskey have joined the School of Information and Communication Studies as Adjunct Assistant Professors, bringing valuable expertise to our academic community.

15 February: Centre Co-Director, Dr Elizabeth Farries and Centre Member Dr Abeba Birhane presented to the Oireachtas, discussing the use of Facial Recognition Technologies (FRTs) and offering insights into their implications for policy and society.

March 2024 Highlights

6 March: Professor Kate Dommett delivered a presentation on the regulatory challenges associated with data-driven campaigning, offering insights into the evolving landscape of political engagement.

14 March: A visit was organized to Microsoft and Dreamspace, fostering deeper collaboration and engagement with industry leaders.

11 March: A workshop, organized by Hunter Vaughan and featuring guest speakers including Leonard Hobbes, Geertje Schuitema, and Patrick Brodie, was held on "Weaving Networks From Valentia Slate to Silicon Docks: The Cultural Heritage and Environmental Stakes of Ireland's Subsea Communication Infrastructure."

25-30 March: Professor Eugenia Siapera served as a visiting fellow at DECA (Demokratian episteeminen toimintakyky algoritmien aikakaudella), further strengthening our international research ties.

26 March: Professor Eugenia Siapera gave a presentation on the concept of the "Extreme Public Sphere" at DECA, contributing to ongoing discussions on the digital public sphere.

28 March: A workshop was held with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, focusing on the implications and challenges of Facial Recognition Technologies (FRTs). The #IDoNotConsent campaign continued to develop, advancing efforts to raise awareness and drive action on digital rights and privacy issues.

April 2024 Highlights

Visiting Fellow: We welcomed Dr Victoria O'Meara as a visiting fellow. Dr O'Meara is a Lecturer in Digital Media at the University of Leicester's School of Arts, Media, and Communication. Before her current role, Dr O'Meara held a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at Royal Roads University. She is also an ongoing research collaborator with the Social Media Lab at Toronto Metropolitan University and a co-founder of the Digital Public Interest Collective.

10 April: Dr O'Meara presented her findings on influencer culture, authenticity, and amateurism, focusing on the impact of cancer-related medical misinformation.
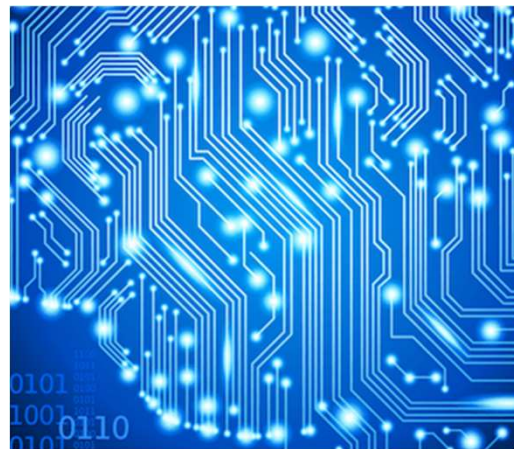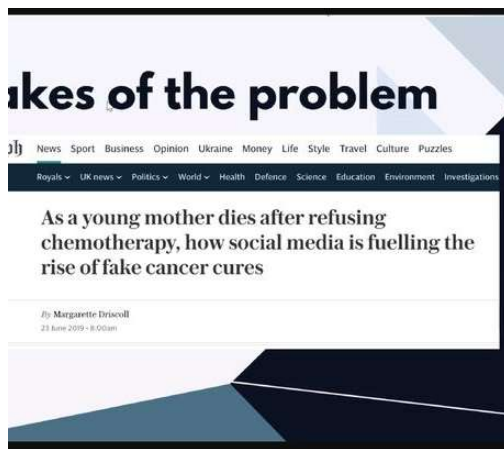
11 April: A submission on disinformation was presented to the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sports, and Media, contributing to ongoing discussions on combating misinformation.

16 April: Professor Eugenia Siapera and Dr Elizabeth Farries presented at the PGMT (Postgraduate Media and Technology Conference) on the role of civil society organizations within platform governance frameworks.

18 April: The AI Primer Series was launched, offering foundational insights into artificial intelligence and its implications.

30 April: The Advisory Board meeting took place, providing a platform for discussing the Centre's strategic direction and ongoing projects.

30 April: Professor Nick Couldry was invited to present his new book, DataGrab, at the Centre, sparking an engaging discussion on the ethics and implications of data collection in the digital age.

May 2024 Highlights

New Advisory Board Member: We are pleased to welcome Una Fitzpatrick to our Advisory Board, bringing valuable expertise to our team.

Visiting Fellow: Ioanna Noula joined as a visiting fellow. Her research focuses on the intersections of democratic citizenship, children's rights online, tech policy, and organizational governance.

8 May: Professor Eugenia Siapera and Dr Elizabeth Farries delivered a presentation on the role of civil society organizations as actors in platform governance, exploring their influence and impact.

13 May: In collaboration with Dr Susan Leavy, we partnered to share the DIVERSIFAIR survey, which focuses on diversity and fairness within digital spaces.1
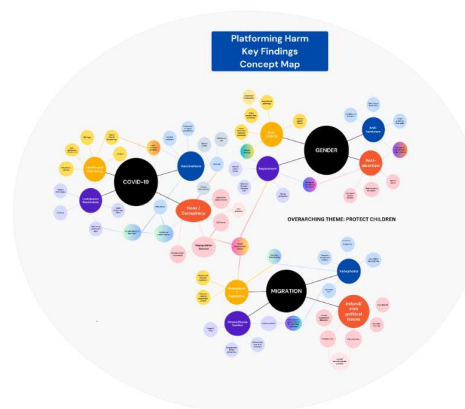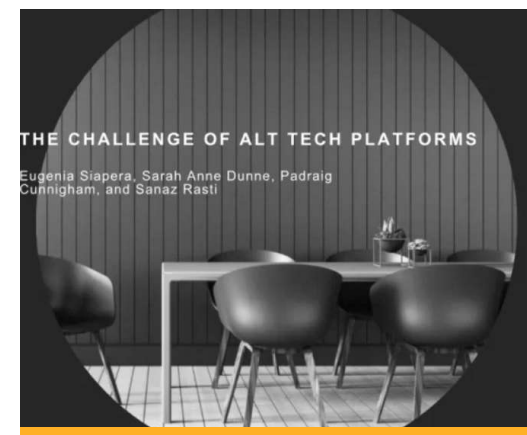

Fig. 1: Concept map of linked narratives and key findings.

5 May: The Centre published a report on the abuse and harassment faced by members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and political staff, contributing to discussions on digital harassment and policy responses.

22 May: A blog post titled "Narrative Connections: Using Narrative Concept Mapping to Understand the Irish Far-Right" was released authored by Dr Sarah Anne Dunne and Professor Eugenia Siapera, exploring new ways to analyze extremist narratives.

28 May: A white paper titled "The Challenge of Alt-Tech Platforms" was published by Centre members Professor Eugenia Siapera, Dr Sarah Anne Dunne, and Professor Padraig Cunningham, offering insights into the growing influence of alternative technology platforms.

29 May: Visiting Professor Javier Diaz Noci published AI Copyright and Digital Journalism, contributing to the ongoing discourse on artificial intelligence and its implications for copyright in the media.

June 2024 Highlights

New Centre Members: We are excited to welcome new Centre members, Courtney Ford and Thompson Gyedu Kwarkye, who bring valuable expertise to our growing team.

Book Launch: Centre member Dr Páraic Kerrigan launched his new book, Reeling in the Queers, contributing to important conversations in queer studies and media.

6 June: Dr Elizabeth Farries and Dr Abeba Birhane presented at the IHREC conference on AI and Digital Transformation, discussing the intersection of technology, human rights, and societal change.

14 June: Dr Susan Leavy, representing GPAI, published a blog post titled "The EU's Digital Services Act Must Provide Researchers Access to VLOPs' Experimental Protocols", advocating for greater transparency in the regulation of large online platforms.

25 June: The Centre committed €1,000 to support the STS unconference, fostering discussions on science, technology, and society.

Workshop: Dr Elizabeth Farries moderated an internal workshop with 15 NGOs and 7 academic experts, focused on refining a set of global principles for policing with facial recognition technology.

25 June: A new report from Policing Insight was launched, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on technology and law enforcement practices.

July 2024 Highlights

Centre Member Publication: Professor Arjumand Younus, a Centre member, published a conference paper exploring the use of AI and Large Language Models (LLMs) to identify online hate, contributing to ongoing research in AI ethics and digital safety.

New Blog Posts: "AI Content Moderation for Online Hate Speech" by Arjumand Younus

1 July: "Disinformation at the Paris 2024 Olympics" by Zaur Gouliev

29 July: New Centre Member: We were pleased to welcome Dana Guy to the Centre, bringing new expertise to our team.

New Appointment: Ciaran Conlon was appointed Adjunct Associate Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIRE), further strengthening our academic connections.

1 July: Arjumand Younus published "Inclusive Counterfactual Generation Leveraging LLMs in Identifying Online Hate", expanding on AI's role in moderating harmful online content.

17 July: A submission was made to the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment's Public Consultation on the AI Act by Farries, Kwarkye, Leavy, Ní Fhaoláin, Minotakis, Siapera, and Ford. The submission argued that sustainability measures should be integrated into the expansion of AI technologies, emphasizing the importance of transparency and education in building public trust.

UCD Centre for Digital Policy Submission to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Public Consultation on National Implementation of EU Harmonised Rules on Artificial Intelligence (AI Act)

15 July 2024

Centre Authors
Elizabeth Farries, Thompson Kwarkye, Susan Leavy, Labhaoise Ní Fhaoláin, Alexandros Minotakis, Eugenia Siapera, Courtney Ford

The above Centre members are pleased to respond to the Public Consultation on National Implementation of EU Harmonised Rules on Artificial Intelligence (AI Act). We present the following issues to inform Ireland's approach to implementing the Act and, specifically in relation to the configuration of national competent authorities required for implementation.

August 2024 Highlights

New Advisory Board Member: Kevin Keary joined our Advisory Board, bringing valuable insight and expertise to guide our strategic direction.

6 August: A new blog post titled "Participatory AI – What Now, What Next?" was published by Charlotte O'Neill, exploring the future of participatory approaches in artificial intelligence.

September 2024 Highlights

New Senior Advisor: Aphra Kerr officially joined the School and Centre as a Senior Advisor, bringing a wealth of expertise to guide our initiatives.

New Centre Members: We are pleased to welcome Jennifer Waters and Anthony Kelly to the Centre, who will contribute to our ongoing work in digital policy and research.

New Blog Posts:
- "Policing Alt-Tech for Disinformation? VIGILANTly Moving in the Right Direction" by Zaur Gouliev and Dr Sarah Anne Dunne (24 September 2024)
- "Exclusionary Microtargeting", "Creating an Irish Science, Technology and Society Community" by Jennifer Waters (19 September 2024)
- "Too Far Right? The Role of Alt-Tech and Mainstream Social Media Platforms in Far-Right Political Violence" by Dr Sarah Anne Dunne (5 September 2024)

Call for Papers: Professor Eugenia Siapera will guest-edit an upcoming special issue (SI) focused on Alt-Tech platforms, inviting contributions from researchers and experts in the field.

Start of Term: The academic term began with guest lecturers Ciarán Conlon and Professor Colin Scott joining us, adding valuable insights to our courses.

Westminster Forum Participation: Dr Elizabeth Farries and Ioanna Noula participated in the Westminster Forum Projects, discussing online safety and regulation at a conference focused on Ireland's regulatory landscape.

9 September: The Platformization of Cancel Culture special issue and chapter, co-authored by Dr Elizabeth Farries and Professor Eugenia Siapera, was released, exploring the intersection of cancel culture and platform dynamics.

October 2024 Highlights

1 October: Invitations were sent out for the first event in our Digital Policy series, kicking off an exciting lineup of discussions and engagements.

2 October: Ioanna Noula and Tijana Milosevic released a response to the Consultation Call on the Digital Services Act (DSA), focusing on key issues of safety, privacy, and security in digital environments.

4 October: The final report on the YouAGaMSI project, led by Aphra Kerr, was published, summarizing significant findings and recommendations.

7 October: Aphra Kerr and colleagues held an event to present the findings of the YouGameSI project, discussing its implications for digital media and youth engagement.
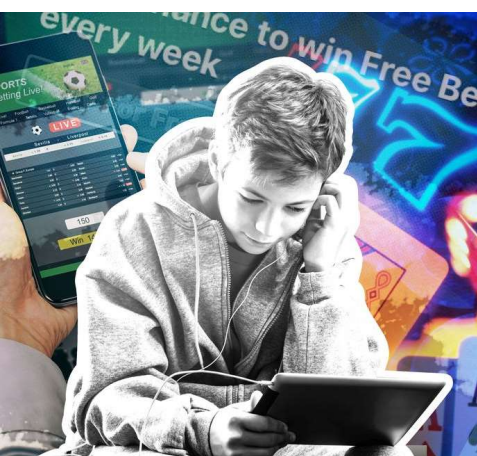
9 October: Kalpana Shankar and colleagues released a white paper on researching funding organizations' policies related to open research in Ireland, contributing to the ongoing conversation on transparency in academic funding.

10 October: "Mainstreaming the Far-Right", a chapter by Dr Sarah Anne Dunne and Professor Eugenia Siapera, was published in Online Hate Speech Vol. 1, exploring the influence of far-right movements in online spaces.

14 October: The Centre's first newsletter was sent out, providing updates on our latest activities, research, and initiatives.

23 October: A panel event on AI standardization and digital policy-making was held in collaboration with NSAI and Adapt Centre members, discussing the future of AI regulations and standards.

30 October: Dr Páraic Kerrigan's book *Reeling in the Queers* was shortlisted for Best Irish-Published Book of the Year at the An Post Book Awards, a significant recognition for his work.

November 2024 Highlights

5 November: Event featuring Professor Adriana da Rosa Amaral on "Remixing Methods for Researching Digital Culture."

11 November: Report published on "Resisting Hate and Navigating Agitation: Irish Public Library Staff Stand United Against Reactionary Challenges to LGBTQ+ Materials," with contributions from Centre members Dr Páraic Kerrigan and Professor Eugenia Siapera.

11 November: Policing Insight article released, exploring debates on Facial Recognition Technology (FRT), with input from Dr Elizabeth Farries at the Centre.

13 November: Content Policy Director at META, Assoc. Professor Siobhan Cummiskey, delivered her fifth annual lecture to the Centre's students.

15 November: Dr Sarah Anne Dunne presented her paper on "Mainstreaming the Far-Right," co-authored with Professor Eugenia Siapera, as part of the Digital Hate Speech trilogy.

18 November: Dr Diretnan Dikwal-Bot presented on "Representation: Race and Migration in Media," as part of the "Talking Black: Voices from the Diaspora" series.

20 November: Data Protection Commission Ireland's Assistant Commissioner Aisling Mulligan and Deputy Commissioner Ian Chambers gave a lecture to students on "The GDPR is a Very Readable Regulation."

26 November: The Centre published a report on the State's response to online disinformation and media/digital literacy, including recommendations for transparency, examining alt-tech spaces, and enhancing digital literacy through new educational programs.

28 November: A Report was published via the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on Ireland's implementation of the AI Act, with a focus on regulations, digital literacy, public campaigns, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability.

28 November: Annual field trip to Microsoft HQ, where students attended policy sessions led by Ciaran Conlon, Dr Kevin Marshall and Kieran McCorry.

FORSEE Project

The Centre for Digital Policy at University College Dublin (UCD) has received €3 million in funding from Horizon Europe for the FORSEE Project, which focuses on artificial intelligence (AI) and its various implications on society. The project seeks to evaluate AI's effects on critical areas such as sustainability, labour, economic efficiency, gender equality, and civil society engagement. With the leadership of Dr Elizabeth Farries, the initiative aims to develop strategies that enhance the role of AI while addressing the societal challenges associated with its growth.

The FORSEE project is a collaboration among eight institutions across the European Union, and it intends to improve the understanding of AI governance. The goal is to ensure that AI development is ethical, inclusive, and aligned with European values. By focusing on both AI's technological advancements and the regulatory frameworks needed to guide them, the project aims to bridge gaps between innovation and its real-world implications in various sectors.

One of the key objectives of the project is to develop sustainable, equitable strategies for AI governance in Europe. It will engage with diverse societal stakeholders to ensure that AI systems are developed and regulated in ways that benefit all sectors of society. The project will contribute to shaping future policy on AI by generating empirical research, which will inform the design of regulations and strategies that address challenges and harness the full potential of AI.

Thank You

Dear Ciarán,

It is with great pleasure that I present the 2024 Microsoft Digital Policy Programme Report to you and your esteemed colleagues. Over the past year, the UCD Centre for Digital Policy has continued to make significant strides in its mission to enhance digital policy capability through research, education, and knowledge sharing.

Our collective efforts have fostered a year of robust collaboration, as demonstrated through peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, parliamentary submissions, workshops, and a wide array of impactful events. These initiatives have not only advanced our shared understanding of digital policy challenges but have also contributed to shaping more informed, innovative solutions for the future.

The continued success of the Centre is a testament to the invaluable role that partners like you play in sustaining the momentum of our work. Your unwavering support and commitment have enabled us to expand our impact and build a vibrant digital policy community. We are deeply grateful for the opportunities to work together and look forward to furthering our collaboration in the years ahead.

On behalf of everyone at UCD, I extend our heartfelt thanks to Microsoft and your entire team for your steadfast dedication to the important work of the Centre for Digital Policy.

Yours sincerely,

Niamh M. Cherry

Professor Niamh Moore-Cherry
Dean of Social Sciences
College Principal in the UCD College of Social Sciences and Law

Thank you for your support

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