

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

WEAPONIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

FEATURING PETER W. SINGER

EPISODE 139

HOSTED BY: LISA MUNYON

(Music)

NARRATOR: Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida.

And now here’s your host, Chief Judge Lisa Munyon.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Hello and welcome to Open Ninth. I’m here today with Peter Singer, New York Times bestselling author and political scientist, named one of the 100 most influential people in defense issues by the newspaper Defense News. Peter currently works as a strategist for the New America Foundation, is a professor of practice at Arizona State University. And is the founder of Useful Fiction, LLC. When he’s not busy with these roles, he’s writing books on the topics of war, the military and politics. One of his most recent books, LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media delves deeply into how social media has changed war and politics. And how war and politics have changed social media. I’m thrilled to have you here today, Peter. Welcome. Thanks for joining me.

MR. SINGER: Thanks so much for having me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, this will be an interesting conversation. I read a little bit of your book, LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media. What exactly do you mean when you say, the weaponization of social media? What is that?

MR. SINGER: So the idea of it is that this project as research began almost a decade back, and we were exploring how this space of social media, if you go back in time, it was thought of as either something that was light and airy and fun and not all that impactful on the world. Or if people thought it had an effect, it was only an effect that was good. This is when you had, for example, the New York Times writing about the “democratizing” power of social

media. And so what we did is, we began to explore, okay, how is social media being used as a tool? And what we found when we looked at cases that ranged from how were celebrities using it, how were street gangs using it? How were Russian information warriors using it? How are teenagers using it? Consistently, it was a tool that was in a sense being weaponized. It was much like any other tool as a weapon, you can use it to influence, but you can also in some cases, use it to harm, use it to achieve your goals. And what we also found in this kind of parallel to weaponization is that overall social media, it was a space for communication. It was a space for profit, but it was also like a bit of a battlefield where you had sides going back and forth. And so that was, you know, when we talk about the wepaonization, think about it that way as a tool, as the space that it plays out is akin to a battlefield and that when you have that kind of understanding, it changes the way that you think about it, understand it, both in its effect on the world but also its effect on you and I.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So social media, when it first started, was puppies and kittens and you know, furry little things like that that made everybody smile. It's not that anymore.

MR. SINGER: It's still that but it's also oh, by the way, ISES's top recruiter using photos of kittens. I'm not making this up, a real story, trying to induce people to recruit, to join the organization or it's similarly, you know, puppies and kittens being used to sway how people vote. It's, you know, deploying things as a tool. There's always a goal in mind and again, that goal might be something for the good. It might be something for the bad. As a great example, the very same kind of approaches were used in ice bucket challenge, if you remember that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah, I do.

MR. SINGER: As ISES propaganda. Two very different you know sort of effects on the world. You know, one for the good, one for the bad. But very similar in it didn't just happen organically. There was a thought behind it. There was a strategy behind it. It was designed to take advantage of the way people tend to operate as well as the way that the platform companies themselves designed this space.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: If social media is a tool that can be weaponized, how does that happen? In what ways is it weaponized? I know that there are facts that – well, there's fiction that poses as facts. That might be one way that it's weaponized. But how do you see it being weaponized today?

MR. SINGER: So what was interesting is when we looked at these cases across so many different spaces, so to speak, so you know everything from Chicago street gangs to Donald Trump to Taylor Swift, to ISES propaganda, Russian information warriors. I'm giving you these examples of like you know, cut across the political spectrum, cut across locations from Iraq to Chicago, you name it is that we found like any other kind of marketplace or war zone, a series of kind of rules. Patterns that emerged. And essentially, there were four that I think are really useful for people to understand. One is the idea of, I jokingly call it, it's the parallel to what the old X-Files TV show warned us about. The truth is out there. It's the idea that there is now so much information being both created, shared and mined that it is essentially impossible to keep something a secret. Whatever the activity is, it leaves a trace of some kind. A digital trace. And even if it doesn't leave a trace, that's a trace in and of itself. And the sheer scale of information means that you can mine it for insight like never before. And again, and that matters in everything from marketing to looking at extremism to law enforcement, you name it. We can go into depth on that.

But the second rule, and you were hitting on this in this idea of miss and disinformation, is that the counter to that is the idea of bury the truth underneath a sea of lies. Don't try and hide it, hide it underneath a sea of lies now. And that's what we see in everything from Russian information warfare to how everyone from corporations to teenagers deal with bad news, to how it's hit our domestic politics. Then you get this third rule that comes out of these. We're in a world now where virility trumps veracity. When it comes to the power of information, its ability to shape people's beliefs but also their actions. Not just online but their beliefs and actions in the real world. It's more important that the information go viral. Its speed, its reach matters more than the truth of that packet of information. Now, the truth can go viral but again, it's the speed, it's the reach that gives it. And we can see this in everything from politics to protests to what's played out during the pandemic and the associated, what they call the infodemic of false information that swirled around it and caused people to take actions that literally have harmed themselves. It had led to not ones, and twos, and tens, thousands, tens of thousands of lives lost due to misinformation and deliberate disinformation about the pandemic, something that's particularly hit Florida hard. And then we get to the final rule that comes out which is the idea of a world of new powers and new possibilities. And what comes out of that is in particular, not just what you can accomplish online. And emergent, you know, groups and leaders that wouldn't have been so in the past. And again, you can think about this for the good. You can think about it for the bad. Whether it's Donald Trump or Black Lives Matter, wherever you fall on the spectrum of what you think about them, both of those would not have arisen without the power of social media. But it goes beyond that. It's the power that, so to speak, the powers behind the throne have, the role that the platform companies, the Facebooks, the Twitters, in particular the Mark Zuckerberg's have to shape what plays out online and then the real world

effects. And of course, that leads to just a whole series of political, economic and yes, legal questions that we're going to be wrestling with for certainly the next decade.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How does this effect just the average Facebook user or social media user?

MR. SINGER: If you are online, you are both a target of this and a participant. And in both cases knowing or unknowing, you are, whatever you read, whether it's, you know wake up and the news that pops up for you on Facebook or Instagram or Twitter or LinkedIn, whatever you're in, algorithms and the deliberate shaping of those algorithms, whether it's by the platform companies or by the various groups that are trying to influence what you see and not just what you see, but what you believe and how you act, you are constantly targeted. Whether you know it or not, and in turn part of the goal of that targeting is to get you to become a participant and click on it, share it, push it across your own network, your friends, your families, your co-workers, and drive it viral. Again, whether it's the movie that you should go see or that you enjoyed, or your happiness or outrage at whatever the latest news and politics was, you name it. And again, the goal is both the physical action of the click, of the share, but your physical action in the real world. What you buy, how you vote, whether you show up to a protest or not. And again, it can be something that is real and heartfelt. I want you to feel real happiness. I want you to feel real anger. Show up to this protest. Or it can be somewhat, someone deliberately trying to manipulate you. To give a Florida example, there was a fascinating – it was a protest in Florida that Russian information warriors manipulated both sides of it. So they posed as Trump supporters organizing a pro-Trump physical protest, in the real world protest. Got people to turn up, to show up at it, physically to show up in Florida at it. But they also then pushed, hey, look

at this protest. It's going on. All the Trumpers are showing up over here and got people to show up to counter protest at it.

So what I'm talking about here is, you can have either real movements or false movements that can be generated online. So much of this push for you again, and we can talk about the legal side of it, it's to affect people's lawful or illegal acts. January 6th is a near perfect/horrific example of a social media event. Everything from the motivation of it to the coordination of it, to literally the activities themselves were all kind of made for social media. Even to the legal questions that follow. Roughly half of the people that have been indicted so far for January 6, their own social media posts have been used as evidence against them. But it might be something again that's kind of pernicious or it can be something that is you know positive, go back to that ice bucket challenge example. But I think what's so crucial about it all is to understand our own role in it and not be unknowing participants but be knowing participants and be responsible knowing participants.

And this connects to the second legal action, legal issue at play is that it's not just about you and I, the participants, it's about the role of the private companies. And of course, that's a huge legal question that's playing out is, in terms of, you know, everything from their market power to what do they allow or not on their networks, to what are the consequences for them and/or users on their networks legally for when online activity creates real world effects.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How do the social media companies contribute to this? And I call them social media companies, because they're really not just technology companies anymore.

MR. SINGER: That's a great way of framing it. They – and this is how I'm – how to put this – one of the pushbacks that I have against them, and I've done it in person and directly with the execs, not just on podcasts, is that they are akin to parents going through the stages of grief. So they created something. It was their baby. And when I say they created it, in almost every case, it was an individual, a very small group of individuals that literally wrote the software for something. Mark Zuckerberg you know writes the original software for what was called Facemash, now Facebook. It was originally designed to help fellow college student's rate who was hot or not. That's the origin of all this. But their baby grows and it goes off into the world. And it does well. And it makes them proud. And it makes them billionaires, and gives them great power. But along the way a couple of things have happened that they're in denial of. One is how you framed it, is that you may visualize yourself as the creator of technology, an engineer, you know, building in your lab so to speak or your dorm room. But along the way what you built changed. And it's not about technology anymore. You're running by one definition the largest most powerful media network in all of human history. Another way to think about it is that it is a combination of a public square and kind of a public utility in terms of people's dependence on it for everything from the news to marketplaces, to public health information, you name it. As I noted, it's also simultaneously a bit of a battle field where contending forces that range from Russian military units to militants in Iraq, to extremists in Duval County are all trying to utilize for their own ends including for violence. And so that brings for the companies and their creators a very different set of responsibilities than you're just making technology. And there's that aspect of denial and then guess what, their baby's not just grown up but they've gotten into some trouble. Some bad things have happened. It's you know no longer the cute baby. It's you know the surly teenager that's you know gotten tattoos and maybe has gotten in a

couple of fights with people. And you still think of them as your baby but they're causing some damage out there in the world. And you have to look at what your role in that is in both, how did you potentially create that and how do you reign that in. And that's something that's played out right now I think in particular of the latest revelations from the various documents the whistle blowers have revealed. And this applies to Facebook, but it's played out in a number of the other companies, is that the other aspect of the denial is that this kind of denial of, oh, but what we created was only for the good. And so they've moved into that next phase which is bargaining. It's that, okay, remember when I said nothing bad was happening on my network. Well, now I accept that bad things have happened on my network, but here's all the awesome stuff that I've done to prevent it, to change it. But as we're seeing from the whistle blower documents, that almost always came after the fact of the bad thing. Whether it was child porn to extremism, to vaccine misinformation, to January 6th, to harm -- to teenagers who are harming themselves, giving them suicidal thoughts that in each of these cases the information was surfacing within the company and the company would respond usually by pushing that information back down and/or after it went public then doing something about it. And so it's kind of in that bargaining mode and it's the same thing when it comes to the questions around market power and business practices, it's okay, these are all the things that we'll do so that you don't more regulate us. And what I'm getting at here is, it's going to be very interesting because you know, how do we deal with this? Well, you work in this space, these are legal questions. And they're legal questions in terms of everything from do we need to create new laws. There's been some legislation around that, or is it we need to alter or enhance our interpretation of old laws, whether it relates to media or even SEC questions. There may have been some things they've told their shareholders or in public announcements that weren't valid, or is it that whole other part of American law where,

you know what, we really don't do new regulation all that well, but we do litigation really well so maybe it might be some lawsuits that come in here. But so much of this is, what I'm getting at, it's not just a question of politics. It's not just a question of markets. It's a question of law.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: We'll get to the courts in just a minute. But I have noticed on social media that you can find almost any viewpoint that you want. And as a society not only have our politics become divisive, but just our society has in many ways become divisive. How has social media contributed to that?

MR. SINGER: It's a great question. And when you unpack it, there's two crucial elements that you are talking about. So you began by saying you know, the issue is you can find any information that you want. So think about it this way. Through most of human history, all the way up to when you and I were growing up, we lived in a world of information scarcity. When you wanted a question answered, anything from who built the pyramids to what's the best pizza restaurant in my town, to where does this new virus come from, you usually pre-internet, pre-social media, did not have a wealth of resources to turn to. You went to some, and going back to an important word that you used, either the media provided that to you and the media is literally the word taken from the middle. It's a profession that takes all the world's information, boils it down. It's the median between all the world's news, funneling it down, then sharing it with the consumer. That's the way it's always been back to literally the creation of the word, back when they invent the printing press in the 1400's. That's why it's called, we call it the media, the press, it was the idea from the printing press, right. So you either did that or there was some authoritative source that you could go to. So if you or I were kids and we were – wanted to find out who built the pyramids, I would go to my World Book. I'd go to my encyclopedia –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: The encyclopedia, yes.

MR. SINGER: -- right. Okay, now, you want to find out everything from who built the pyramids to where did coronavirus come from, you go online and you don't struggle to find information. You struggle to find the truth. Go back to that notion, bury the truth underneath the sea of lies. There is a wealth of information out there. Some of it valid and true. Lots of it not. But it's not just the sheer scale of it, it's the idea and this is the second part, it's the role of the algorithms that what you see is shaped by this combination of how the platforms work. They were for profit models designed to increase engagement, to get your clicks, your shares and those people within your network that drive you towards those clicks and shares. And so that is how you know within -- you're a kid, you want to find out who built the pyramids, say for example, you're doing a school project, within two -- you go to -- you know, you'll go to YouTube and in two hops you're being told aliens built the pyramids, right. That was not in my World Book but that's what you're being told. It's the very same thing on coronavirus, vaccines, whatever we saw, to voter information, et cetera. That algorithmic part hits that second question that you asked, which is, you said, you know, how is this contributed to division? Well, so essentially, there's an idea, it's a term called homophily. Homophily translates as love of self. And it's essentially the idea that we're drawn to people who think like us and that's -- whether it's in politics, whether it's in sports, whatever it is, if you are a sports fan, so I'm going to be tongue and cheek with you. I'm a fan of a successive NFL team, the New England Patriots as opposed to --

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Tampa Bay.

MR. SINGER: Oh, you're from Tampa Bay so we lost our key player to you all. I was hoping instead you were from Miami or Jacksonville but I was going to do a little bit of Florida poking there. But the point being you go online and both the algorithms will steer you towards if

you're from Tampa Bay, it might pop up Tampa Bay to who do you – you're drawn – you're drawn to news of Tampa Bay Buccaneers. You see someone else posting things about the Buccaneers, you're more likely to engage with them. You might join the Facebook group of them. And whether it's sports, whether it's you are into horticulture and you want to add other people who are into gardening to your right wing, your left wing. You're into white power, you're into – whatever it is, you are drawn into these clusters of people that are like-minded and the algorithms and the whole enterprise that is built around it re-enforce that. You get pushed more and more of that information. And you have a business ecosystem, media outlets that get more clicks if they service that. So Breitbart on the right was literally created by someone – Andrew Breitbart with that in mind. He actually was, part of what's interesting is, he also helped devise the creation of Huffington Post on the left recognizing the same phenomena. And so this division in part, it's not the sole cause. There's lots of other things that have driven partisanship in the United States, but what social media has brought into it is more and more of that info bubble where it's not just kind of partisan divide where you know we can see that coming out of, redistricting and gerrymandering. But what social media has done has created these different realities for people in their differing bubbles and re-enforcing them.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: They never hear dissenting voices.

MR. SINGER: They never hear dissenting voices or they actually rethink their beliefs on something that they themselves observed and saw. So a sad and horrible example of that is one of the most momentous events of American democracy here in my lifetime, which was January 6th. The events of January 6th seemed to have shocked everyone during it, but afterwards a recasting, a narrative war built around the acts – the actions on January 6th and we have seen a change in beliefs among one of the info bubbles as to everything from the participants that they

were heroes, to the person who – martyr is used to the justification of it, the number of people that believe in what was called, it's a series of actually sixteen overlapping conspiracy theories on stolen election. And I say conspiracy theories because what's fascinating about these sixteen is go back to where we were before, they're contradictory. They're not aligned and every time they've been tested in a court of law they've failed, including even in front of judges that were appointed by Donald Trump himself. And yet the more over time that we get away from the event itself, the more over time that they've been debunked in various courts of law actually we see more adherence to the belief. So the disinformation campaign has become sticky in part because of this info bubble and so you can see like fascinating changes in even something that people saw with their own eyes, felt over time they changed belief. And we can see similar things in everything from pandemic measures to – it's a really interesting case example of how you can alter people's preferences and actions. Yeah, and unfortunately so.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It sounds as if with each click, these algorithms are manipulating to reinforce my deeply held beliefs.

MR. SINGER: So each click, not only you become more involved and you – and what's interesting also is if someone pushes back directly against you online, you actually will – not you personally, but the statistics show you're more likely to dig in. But the real key in this is to go back to the notion of a combination of a battlefield in a marketplace. Each click, actually each choice not to click is a little tiny experiment. It sends back information to the original creator, the pusher of that, whether it's again, a digital marketing campaign for a movie, for an electoral race, be it for President, Senator, Judge, whatever. It sends back information, not just about you, what are you likely to click on or not. And again, not just the information content, but all the way down to the packaging of it. What color are you more likely to respond to. The

psychology, is it a message that hits an emotion of fear or is it one that hits an emotion of pride or an emotion of family, whatever. It not only provides information about you, but also people that are just like you. People of a similar age, a similar gender, income, geographic setting, whatever it is. So if you click on it, we then pull that data and go, okay, this is what someone who is of such and such in age, from such and such a county, who drives, we can pull the data, X model of car, all these different points of data. They're more likely to react to information packaged in the color, light blue and striking their fear phenomena. So let's for the next round go after everyone with that background and package it in that way and we're more likely to get their clicks, right, and their shares across their network. Because the key is the shares are what they're after because they don't have to pay for the share. The share is the free part. That's you doing the job for them. That's you –

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That's their free advertising.

MR. SINGER: That's you carrying that message to everyone in your network and importantly, you putting kind of your stamp of approval and trust in it which is actually why, and again, this goes contrary to the way they think it, why people that are in greater positions of power or trust, be it judges, lawyers, or veterans is another example, are – they're like the gold coin in this space because them pushing your message, wow, they're putting their sort of stamp of credibility on top of it. And that actually again, you know, I think sort of brings greater responsibility towards those who are in those positions of trust.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how do you see this weaponization effecting the courts?

MR. SINGER: Gosh, I think we can see it in a lot of different ways. And again, you know, I'm not a lawyer nor do I play one on TV or whatever. You know, let's just kind of walk

through it. On that notion of sheer scale of information, I think you can wrestle with it in everything or, sorry, the courts are already wrestling with it in everything from this is a wealth of potential evidence that might be and has already been utilized. And I don't just mean you know the criminal posting on Twitter I did it, you know, guilty plea. I mean, as an example, your average smart phone has 25 sensors on it. Everything from visual data, what camera is showing to geolocation, where in the world was it. Think about your average home right now, all the devices that are collecting information. You know, everything from temperature data to which door opened. I mean, there's just so much information and of course it also creates a data trail, you know, follows you through life. That information might be utilized as evidence and is being utilized as evidence in new ways but it also in turn raises you know all those constitutional rights questions, privacy questions, you name it. Let's look at it within the court itself. How do you use that information in everything from jury selection to legal strategy. Even down to I can learn certain things about judges and what are they more or less likely to do. I might incorporate that into my legal strategy. I mean, so just the sheer wealth of data that's available clearly will go through the courts but what is allowed or not, how do you make use of it or not. Okay, let's go to that question of bury the truth underneath the sea of lies. Same thing on everything from the evidence, how do I you know, is the data truthful or not, can it steer me in wrong directions and/or steer juries or lawyers or judges in the wrong direction. Understanding new issues like algorithmic bias are huge for people working in courts. To how are we casting doubt on various legal issues right now and there's you know been deliberate campaigns of disinformation about court rulings. That everything from the national to the state and local level, it's been obviously one of the major challenges related to elections and the role that courts play in that. Go back to the example I gave you, kind of the big lie. I mean, a series of courts made decisions but those

decisions were not respected in the way that they were previously because of miss and disinformation campaigns around them. To the question for the courts of how are they going to adjudicate all of these new legal issues that surface, of what is allowed or not, whether it's at a personal level. We've seen all the way up to the Supreme Court free speech questions. There was the, you know, what can someone say on social media or not, in what settings and what are the consequences to – there's probably going to be market questions that courts are going to help resolve. You know, market power. How do you make use of customer data? I mean, it's almost like a combination of going back in time and saying, there's this new thing. It's called the telegraph. And there's this other new thing, it's called the computer. How is that going to effect the courts? It will effect everything from kind of the transfer of information in the courts to courts had to decide, you know, whether ultimately to break up a company called American Telegraph and Telephone, ATT, right?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Right. Yep. So our court has a social media presence. Do you see courts having that social media presence being potentially damaging? I mean, they do provide a function of letting people know what it is the courts do, but there's a dark side to social media as well.

MR. SINGER: So in general, I'm a supporter of official outlets having these – of official organizations, government agencies, leaders, et cetera, you know, whether it's national government, state and local. Same thing for corporations, having these accounts because in many ways, you know, to give a different kind of parallel, social media is like a vacuum. You know, nature reports a vacuum so if you're not there, someone is going to fill that voice for you. It is also where, not just the public, but the media, local, state, national, newspaper, TV, radio reporters are drawing their information. There was a study that found that 90 percent of

journalists use social media to determine what stories to cover or not, what angle to take, utilize them in their stories, quotes, et cetera. So I think it is essential that official outlets have it to be able to provide official news. It's you know back in the day, you know, someone would have literally taken a piece of papyrus, and a hammer and a nail, and nailed it outside the court or there would have been, you know, whatever the court – in ancient Rome there was literally a person who would you know read it out loud into the forum so you would have an official document – you know, we think of the court – there's official documents that are posted. They create books and the like so it's a form of communication. You need to be there. It's – I think it's valuable. Now, that said, there have been problems and the problems emerge.

One, there's obviously a cyber-security concern. There's sometimes accounts that have not been well secured and someone else has hacked and take that over. So it's an alternative voice substituting for that official voice so you need to be secure about it. You also need to be responsible with that official voice. It has to be truthful. It has to be – it has to be authoritative. That does not mean it has to wait for everything to be done. It can provide partial information. This is what we know right now. We will soon provide information on X, Y and Z. That is better than staying silent. And again, but saying this is what we know right now does not mean lie. That is a way to lose credibility in this space. There is another question for official outlets that there's a little bit of a back and forth on, which is tone or kind of personality. Some official accounts stay very official so to speak. This is the court ruling. This is the hard data. We will have this event. It will be broadcast here. Other ones sometimes take on the personality of the space that they're in as a way to draw eyes. Great examples of that range from Wendy's, the hamburger company has a very lively account. It gets into arguments and a flame war so to speak with Burger King and its account. The CIA account is actually pretty lively. You know

it's got everything from CIA history to occasionally might be a little bit snarky. If you're going down that pathway, on one hand it's more likely to draw eyes. It's more likely to get people in which is valuable. On the other hand, you still, you know it's a tightrope and so you want to be careful that the audience is in on it and gets that this is a personality that's designed for this space. You're still trying to maintain your trustworthiness and you know, you need to be careful not to go too far and/or, when these things get into trouble, it's usually when they take the joke too far or do a joke that lands poorly either intentionally or unintentionally offensive. We all know those examples of when they screw up and that's another part of that personality side that applies to anyone in this space, whether it's an official account to an individual. When you screw up, own it. And you know that's something that people have some issues with in this space. And so again, you want to be authentic but authentic in a manner that doesn't lose credibility.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Let's take a few minutes before we wrap up and talk about the future of social media. We've seen social media mature to where it can – it's changed from puppies and kittens to being – capable of being weaponized. Is that weaponization controllable? Do you see it being controlled in the future?

MR. SINGER: So I think we're going to see a couple of certain changes in this space and then other sort of there – we'll have to see how it plays out. So they go in terms of a couple of areas. One is there is very clearly a trend towards more and more intervention into what is allowed or not in this space. At the origin, it was an anything goes space. And then essentially the platform companies have gradually, but it's been fairly steady over time, intervened in terms of content moderation and you could almost see it, it's like a – kind of a precedent setting case-by-case basis to give a legal parallel. So originally, anything goes. Then it was wow, remember

when we said anything goes, we didn't mean child porn. Oh, remember when we said it was just child porn, intellectual property issues because we're worried about losing advertisers or lawsuits. Remember when we said it was just that beheading videos, yeah, not that. Remember when we said it was just images of violence. Well, also calls for violence. Remember when we said it was just things related to violence and primarily Islamic groups. Well, you know, we had Charlottesville; we had the massacre in El Paso so now we're going to do any extremists groups, not just of this one flavor. Yeah, pandemic, yeah, we're not going to ban information-related pandemic, we're going to elevate good information kind of after the fact. Okay, remember when we said we were going to ban information. Yeah, we're now going ban some of these forms of like anti-vaxxers and so what we're seeing is this sort of slow but steady intervention. I think that continues but obviously creates a swirl around them.

Second issue is there's been a constancy in terms of new platforms arising. So you know, you and I are not talking about My Space or Friendster. We're really not, you know, there's Facebook but if you're under the age of 20, you're like Facebook, that's where my grandparents are. You've moved on to Instagram, TikTok, to whatever is the new one. We also see an intervention coming out of that – I'm sorry, we see new platforms coming out of that gradual steady intervention kind of in response to it. So you saw the emergence of Parler, Gab, sites that catered to one political strand, kind of more far right. We've seen it, may or may not launch. Even Trump who was you know once the most powerful person arguably in the world as President, but before that, importantly and got to the Presidency because of his social media power, he's moved on to I'm going to create my own social network in part because of the interventions against me and the other. So we'll see that play out.

Another vector of change is the question of greater market regulation. Clearly it's happening in Europe on everything from what the companies can do to privacy. I think we're going to see more of that inside the United States. Again, as we were talking about – I think it will come from a mix of interpretation of existing laws, court cases that set precedence, whether there're lawsuits or maybe even on the criminal side to potentially, I think those will definitely happen. Potentially we might see some new legislation pass. Another area is the question of new technology and what will AI do to this space. There's a – AI will be used more and more for shaping what's on the network. But also even creating false images on the network. It's publically called Deep Fakes where you can create a fake human face or even a fake video, a fake account that's so realistic it's hard for people to figure out what's real or not. That's something to pay attention to. So those are kind of some of the vectors. But at the end of the day, the most important thing is something we've not talked about, it's you and I. How do we change? How do we adjust? And not just you and I as individually, but kind of our society and that's really where you get to the role of education system. So this space looks very different dependent on how well trained so to speak we are to use it. We're not going to get rid of it. I know people would love it. That's just not going to happen. And you know it will be as effective as like the just say no commercials back in the day. We're going to be on it. It doesn't – you know, we're going to be on it because it's addictive but there's a lot of good that happens there. I liked the ice bucket challenge. I like seeing my cousins' party photos. I get my news from this space. I get my pizza reviews from it. But can we create a world where we're better trained to use it, where we understand the dynamics at play. And that I think will determine more whether it's this space continues to be kind of net-negative versus net-positive.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And I think you have partnered with the state of Florida in coming up with some tools to train people on how to better train themselves to use the Internet and social media. Can you describe that project?

MR. SINGER: Yeah, so there's a great – it's a network of activity that has come together. It involves the think tank that I work at called New America. The National Association of Media Literacy Educators, but on the Florida side, Cyber Florida which is the Florida University systems hub for cyber-security education. And traditionally when you think of cyber-security education, you think of, you know, don't click that link and then you think of the people that are trained to go work in you know your IT department to do that. But what we found related to this discussion is that there's this whole other side of challenge, of threat. It's not just about someone hacking your network. It's about what we call LikeWar, hacking the people on the networks and so we set up a project that had a couple of tracks to it. One was research, to understand what's going on. The second was network building. We brought together the variety of different people in groups that connect to this issue that care about this issue but for very different reasons. You know everything from you work in national security, you work – you care about extremism, you care about Russian information warfare to oh, no, you care about technology policy. You care about law to, no, you are an eleventh grade social studies teacher in Florida. You care about the information that your students receive. You are related to social studies, to you are a language arts teacher and you want them to better understand fact versus opinion to you're a science teacher and going to our example we used earlier, you're frustrated by the fact that you know you assign them to do a project on how the pyramids were built and they come back and tell you that aliens did so, right. And so it's a networking, bringing all these groups together.

And then what we found from the interviews and bringing it together was not just in Florida, but across the United States, by one measure, you've got about eleven thousand school systems in the U.S., public, private, you know, some of them are of huge scale, Miami-Dade. Other ones are like, you know, one school. But basically, in them we – some of them teach some of these skills. Most of them do not in a full manner. Next part of it is that when they do teach them, the tools they use to teach in the classroom are buried in their quality. And the big challenge is that they – teachers haven't had a good and ready access to the best of these tools. And literally one Florida schoolteacher, you know, we asked, well how did you use this – how did you find this tool that you use in your classroom to teach on this and they said, I googled it which is like, you know, shows the problem here. So what we did, the Cyber Florida team and this broader network is created a portal. And anyone can go onto it but it's particularly designed for Florida educators. It's at oercommons.org or you can google Cyber Florida cyber citizenship and basically what it is, is it brought together over a hundred different teaching resources on this problem. When I say teaching resources, I mean everything from like a curriculum that might be used in a classroom to an educational video game. Over a hundred of these, put them all together into the same place, into like a searchable portal that the teacher or you and I can find what they need. So I'm looking for a resource that's a game that's good for whatever, fourth grade level, which is different than someone who's in eleventh grade. Basically it's a hundred different resources in the same place and the idea is to help our teachers help them to help our kids, but also circling back, by teaching these skills, you start to create a little bit more resilience in our society. It doesn't end the challenge but the research shows that if someone understands this space, has these skills, they're less likely to be manipulated online and less likely to manipulate others unintentionally whether the topic is you know Russian government misinformation.

Someone marketing to the teenager to coronavirus information – misinformation. If you’ve got these skills, if you understand how to operate in this space effectively, you’re less likely to be taken in and you’re less likely to take in others. And so it’s a little bit like the equivalent of hygiene, you know, related to disease. It doesn’t mean all disease goes away but gosh, you’re in a much better world where people understand hygiene, cover your mouth, wash your hands, whatever. And it’s I think a really – another part of this that’s so important is it illustrates the shared responsibility. So you think about hygiene, that’s an individual responsibility. I should wash my hands. I should cover my mouth. It’s also a parental responsibility. I should teach my kids to do this. And why do I teach it to them? It’s not just to protect yourself. It’s you have an obligation to protect – to keep your family safe, keep your friends, your network safe. But oh, by the way, hygiene, they learn it in their schools. I teach it as a parent but it’s also important that our schools teach it. And that’s the same thing when we think about the digital equivalent of it. It’s a shared responsibility.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How long has this cyber citizenship project and website been available? It is something pretty recent?

MR. SINGER: Literally weeks.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay.

MR. SINGER: I mean, so we – it’s a reaction to these challenges. Big credit to the team at Cyber Florida and they were supported by the Florida State Legislature to get this out here. You know, the research of gathering these, to building the portal. I mean, it was – it just went live very recently so we’re excited by it. And I hope to spread the word about it so that’s it’s used in more and more schools. And then you know, ideally, you may have heard Florida’s only

one out of 50 states can we get this similar kind of tool kit pushed out to aid people in other states. But I think it's a great example of where Florida, you know, it's both supporting educators, students, parents in Florida but it can also be a space for Florida to kind of lead the way for others. Now again, let's be – you know, people will be like wow, but it's just for K through 12, you know. Isn't the problem adults too? Yeah, but guess what, we got to start somewhere. And you know adults can also use these tool kits, but you know, again, let's – let's start somewhere. And it's not the only thing. I mean, I'm as much of an optimist also. I get it; I'm a realist. This is not going to be enough. It also, going back to our earlier discussions, we've got to work out the legal issues related to this space. We've got to work out greater responsibility by the platform companies. But even if that happens we still have to equip the individual targets and participants to better understand the world that they're operating in.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: It's always been important to teach kids and for adults to understand how to tell fact from fiction. And I guess this just brings that skillset into the 21st century.

MR. SINGER: That's a – yeah, that's a great way of thinking about it is that we've always changed what we teach in our schools relative to the political needs of the day and the technologies of the day. So in the United States public education comes out of it's, you know, in the 1820s of like this idea that to be a good citizen of this new democracy, you needed to teach in a public setting literacy and the like. To after World War II and the rise of you know, worries about communism and the like, we started to teach civics in our schools. Pledge of Allegiance comes out in that period. So what we have today is a similar kind of -- there's – there's changed needs, there's changed technologies. And importantly it brings together three areas that we call this concept of cyber citizenship. One is as you just laid it out, is – it's called digital literacy.

It's critical thinking skills, fact versus opinion, sourcing of evidence. How do algorithms work? How did I get that information? There's a second element of it, which is things like civics and citizenship side which is not so much what you know, but how you behave. Don't be a cyber-bully. Don't be a troll. Don't be malicious in this space. Be a positive, you know – how does it affect democracy? And then there's the third part, which is threat awareness. And this is that traditional cyber-security side. It's the idea that, hey, it's not just an ability to distinguish fact from opinion that matters. You got to know how people are trying to manipulate you. And what are the tactics that people are using? And those people again might be Russian information warriors. It might be a political campaign. Even a campaign you like. It might be a company that's just trying to get you to buy a product or in this space, how is someone manipulating judges' votes or manipulating who turns out for jury pools or not. So again, it's the combination of those three skills coming together that is really needed and if we've got those built up, gosh, we're in just a much better space to deal these issues.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, it sounds like a really exciting project. And I look forward to seeing how it can grow to encompass not just school kids but others that need to learn cyber citizenship because it is something that is definitely needed in our society today.

MR. SINGER: Well, thank you so much.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I think we could probably talk for the next two hours but people would get bored. But I do appreciate you joining me today. This is a fascinating area that is just so relevant to everything that we do today. So thank you for being with me.

MR. SINGER: Thank you so much and again, if anybody wants further information about these – the toolkit from Cyber Florida, it's online, oercommons.org cyber citizenship or

just google cyber citizenship in Cyber Florida. And then my own work and writing, including the book relative to this are available at pwsinger.com or on Amazon and all that good stuff.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, thank you very much and I hope you have a good afternoon.

MR. SINGER: All right, take care.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Thank you.

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