Conversation with Luminate: Big Tech, AI, and its Impact on Vulnerable Communities

MEETING INSIGHTS

DATE AND TIME	24 June 2024	3.30 – 5.00 PM
LOCATION	APC Office and Online, Singapore
AUTHOR	Jasmine Khin
PRESENTERS	• Stephen King, CEO, Luminate • Melanie Hui, Vice President, Asia, Luminate

Summary of the Event

APC invited Luminate to discuss their work on the impact of AI on vulnerable communities. Luminate, a foundation under the Omidyar Group founded by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and his wife Pam, focuses on creating a healthy information ecosystem by supporting independent journalism and fostering healthy dialogue in the digital age. A key component of such ecosystems is the availability and access to reliable information. Over the years, Luminate has shifted its focus from supporting tech-positive companies to advocating for digital accountability and raising awareness about the dangers of AI. During this session, Stephen and Melanie provided an overview of Luminate's efforts to combat the dangers of AI and highlighted their activities in Asia.

Key Takeaways

1. **Big Tech Business Model:** Big Tech companies gather user data to sell to advertisers. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Google collect vast amounts of user information, which is then used to target products and services to consumers.
    a. While targeted advertising can benefit consumers, it can also encourage harmful behaviors, especially in teenagers, such as self-harm resulting from seemingly innocuous initial searches.

2. **Dangers of AI :** AI can spread misinformation via algorithms and social media, fueling the dissemination of dangerous conspiracy theories and disrupting political processes. Social media algorithms create echo chambers, intensifying news and information among closely connected users.

a. AI-generated deep fakes of political leaders are becoming increasingly convincing, posing a significant threat to free and fair elections. The manipulation of information endangers everyone. AI can spread misinformation through algorithms and social media, strengthening the dissemination of dangerous conspiracy theories and disrupting political processes.

3. **Regulation and Accountability:** Regulation is crucial, yet the US lags behind, while the EU leads with the Digital Services Act (DSA).
   a. Luminate supports the enforcement of this legislation by establishing the AWO law agency. To raise awareness about the impact of social media on teenagers' mental health, Luminate highlights the case of Molly Russell, a teenager adversely affected by social media algorithms promoting self-harm.

4. **Impact of AI on Inequality:** AI algorithms can reinforce inequalities due to inherent human biases. The blanket application of AI to social and environmental issues can exacerbate inequality.
   a. International development programs often fail as big tech companies operate in human rights-free zones and their algorithms are not designed for social protection.

5. **Environmental Impact:** AI can worsen climate issues due to the large energy consumption of data centers which have to be maintained.

6. **Economic Potential for Asia and Regional Strategies:** Despite its dangers, AI is a significant part of the future, providing 10-18% of GDP uplift in Southeast Asia by 2030, with Singapore seeing an 18% increase (up to 110 billion USD).
   a. In Asia, AI pathways must be tailored to specific contexts rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.
   b. Social media companies prioritize profitability and are content-agnostic, spreading misinformation using stolen content.
   c. It is essential to document the harms of AI in Southeast Asia, focusing on digital governance and AI use. For instance, Facebook's failure to moderate content contributed to the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar.

7. **Luminate's Efforts in Indonesia:** Luminate is working to keep the online civic space open by funding organizations that collaborate with government partners to advocate for AI governance. This effort has led to the passing of the data-protection bill and the anticipated launch of AI regulations by the end of 2024.

ASIA PHILANTHROPY CIRCLE

Appendix: Attendees

PARTICIPANTS

NO.	NAME	STATUS	ORGANISATION
1	Melanie Hui	Presenter	Luminate
2	Stephen King	Presenter	Luminate
3	Justin Chang	Member	RS Group
4	Karen Zeng	Guest	Tencent Foundation
5	Kasey Soh	Member Staff	AITi Global
6	Laurence Lien	Member	APC
7	Mei Chin	Member	United in Diversity
8	Merle Hinrich	Member	Hinrich Foundation
9	Nicky Wilkinson	Member	Firetree Philanthropy
10	Sebastian Hebblewaite	Member Staff	AITi Global
11	Seow Hui Qin	Member Staff	Quantedge Foundation
12	Wayne Chang	Member	Affinity IMpact
13	William Gondokusumo	Member	Campaign.Com

APC TEAM

NO.	NAME		ORGANISATION
1	Nan Li		APC
2	Koon Peng Ooi		APC
3	Jasmine Khin		APC
4	Anna Natassha		APC
5	Theresa Cua		APC