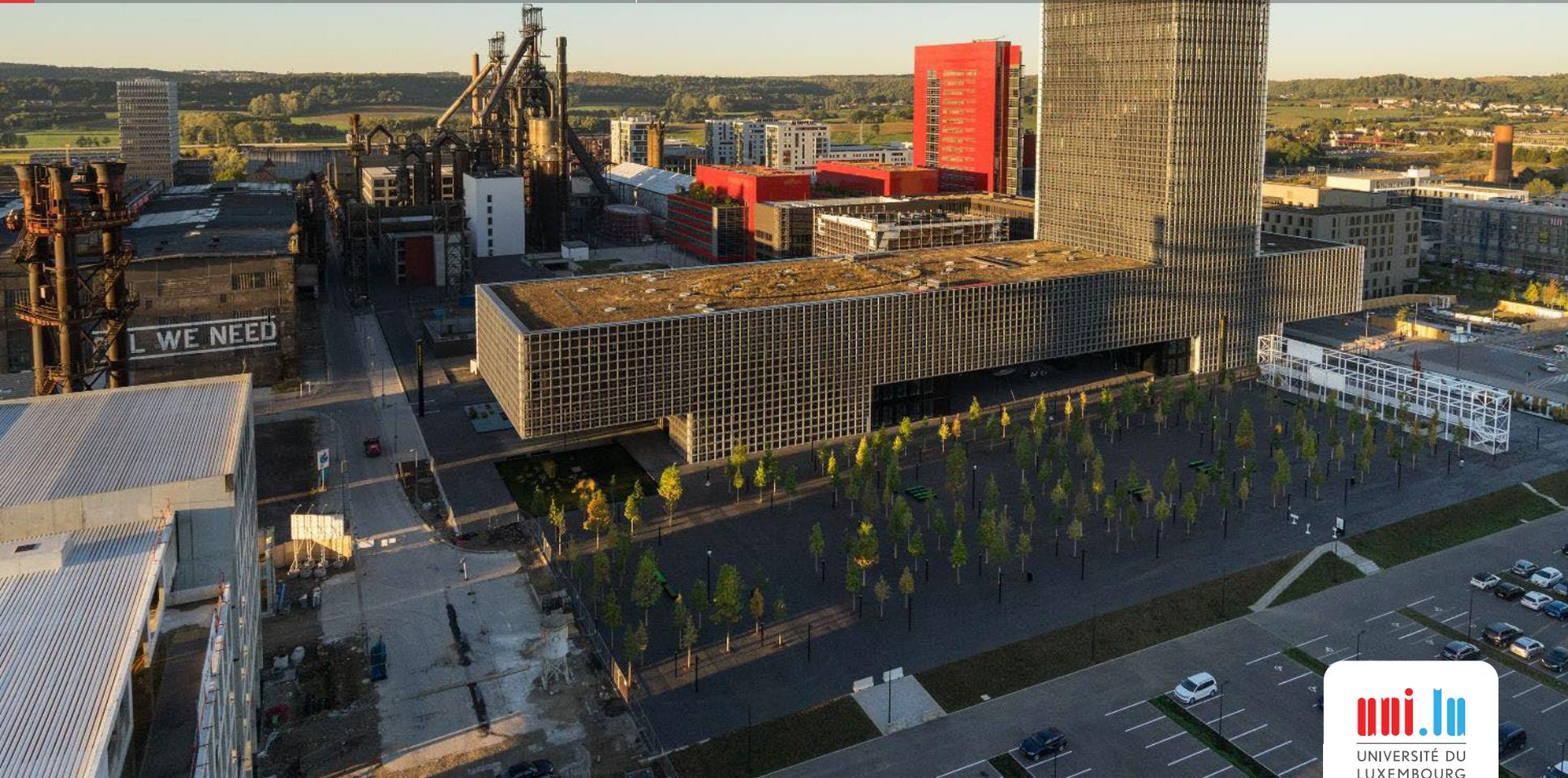University of Luxembourg

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Technical Sovereignty and Digital Democracy in Europe – Follower or Influencer ? A New Media Approach

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Research questions

RS1: In a comparative approach, where does the EU (and its Member States) fit into the new technological geopolitical picture?

RS2: What are the main new media challenges (in technological, quality of information, economic, regulatory, communication, and consumption terms) ? and how the EU (and its Member States) has dealt with it?
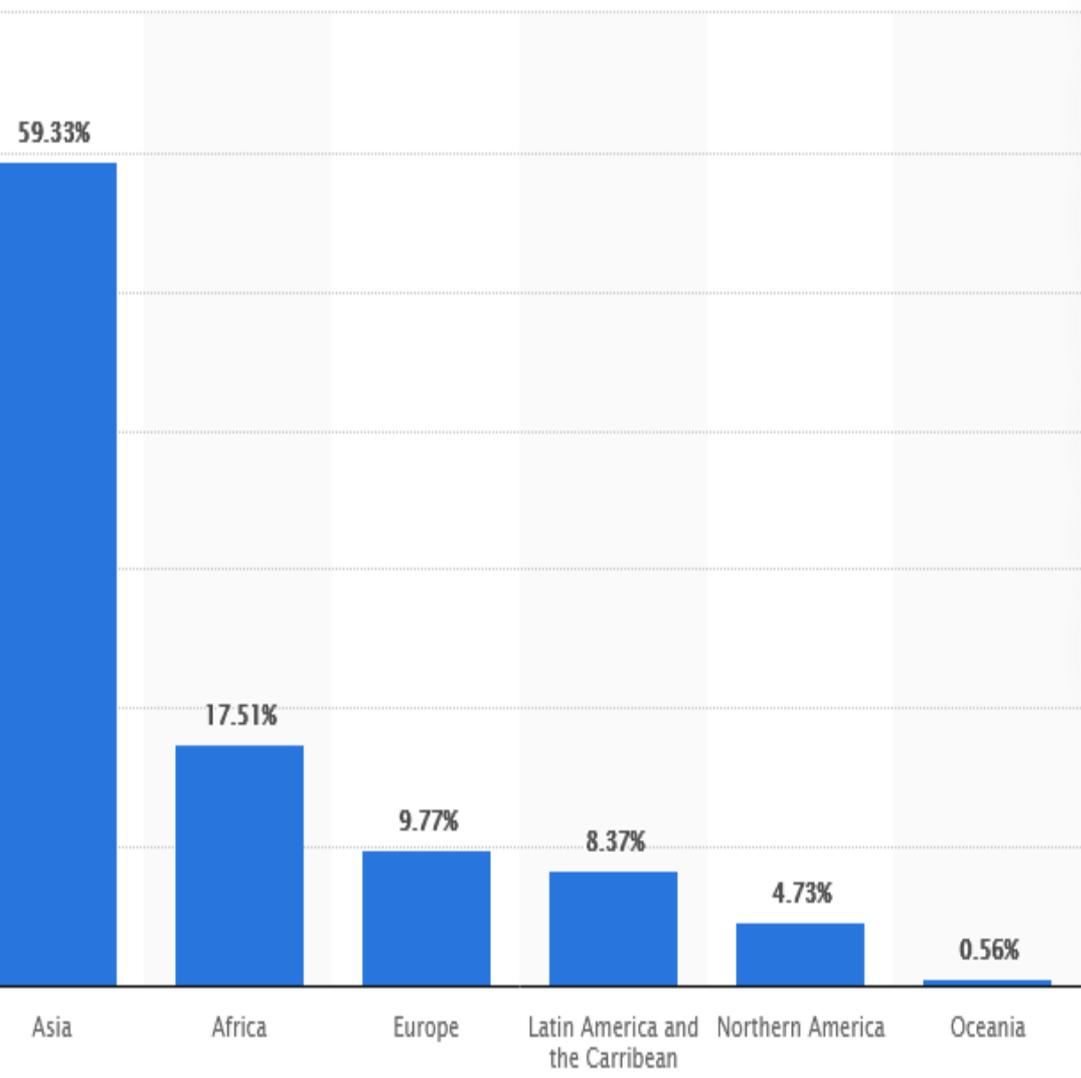
RS3: What are the currents threats to democracy ? (are algorithms "dissolving" democracy?)

RS4: How the EU (and its Member States) will deal with the risks, uncertainties and challenges in the AI era?
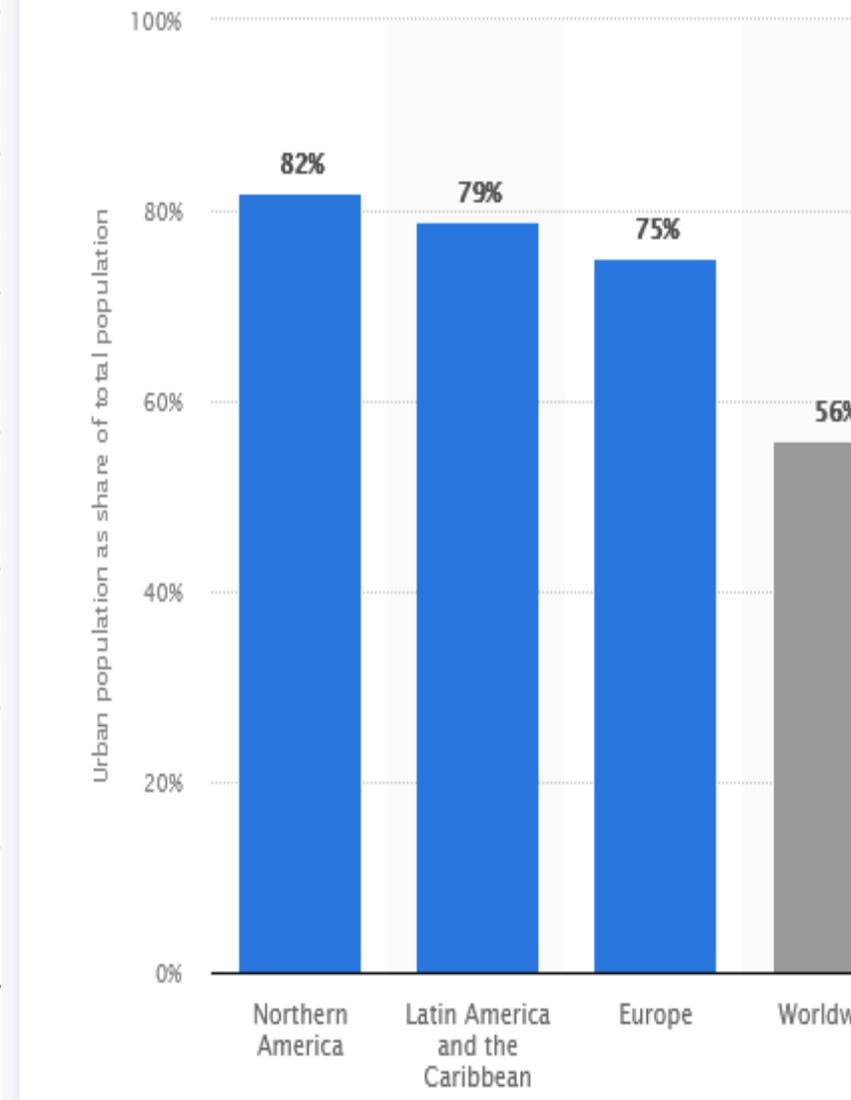
RS1: EU's fourfold challenge in the new technological geopolitical order:

1) Completing its Digital Single Market ("contradictions between techno-nationalism and techno-globalism", contrasting approaches between Member States, asymmetry between "under-connected" and "hyper-digitised" countries, etc) (Edgerton, 2007);

2) Attempts to develop its technological and digital sovereignty in cutting-edge fields (AI, 5G, cybersecurity, robotics, semiconductors, space); developing the regulatory and governance strategies in the field and a specific niche trade policy;

3) Adapting its democratic model via digital democracy (quality of information, civil participation, digital literacy, critical thinking);

4) Fostering a more appealing narrative and brand image and using it to convey the EU's fundamental values and freedoms. (New) media have a major cross-cutting role to play in tackling these four challenges.

...tion of the global population 2021, by continent

Share of urban population world...

Left chart — Distribution of the global population 2021, by continent:

- Asia: 59.33%
- Africa: 17.51%
- Europe: 9.77%
- Latin America and the Carribean: 8.37%
- Northern America: 4.73%
- Oceania: 0.56%

Right chart — Share of urban population worldwide (Urban population as share of total population):

- Northern America: 82%
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 79%
- Europe: 75%
- Worldw...: 56%

Average scores across all dimensions for I-DESI 2015 to 2018

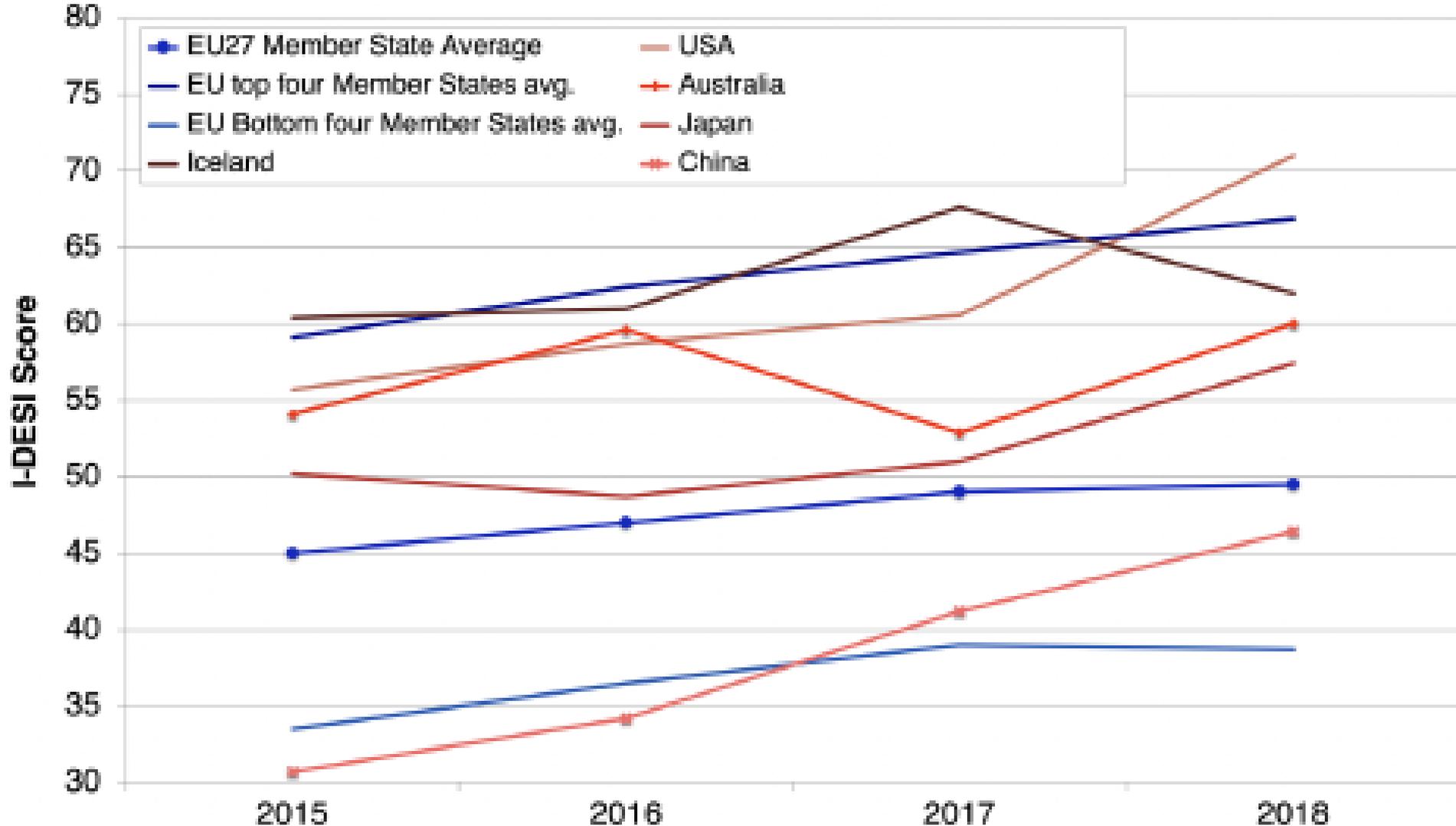**Technical Sovereignty and Digital Democracy in Europe – Follower or Influencer ? A New Media Approach**

ECREA Luxembourg Workshop (2-4 February 2022)
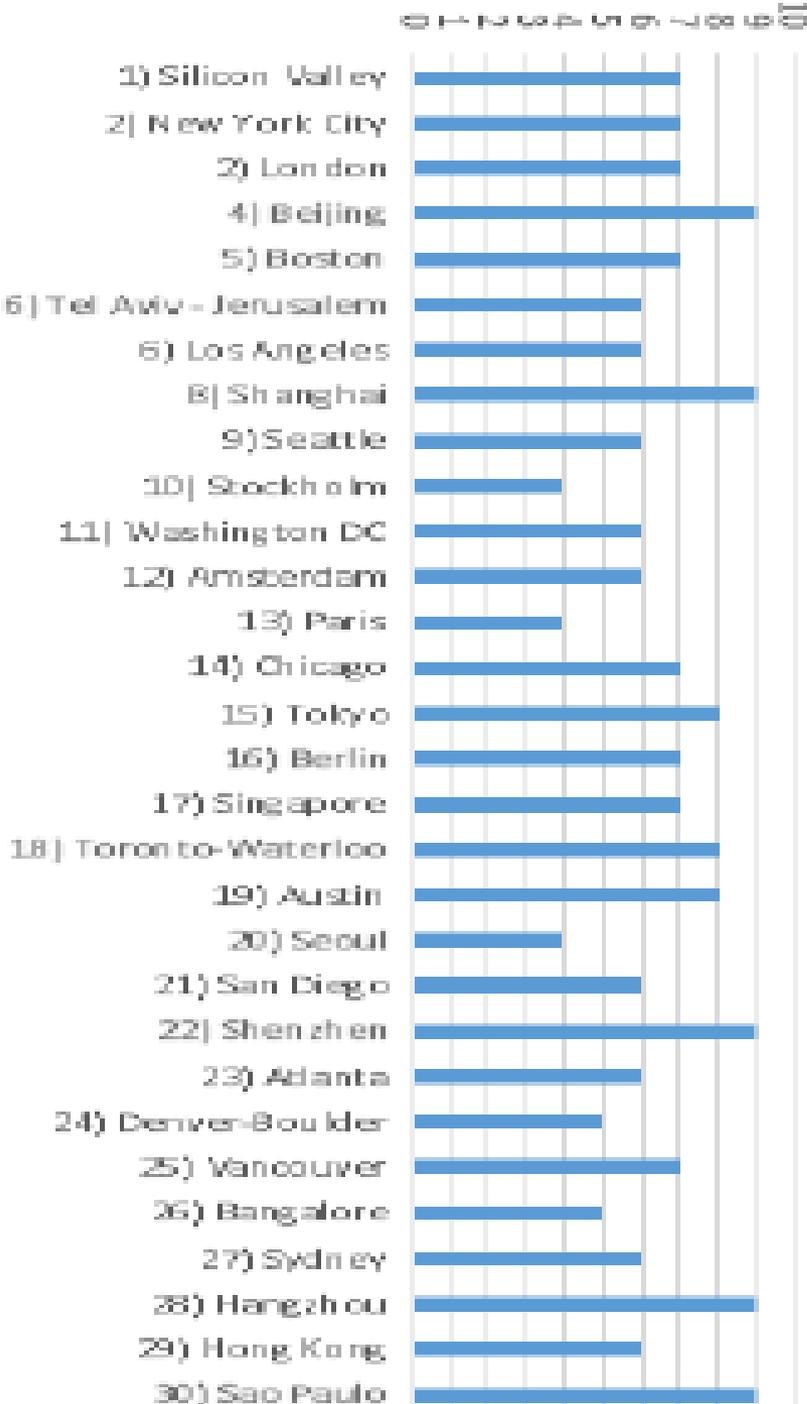
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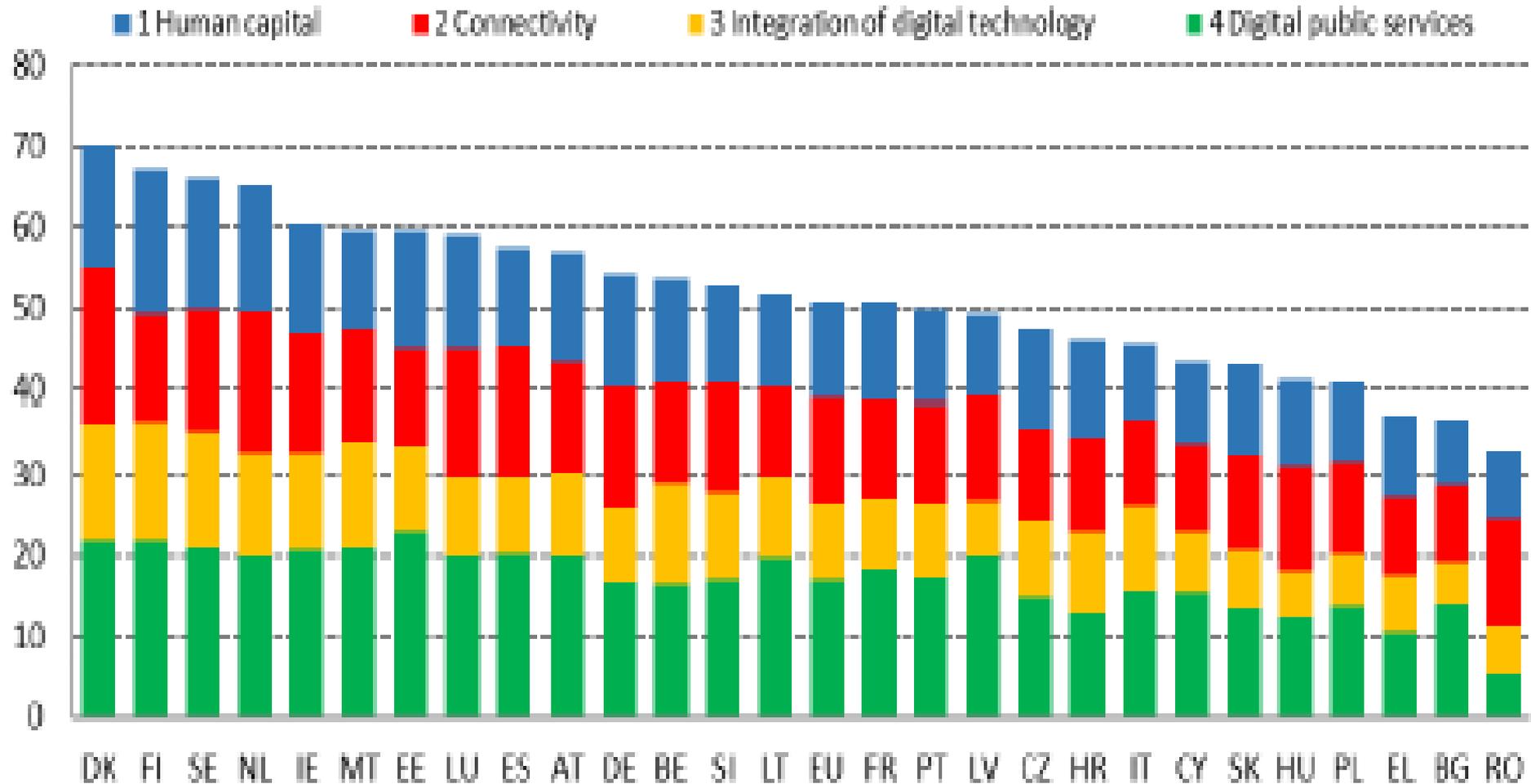
Source: Digital Economy Society Index 2021, European Commission

1) Silicon Valley
2) New York City
2) London
4) Beijing
5) Boston
6) Tel Aviv - Jerusalem
6) Los Angeles
8) Shanghai
9) Seattle
10) Stockholm
11) Washington DC
12) Amsterdam
13) Paris
14) Chicago
15) Tokyo
16) Berlin
17) Singapore
18) Toronto-Waterloo
19) Austin
20) Seoul
21) San Diego
22) Shenzhen
23) Atlanta
24) Denver-Boulder
25) Vancouver
26) Bangalore
27) Sydney
28) Hangzhou
29) Hong Kong
30) Sao Paulo

* 7 of the most valuable unicorn in the world are based in the US and 3 in China.
* Amazon, valued at EUR 1.4 trillion, ranks first.
* The most valuable EU unicorn Adyen has a valuation of EUR 52.3 billion (located in Amsterdam), followed by Klarna and Spotify (both based in Stockholm).
* Out of the 12 most valuable EU unicorns 5 are located in Germany, 4 in Sweden, 2 in the Netherlands and 1 in Denmark.

Source: Startup Genome, The Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2020.

"The challenges are not just commercial, but touch the very heart of the future of Europe as a political unit mastering its own destiny "

(Fickers, A. & Griset, P.: 2019, p.377)

RS 2: Digital technologies led to unprecedented changes:

1) **in the production, management and dissemination of information** for society as a whole (information for professionals, politicians and citizens.)

2) **in the consumption of information**:
- "new sources for young people" (social media, collaborative platforms, etc).

- the rise of intermediaries – "brokers of information that position themselves between producers and consumers while altering the flow of information. (intermediaries act as "gatekeepers"…).

3**) in practices and uses** (a new type of relationship between information/media and their audience).

4) **in the realm of information itself**.

Twitter

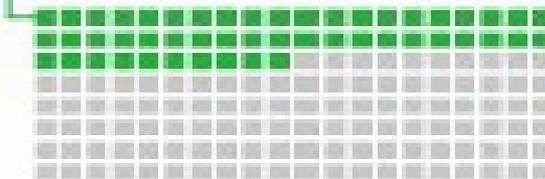330 million monthly active users

145 million daily users
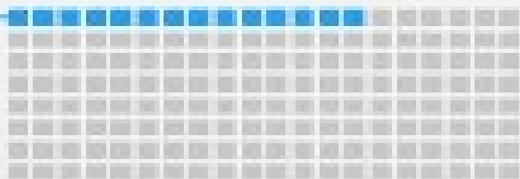
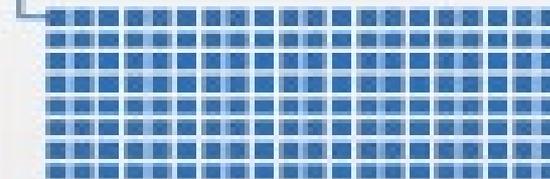**WhatsApp**

1.6 billion monthly active users

500 million daily users

Facebook

2.37 billion monthly active users

1.600 million daily users

1 square = 10 million users

Source: Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, 2020

Information now finds itself within a transitional ecosystem in which traditional and innovative media coexist and old concepts are co-opted to deal with new challenges.

Traditional journalistic criteria (professional assessments, the market and the audience, etc) **are gradually giving way to what might be referred to as "news values"** – such as controversy, conflict, negativity, proximity or elite people.

**Traditional journalistic methods and principles** (reliable factual information that is cross-checked, impartiality, variety of sources, etc) are replaced by algorithms ("black boxes") which target users/citizens individually. This makes it difficult to accurately assess their societal influence.

As algorithms take centre stage – in the absence of any meaningful ethical framework - information has become horizontal and fragmented.
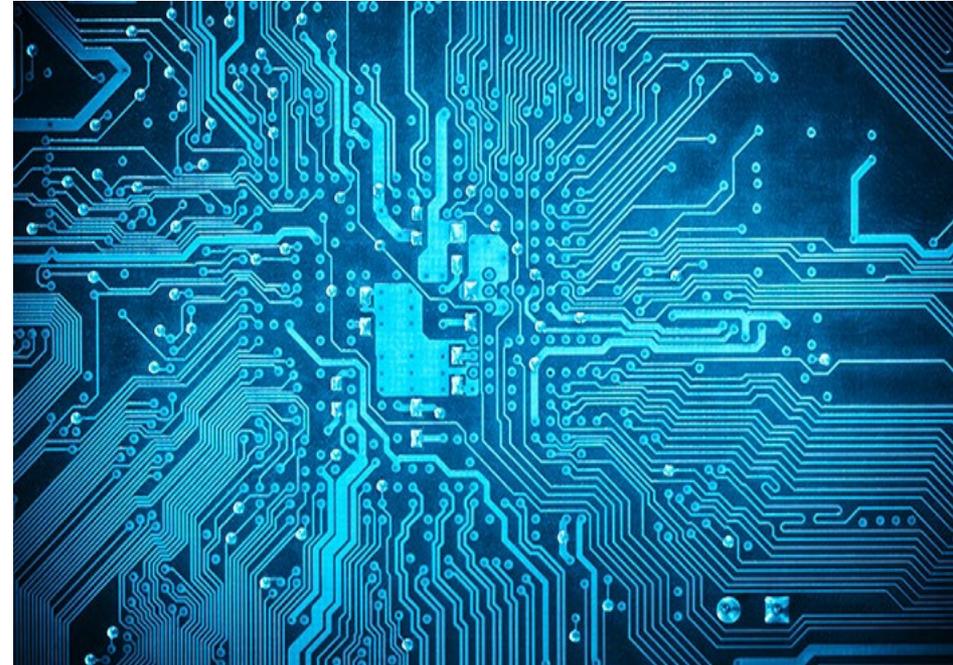
' The proliferation of sources and the phenomena of fake news, "alternative facts", disinformation and misinformation are becoming increasingly prevalent in public discourse, eroding the credibility of information and giving rise to scepticism, relativism and even to a "pandemic of credulous thinking '.
(Thompson D.: 2008, p.1)

The Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2020) highlighted **that in many EU countries, the proportion of the population using social media as a news source ranged from about 30 to 60%, and thus algorithms are becoming the dominant news source.** These algorithms filter, sort, personalise, recommend and classify news content by prioritising data and opinions that corroborate existing preferences, while at the same time excluding (filtering) other content classified as non-relevant for the use.

Media = at the intersection of democratic culture and technical progress.

Information is intrinsically linked with a deeply human need- the need for truth.

Figures)	Context		and Actors
1950–60			
The governing machine	Cold War	Computers are seen as powerful tools to process big amount of data	Efficient management of public administrations
(Norbert Wiener)	Strong State intervention	Centralised systems	Rational and scientific approach of public policies
	Emergence of public management		The State as the central actor and coordinator of societies
1970–80			
Teledemocracy to enhance social links	Social and political crisis in the late 1960s	Cable TV networks, then telematics	Modernisation of representative democracy
(Benjamin Barber, Amitaï Etzioni, Franck Arterton)	Political institutions are contested	Local and independent systems	Better relationship between citizen and elected officials
	The local arena seen as the place to re-found politics	Interactivity	Local communities as a laboratory of a strong democracy
1990–2000			
Cyber-democracy as a new polity	Liberalisation and privatisation: the role of the State is challenged	Computers networking	Virtual communities as a means to produce identity
(John Perry Barlow, Howard Reingold, Alvin Toffler, Esther Dyson)	Globalisation: the future of nation states is questioned	Development of the Internet seen as an open, global, decentralised network which provides the potential for non-hierarchical communication	Citizen as an autonomous agent in a global public sphere (the global village)
	Development of individualism and commercialisation along with libertarian values		Cyberspace: as a metaphor and tool of political self-organisation

Source: Thierry Vedel. The Idea of Electronic Democracy: Origins, Visions and Questions: Origins, Visions and Questions. Parliamentary Affairs, 2006, 59 (2), pp.226 - 235. hal-01475858v2. Here pp.228.

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28 OUT OF 30 LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS AGREED SO FAR:

Connectivity: *Meeting Europe's growing connectivity needs, including in rural and remote areas and boosting competitiveness by 2020.*
• 700 MHz
• Wholesale roaming
• Wifi4EU
• Telecoms Code (incl. spectrum)
• BEREC

e-Commerce: *Making it easier to buy and sell online across borders.*
• Consumer protection cooperation
• Geoblocking
• VAT e-commerce (2 proposals)
• Cross-border parcel delivery
• VAT e-books
• Contact rules for digital content and goods (2 proposals)
• Platform-to-business

Data: *Creating a competitive data economy within the Digital Single Market.*
• Free flow of non-personal data
• High-performance computing
• Public sector information

Media/copyright: *Promoting European content and providing citizens with more choice and access.*
• Portability of online content
• Marrakesh Treaty (2 proposals)
• Audiovisual media services directive
• Broadcasting (SatCab)
• Copyright

Trust: *Strengthening trust and EU's capacity to respond to cyberattacks.*
• Data protection rules for EU Institutions
• .eu
• Cybersecurity Act
• non-cash payments

e-Gov: *Making it easier for citizens to deal with public administrations online.*
• Single Digital Gateway

Source: Completing a trusted Digital Single Market for All. Communication from the European Commission of 15 May 2018, COM(2018) 320.
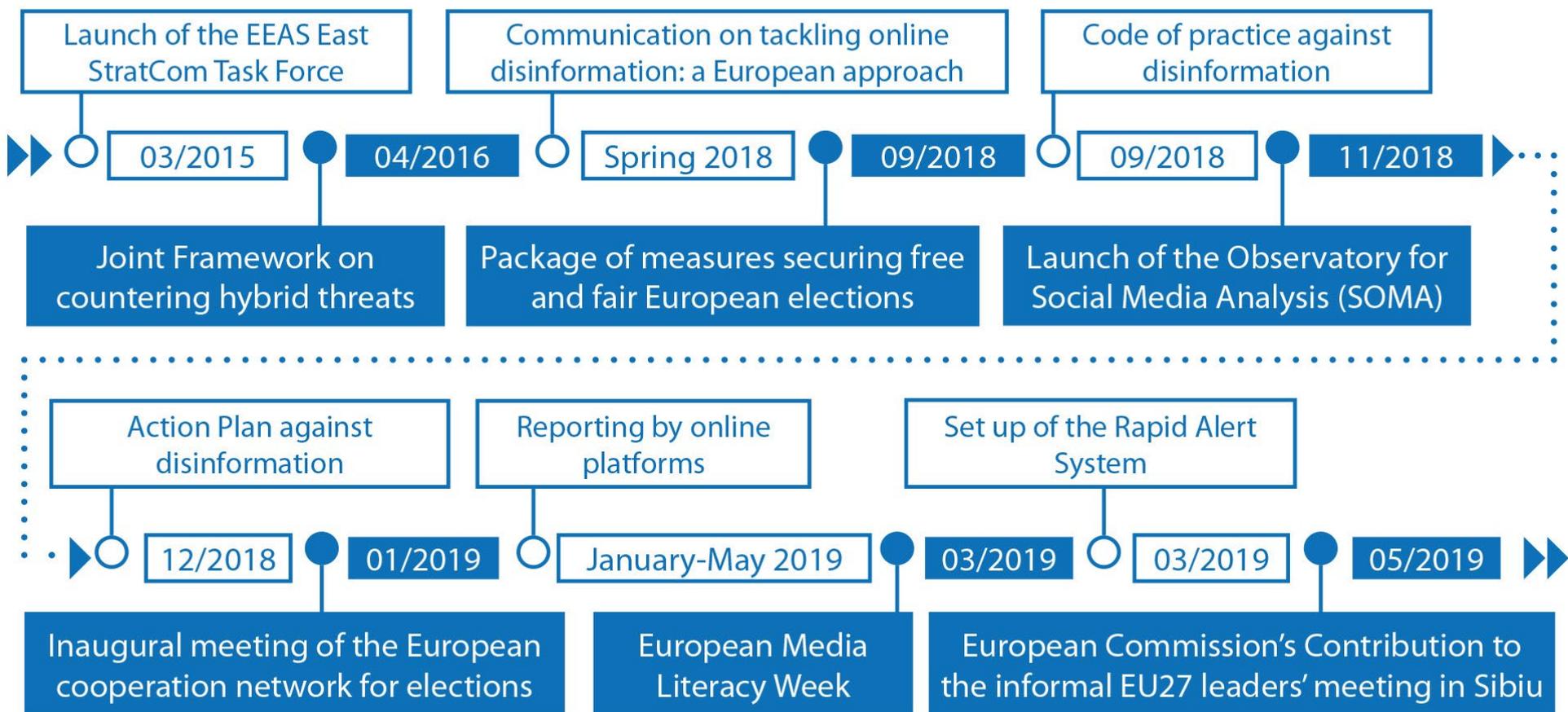
RS 4:
• "Declaration on European Digital Rights and Principles" (2022)

• «Path to the Digital Decade» – 2030 Policy Programme» (2021)

• «Recovery and Resilience Facility each EU country" (20%) (2021)

• International Partnerships – Quantum, 6G, use of technology to fight climate change and environmental challenges. (2021)

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OVERVIEW OF EU JOINT AND COORDINATED ACTION AGAINST DISINFORMATION

Launch of the EEAS East StratCom Task Force	Communication on tackling online disinformation: a European approach	Code of practice against disinformation
03/2015 — 04/2016	Spring 2018 — 09/2018	09/2018 — 11/2018

Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats	Package of measures securing free and fair European elections	Launch of the Observatory for Social Media Analysis (SOMA)

Action Plan against disinformation	Reporting by online platforms	Set up of the Rapid Alert System
12/2018 — 01/2019	January-May 2019	03/2019 — 03/2019 — 05/2019

Inaugural meeting of the European cooperation network for elections	European Media Literacy Week	European Commission's Contribution to the informal EU27 leaders' meeting in Sibiu

Overview of EU joint and coordinated action against disinformation (2015–2019).
Source: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/tackling-online-disinformation.
Source: © European Union, 1995-2021.

RS 4: At the international level, the EU is currently working

* to assert its "tech sovereignty" and maintain regulatory sovereignty in key areas.

* to harmonise rules, standards and policies within a multilateral framework (UN, UNESCO, OECD, G7, G20, CoE).

* to find a solution for a number of sensitive regulatory issues which have emerged recently, all with the potential to influence democracy (i.e. the market size of social media, how to tax intangible assets, personal data management, the question of "ethical algorithms".

Conclusion

Democracy in the EU (and in its Member States) depends on the existence of free and independent media. The emergence of a virtual media environment, with its arsenal of "fake news", "alternative facts" and disinformation, is generating new risks and uncertainty for society, especially since it is deeply intertwined with the broader digital ecosystem, in which technologies and tactics will continue to evolve.

The exposure of citizens to large-scale disinformation represents a major challenge.

Conclusion

In the "post-truth era", the EU aim to take the lead in raising public awareness about disinformation through several axes:

1) cooperation between platforms and public authorities, including mobilising and coordinating fact-checkers.
2) an incremental approach to regulation, combining self-regulation (including "citizen regulation").
3) a proactive media policy that encourages responsible behaviour in conveying information to end users and a more sustainable evolution of the online news market.
4) a long-term strategy for digital education, media literacy and broad user empowerment. (leading role of academia).

………

"Post-truth" was selected by Oxford Dictionaries as its 2016 international word of the year, reflecting what it termed as a "highly-charged" political 12 months. It defines the concept as a situation in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts. Available from: https://languages.oup. com/word-of-the-year/2016/
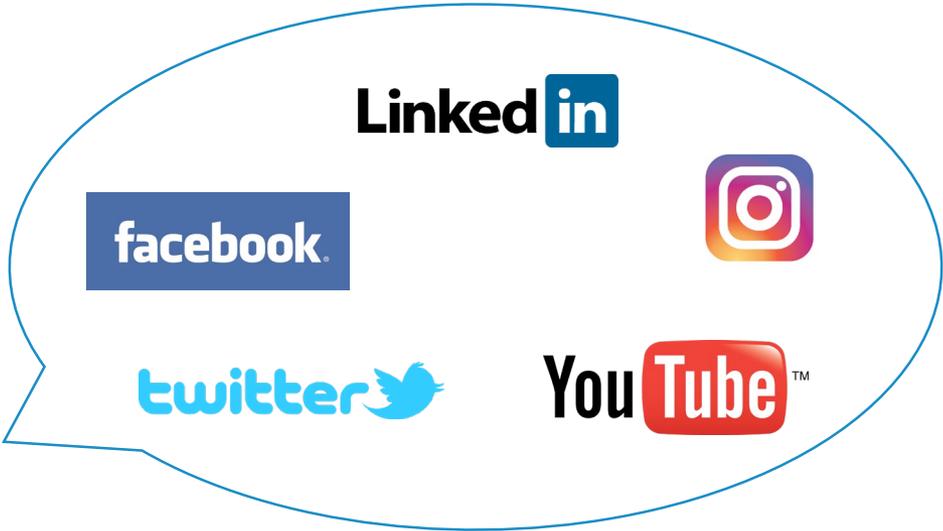
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