

SUSAN LIAUTAUD

Lecturer in Public Policy and Law at Stanford University, Interim Chair of Council of the London School of Economics, Founder and Managing Director of Susan Liautaud & Associates Ltd

Jim HOAGLAND

Now, it is my pleasure to introduce someone who clearly has mastered technology enough to be everywhere at the same time, that is Susan Liautaud, who is Professor of Law and who balances commitments at Stanford University, LSE in London, and her own business, and somehow manages to keep all of these balls in the air. Susan.

Susan LIAUTAUD

Thank you. Thank you Jim and Thierry, thank you for the honour.

What I would like to do is to make three or four points and see what resonates for the discussion and the Q&A, because that is always the best part at World Policy Conference. My points will have three things in common. The first is that they all have a considerable ethical responsibility for individual citizens, corporates and governments. The second is that no matter how much technology is present, there are always people who are ultimately responsible, and ultimately affected. The third is that I see this intersection of technology, society and democracy through the lens of risk and opportunity, so how can we maximise the opportunity, how can we minimise the risk?

To start, as others have said, technology is ubiquitous, but I think we need to reconceptualise what it means to have a society in which democracies function, because the reality is that it is no longer about individual human beings and their institutions. The connective tissue is machines, apps and data. To the extent that citizens do not understand how that is affecting them, influencing them, what is required of their leadership in that context, it is very difficult to move democracy along with technology.

To take a concrete example of AI, I sit on the UK government's Centre for Data and Ethics Innovation Board, which is all about AI and what regulators should be doing, and what we need to tell citizens. It is a real question about what citizens need to understand. They do not all need to be able to code, but they do need to understand about targeting and bias, and that AI is everywhere, from facial recognition to potentially driverless cars, immigration and policing and beyond. Therefore, it is a very big challenge.

However, more generally, where technology fits in with what we expect of our leaders is critically important. We have bots everywhere. We have robots taking care of the elderly. We have robots flipping burgers and greeting us at the Eurostar. What does that mean for society? What does that mean for responsibility? Some of you may be aware of a robot, a humanoid robot called Sophia, who was created by a highly ethically-minded entrepreneur in Hong Kong, David Hanson. It turns out that Sophia has Saudi citizenship. Therefore, one might ask what happens to democracy when robots start having citizenship? What does that mean for rights?

The second point I would like to make is that we tend to think about democracies in the context of a particular country. At the moment obviously there is a lot of focus on Brexit, and there is a lot of focus on the upcoming US election, but in fact, the responsibility is borderless. For example, it is very easy for me to say that I am in no particular hurry for driverless cars, and the safety promises that the entrepreneurs in that field bring, because I live between London and Palo Alto. But the World Bank came out with a shocking statistic a couple of years ago, and this is not going to be precise, but it is something along the lines of 50% of the world's motor vehicles are in developing countries, but 95% or 92%, thereabouts, of deaths from automobile accidents are in those countries. Therefore, we also need to be looking



at technology through the lens of global impact, and global governance, even though democracy tends to be a national question.

The third point is that we look at technology sometimes as an eraser of ill, and where it provides opportunity, but in fact it is also an amplifier of age-old problems. It can be hate speech, sex trafficking, child trafficking, bullying. Right now, we are in the midst of an epidemic of teen suicides from bullying on social media. Why? Because you cannot leave a playground, or even change schools when you are bullied. There is just no way to get away from it on the Internet. In fact, just like citizens do not understand AI, victims of this kind of thing do not really understand who might have access, where things might have been forwarded, how you could put a stop to it. Therefore, things start to seem hopeless.

Similarly, child sex trafficking on the Internet is a tens of billions of Dollars industry, to use a terrible word for it, and on and on. Therefore, we need to be very mindful when we look at how our society functions and what we expect of our leaders, of the fact that technology is a terrible amplifier of these ago-old harms.

Voting relates to the good and ill of technology. There are a couple of key points about voting. We may go to the voting booth influenced by foreign governments infiltrating our social media. We may go to the voting booth having been targeted through algorithms with advertising, and indeed just generally be a victim of some algorithmic infiltration of our freedom of thought. We may also have security issues around the voting process itself. There are leaders like Brad Smith at Microsoft who are talking about experimenting with different voting machines to fix that, things like a combination of screens where we choose our candidates on a screen, but there is actually, believe it or not, a paper trail, one that could be audited, and paper receipts that have tracking to algorithms that would allow us to track.

Whatever the technology that influences us, and whatever the technology is that we use to vote, again, people are here. When we look at the statistics, for example the last US presidential election, of somewhere in the mid 50% turnout, no matter what we do with technology, no matter what we experience, if we do not go vote, democracy is going to be in jeopardy.

Finally, truth. I have spent a lot of time in the last couple of years thinking about truth in my ethics advisory work, in particular with large corporate clients. Compromised truth, or the assault on truth, whatever you want to call it, whether it is fake news, or deep fakes, whether it is ignoring scientific evidence, or whether it is cherry-picking your favourite facts so that you can get the outcome that you wish, and you are not inconvenienced by the facts that do not work for you. I genuinely believe that compromised truth is the greatest global systemic risk of our time. It undergirds every other challenge we have, from climate change to global governance failure, to political system issues, to financial system meltdown. Democracy hinges, and our society, our trust in institutions, our trust in each other hinge on truth, and accountability of our leaders hinges on truth.

Therefore, to the extent we do not have truth, to the extent that technology can amplify fake news, that it can amplify compromised truth, it is a threat to democracy. I genuinely do not believe that an alternatively factual democracy is possible. I think I will end there and welcome the conversation.

Jim HOAGLAND

Thank you Susan.