

‘Global and Public History, and Digital Media’

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Introduction

The internet and digital media revolutionised our information landscape over the last 50 years, shaping almost all aspects of our lives. In this rapid social, cultural, and political transformation, information is a key factor that significantly influences that change. Many aspects of the positive social, cultural, political, and technological enhancements that were undergone in the pre-digital era are now under intense ideological scrutiny due to disinformation and misinformation. The vast flow of information through digital media is unprecedented, and people are grappling with it to discern truth from falsehood.

The ongoing information war, marked by intense ideological conflicts and involving citizens from various backgrounds globally, is being fuelled by factions on both the left and right of the American political spectrum. This struggle undermines the progress achieved in key social transformations related to race, gender equality, religious freedom, public health, and environmental sustainability—advancements that have been painstakingly made over the past several decades and centuries. The polarisation of media narratives, coupled with the widespread spread of misinformation, complicates these issues further, threatening to reverse hard-won gains and create discord within our communities. As scholars, activists,

policymakers, and everyday citizens engage in this tumultuous dialogue, the very fabric of society hangs in the balance, underscoring the urgent need for discernment and a commitment to constructive discourse in navigating these challenges.

Before the rise of the internet and digital media, governments in many developing countries tightly controlled information, often shaping narratives to align with their political ideologies and reinforce their authority. This control extended to newspapers, radio, and television, where dissenting views were frequently censored or suppressed. However, with the advent of the internet, many citizens in these countries have gained access to a wide range of global opinions and cultural perspectives. This digital revolution has empowered individuals to challenge the information they were previously taught, fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of societal issues. As they explore various viewpoints online, people are increasingly aware of different cultures and ideologies, which encourages acceptance and tolerance within their own communities. This shift represents a significant transformation in how information is consumed and understood, enabling individuals to participate more actively in discussions about their identities and beliefs.

In any significant societal transformation, there is a persistent tension between progression and conservatism. This dynamic often leads individuals and groups to ask difficult questions, critically examine prevailing ideas, and challenge established knowledge. Throughout history, these intellectual contests have not only sparked

debates but also fostered a sense of community among advocates for change. These activist communities rally to promote their causes while facing counter-rallies from conservative factions that aim to protect traditional values and resist change. This ongoing interplay of opposing forces plays a crucial role in shaping the social landscape, highlighting the complexities of progress and the diverse perspectives that emerge as society navigates transformation.

Experts across diverse fields play a critical role in elucidating factual information and illustrating its evolution, employing their specialised knowledge and methodologies. It is indisputable that many digital platforms are divisive, derogatory, and superficial, primarily seeking to stoke ideological debate rather than facilitate meaningful engagement. The conventional approaches to disseminating information—such as lectures, seminars, and publications—tend to reach an audience that is already ideologically aligned, failing to engage those with opposing viewpoints.

Furthermore, historians and advocates of knowledge bear a responsibility to counteract misinformation through public history initiatives and active engagement with digital media. They must elucidate the development of our civilisation in public discourse, which is a collective endeavour involving all regions and citizens of the world. As misinformation becomes increasingly prevalent, a limited number of individuals grasp that the progression of our civilisation, characterised by an evolutionary trajectory shaped by both written and material history, is not widely

available in the public domain to effectively counter "alternative news."

History and Global Development, and the Advent of the Internet

The word 'history' is one of the most frequently used terms in our daily lives, covering a wide range of human experiences and developments over time. We use "history" to refer to significant events that happened in the past, whether they involve key moments in human civilisation, the lifespan of notable objects, groundbreaking innovations that altered society's course, or the slow evolution of ideas that have shaped our worldviews. History not only records these events but also evokes deep nostalgia, encouraging us to reflect on eras, shifts in great power, personal experiences, or cultural milestones that resonate with us.

Anthropologists, historians, scientists, and other scholars have meticulously documented and investigated a wide array of discoveries, inventions, and historical events across diverse timelines, significantly shaping the trajectory of human civilisation. This multifaceted body of knowledge not only fosters a deeper understanding of our societal evolution but also highlights the intricate connections between the past and the present.

By delving into advancements in technology, such as the printing press and the internet, as well as significant social movements like civil rights and feminism, and the effects of colonisation and empires, we can achieve a richer understanding of how human rights and scientific inquiry have developed over time. This exploration

also illuminates how humanity has spread across the globe and built civic systems. Such insights deepen our appreciation of cultural dynamics, civic engagement, and the ever-changing nature of human relationships. Hendrick's book 'Technology: A World History' clearly illustrates how different stages of human development led to the evolution of primitive tools, and how these tools transformed over time across various cultures and regions.¹ Technological and other innovations, as well as the development of our civilisation, are collective efforts by our ancestors and all world regions.

This extensive, interdisciplinary knowledge is instrumental in fostering greater tolerance and empathy among communities, underscoring the shared challenges and triumphs experienced throughout history. By learning about different cultures, traditions, and perspectives, we promote peaceful coexistence and a more cohesive society, ultimately enhancing our collective life experience on this planet.

The internet experienced a rapid and unprecedented transformation, evolving from an intranet into a global network in just a decade. Consequently, over 74% of the world's population became connected to this network. However, this swift evolution left many communities and authorities unprepared. The rapid spread of information raised questions about the reliability of knowledge, leading individuals without proper expertise or qualifications to challenge expert opinions and established institutions, resulting in populism overshadowing political convictions.

This environment paved the way for the widespread dissemination of misinformation and disinformation. False narratives and conspiracies began to spread rapidly across social media platforms and websites, blurring the lines between credible information and unreliable sources. As alternative viewpoints proliferated, society faced a growing challenge in discerning truth from falsehood, making it crucial for individuals to develop critical thinking skills and media literacy to navigate the overwhelming flow of information online.

In academic discussion, the term "history" encompasses more than a mere chronological list of past events; it involves a subtle examination of key incidents and their broader effects. This includes a thorough investigation of why particular events occurred, the underlying causes of these changes, and the subsequent impacts on future societies. The discussion topics can cover a broad range of subjects—such as the impact of a particular invention, a social movement, a political upheaval, or demographic shifts—and explore the complex interplay of cultural, economic, and technological changes. It also examines the behaviours and adaptations of humans and other animals, the evolutionary developments over time, and the crucial discoveries that have significantly shaped human behaviour and societal organisation.

To qualify as a historical account, a piece of writing must meet academic standards, demonstrate thorough research and analysis, and undergo rigorous peer review. It should engage with past events or themes in an academically rigorous way,

thereby enriching our understanding of how these elements have shaped human experience across time. In summary, history as an academic discipline requires not only a narrative account but also an evaluative perspective that links the past to the present and future. As mentioned above, as we use the term ' history ' in daily life, those are static and memories of people about something past; conversely, academic history is dynamic, and it changes when new evidence or research points towards a different outcome or historical significance.

Despite the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the timeline and processes through which early humans populated the world, traces of human civilisation are vividly scattered across every continent. From intricate tool-making to the development of agricultural techniques, these artefacts serve as crucial touchpoints for social scientists and anthropologists analysing their significance in relation to human evolution. This interdisciplinary examination reveals clear evidence of how distinct tribes and communities from different epochs have contributed to our collective development in various regions, highlighting the complexity of human adaptation and survival.

Historical records that stretch back over 2,500 years to ancient civilisations like Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, India, and Greece bolster and reflect these scientific and anthropological findings. By analysing written documents alongside archaeological discoveries, researchers have gained a more comprehensive understanding of human society and its evolution. This journey highlights the

collective efforts of countless generations across various regions that ultimately shaped our civilisation. It all traces back to early human history in Africa, where Homo sapiens first emerged. Through migration, trade, cultural exchanges, and interactions, the rich tapestry of cultures and societies we see today around the globe has gradually evolved and expanded. Scientific and anthropological evidence strongly confirmed this narrative, as Kenny wrote,

“In evolutionary time, Homo sapiens emerged very recently, no more than 200,000 years ago. Humans have not physically evolved since, apart from some minor and inherently meaningless variations in skin colour, hair, and body shape. According to the latest scientific research, everyone alive today is descended from a small group of anatomically modern humans, Homo sapiens, which emerged in East Africa. Recent genetic studies demonstrate that all mitochondria within human cells descend from a single woman, who lived in Africa between 150,000 and 200,000 years ago.”ⁱⁱ

World history offers a broad account of human activities across time, highlighting the core themes of survival, self-protection, and improving life experiences. This record covers a wide range of topics, including social structures, cultural practices, economic systems, political movements, ideological changes, and development. It engages in meaningful debates about the interactions between humans and animals, exploring their roles in shaping societies, behaviours, and environments.

Furthermore, it investigates material aspects, such as artefacts, technologies, and economic histories, that have influenced human development and progress across various civilisations and eras. Through this perspective, world history provides valuable insights into how our past continues to influence our present and shape our future. Therefore, world history is our collective footprint on this planet and is shaped by all of us.

Humans today are confronted with an unprecedented volume of information, which includes both verified content and misinformation across various print and digital platforms. While this may appear to be a modern issue, the spread of misinformation has played a significant role in ancient and medieval politics and societies as well. Rumours and conspiracy theories about events, individuals, religions, tribes, and cultures have long fuelled misunderstandings and conflicts throughout history.ⁱⁱⁱ

Following the invention of the printing press in the late fifteenth century—a transformative development that played a crucial role in the European Renaissance—Europe experienced a significant Reformation. This movement, which gained momentum in the early sixteenth century, saw Christians questioning and challenging traditional religious practices and doctrines of the Catholic Church. As a result, Christianity divided into various branches, most notably Protestantism and Catholicism, resembling an ideological information war characterised by intense theological disputes and differing interpretations of the Bible. The proliferation of

printed materials not only fuelled the Reformation but also facilitated the spread of new ideas across Europe, enabling individuals and communities to engage directly with religious texts and challenges to the hitherto social, cultural, and civic status quo.

During this period, education was increasingly prioritised, leading to a rise in literacy rates among the general population. This shift enabled more people to read and interpret religious texts, contributing to the growth of individual belief systems and further allowing questioning of the existing ideological landscape. Consequently, multipolar worldviews on religion, culture, and societal issues began to emerge, reshaping Europe's cultural and religious framework for generations to come.

Starting in the early nineteenth century, significant social, political, and economic changes paved the way for a more representative, equitable, and compassionate society. These changes included the abolition of slavery, marking a crucial step in recognising the fundamental rights of all individuals, regardless of race. Furthermore, the movement towards gender equality gained momentum, advocating for women's rights to vote, work, and access education, thereby shifting societal norms. Progressive labour laws emerged as a response to the Industrial Revolution. They aimed to protect workers' rights, improve working conditions, and establish fair wages. Collectively, these advancements contributed to a more just society in which diverse voices could be heard and valued, fostering a high level of tolerance

among religiously and ideologically diverse communities. Nationalism and aspiration to self-govern intensified worldwide, and after the Second World War, it triggered decolonisation and many new nation-states were established.

Moreover, this era was marked by significant scientific inventions and discoveries, despite resistance from conservatives, which profoundly shaped our civilisation. Key figures such as Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Edward Jenner, Michael Faraday, Nikola Tesla, Charles Darwin, Alan Turing, and Tim Berners-Lee left lasting impacts through their groundbreaking scientific invention and discoveries.

Despite encountering challenges and resistance, activists successfully encouraged positive ideological discussions until 2000, which contributed to the development of a more cohesive, fair, tolerant, and compassionate society. Some notable figures whose activism played a significant role in these changes include William Wilberforce, Emmeline Pankhurst, Mahatma Gandhi, Charles Bradlaugh, Dr James Niven, Dr Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela.

The individuals highlighted above are key figures in their fields. Yet, it is crucial to recognise that countless others from diverse regions and eras have made significant contributions to these inventions and discoveries to this day. The journey of survival and progress has never been an individual effort; it has always been a collective endeavour. From the dawn of humanity, the quest for survival has driven the invention and discovery of essential tools and ideas. These advancements have

empowered humans to dominate the animal kingdom, adapt to their environments, and significantly enhance their quality of life.

By deepening economic and technological connections within a globalised framework, societies not only engaged in trade but also exchanged knowledge for financial benefit, equipping developing countries with essential tools for prosperity. Moreover, through trade and migration, cross-cultural cooperation and interaction became increasingly prevalent. Since World War II, the world has become increasingly interconnected, thanks to technological advances that have made it easier to connect people and goods across great distances. Travelling and shipping goods have become faster and more affordable. After the 1990s, following the collapse of communism and the disbanding of the Soviet Union, more countries declared independence, and transnational cooperation and regional partnerships began to play a crucial role in shaping the global economy during the post-Cold War period. Through GATT, the WTO, and other regional cooperation, the world has witnessed sustained growth across all regions.^{iv}

Through the United Nations and its peripheries, including local and international NGOs, health and education have been prioritised, and those institutions play a key role, among others, in vaccine enrolment globally and funding. In the West, progressive trade policies aimed at lowering barriers for all nations became a cornerstone of the neoliberal economic model, promoting free markets, deregulation, and the reduction of tariffs and non-tariff barriers as part of a broader push for

financial liberalisation. Although these trade rules primarily benefited developed countries, in the long run, poorer nations gained as well—China and the so-called tiger economies serve as prime examples. This economic drive fostered rapid growth worldwide, transforming many poorer countries into developing nations, and despite rapid population increases, global poverty began to decline.

The rise in population and affluence has prompted developing countries to establish more educational institutions, leading to a swift increase in literacy rates. However, many of those who become educated do not learn the true, coherent, and connected history of our civilisation; instead, their understanding is often shaped by ideological and regional biases and strictly controlled by the authorities' narratives. Similarly, in the West, educated citizens are divided along liberal and conservative lines, which complicates the education system and results in a fractured understanding of history and society. In the United States, these ideological divisions are so entrenched that each blue (Democratic) and red (Republican) state has developed its own educational curriculum. Furthermore, presidents are often elected based on policies that reflect their personal biases rather than being grounded in conviction and rational argument, which were once fundamental to America's democracy. ^v

Before the advent of the Internet, books, journals, libraries, and media outlets such as TV and radio were the primary sources of information. While this information was often debated and challenged in various ways, it typically led to a coherent and

verified understanding, at least in most cases. However, several factors—including rapid population growth, increased global interconnectedness through technology, a swift rise in educational institutions worldwide, and, most significantly, the emergence of the Internet in the 1990s—have transformed information and knowledge into a phenomenon no one could have anticipated.

During the Renaissance and the Reformation, the massive information revolution was contemplated by a small number of people; at that time, there were approximately 90 million Europeans, of whom around 10 per cent were educated. However, those who sought a high level of education had immense influence in this transformation, steering the revolution and advancing their ideals, including those of Socrates, Thucydides, Plato, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Galen, Ibn Sina, Al Razi, among others who promoted rational thinking. Despite the invention of the printing press, educational expansion was slow and varied across Europe.^{vi} But this digital information revolution is larger in scope, and the rise of literacy is unprecedented.

Conversely, the internet and digital revolution, which began in the 1990s in Europe and America, rapidly revitalised and connected other parts of the world. By the turn of the millennium, almost all countries had internet and digital infrastructure. With smartphones, people could access any information they desired, but this time, the information is unchecked by experts. Today, around 73% of the world's population has access to the internet, which is 6.4 billion people.^{vii} This transformation exceeds any Renaissance; it is unprecedented, global in scope, and

involves 6.4 billion people worldwide. The flow of information is uncontrollable, even as various authorities try to filter it according to their preferences. The vast amount of information available on the internet sharply contrasts with established knowledge and is often based on individual opinions that, unchecked, are already causing social, political, and economic repercussions globally. At the same time, the involvement of experts in digital debates is limited and often non-existent. Unlike during the Renaissance, the current era is dominated by ideologues who aim to reverse many of the positive social and cultural changes that occurred during and after that period.

In today's fast-paced and information-saturated social landscape, academics and scholars often stoically allow misinformation and alternative facts to gain mainstream acceptance. Various experts and conservationists recognise that countermeasures based on verified information are mainly confined to campuses and seminars and are less effective at combating misinformation, while digital media, the main source of information, lacks expert opinion. Data and statistics are crucial for countering unverified information, and an expert can only robustly publish and argue an opinion. The disengagement or reluctance of experts to engage in public debate in public places is one of the leading causes of 'alternative' information becoming mainstream, shaping political narratives and serving as a key driver of legislation. A famous British conservationist, Chris Peckham, recently said, "I should've been able to influence this more positively. (The nature loss is) on my conscience because conservationists like me have not done enough".^{viii}

Digital Media, Rising Literacy, Information and Public History

The internet revolution and digitisation, together with rapid technological advances that facilitate the seamless integration of software and hardware, are driving an enormous flow of information. Today, most of the world's population engages in both face-to-face and online debates, similar to those that took place during the Renaissance at the community level, but now on a global scale, involving around 6.4 billion people and providing instant access to vast amounts of information. Despite the prevalence of rumours and gossip during the Renaissance, chronicles, written documents, and manuscripts effectively countered misinformation and helped establish a clearer understanding of our civilisation and its history.

As mentioned, this internet revolution is unprecedented: over 6.4 billion people worldwide are connected, and it remains enormous and uncontrollable even in the most developed countries. Despite strict controls by some authoritarian governments, legislation to restrict users and information is still under discussion in most developed nations. As mentioned, most of the debates are ideological, religious, regional and race-related, and the aim is to divide people, challenge academic knowledge and promote intolerance.

A statement or comment on a digital platform may spread misinformation if it is not corrected by expert opinion or public history. Understanding the basic concepts of history for all world citizens is crucial to engaging with the digital world, which has a worldwide reach. A publication on TikTok, X, Facebook, Threads, or

Instagram will reach every region of the world and every community. A personal opinion about something may cause outrage and division. Having a basic understanding of history, about ourselves, and our evolutionary journey will promote cohesiveness and tolerance among different groups of people, cultures, and religions.

Public history plays a crucial role in shaping fundamental historical knowledge within public debates. This is especially important in an era where populism and misinformation threaten to erode rational discussions and overshadow ideological conversations, which are deeply rooted in the social and political landscapes of many developed countries. Such trends can significantly affect social cohesion and tolerance. The traditional idea of “intellectual empowerment for active citizens,”^{ix} as promoted by John Tosh, has lost its relevance. Today, active citizens and politicians often align with populist sentiments, with their views heavily influenced by public polling.^x

Every global citizen who owns a smartphone has the potential to be an active participant in society. Sharing information can influence others and potentially shape government policy. While discussions of public history often focus on heritage sites, museums, or traditional media, as noted by Tosh, there is a significant oversight: digital media has become the primary source of information for people worldwide. Each vote reflects an individual's ideological stance and is influenced by discussions on digital platforms. However, much of this information is unverified

and often based on personal opinions rather than reliable sources or established public history, which typically includes trusted media and informed dialogue

Some information is indeed verifiable, having undergone rigorous academic scrutiny and being accessible online. The widespread availability of global internet connections, economic growth in developing countries, increasing globalisation driven by technology and migration, and rising literacy rates are all key factors contributing to the vast flow of information. This information varies greatly, ranging from verified facts to personal opinions and misinformation. While fake news and rumours have always existed, their prevalence today is unprecedented. The digital media landscape has played a crucial role in the rapid spread of false information worldwide.^{xi}

Obviously, the world centre of digitalisation is the hub of alternative news and misinformation. A substantial number of the online platforms that allow free speech, which also significantly contribute to the spread of alternative and fake news, are based in key American cities such as San Francisco, New York, and Seattle. These platforms thrive under the protection of freedom of speech, a cornerstone of American democracy, which enables citizens to actively participate in public discourse and share their viewpoints without fear of government censorship.

This environment results in a massive influx of unhindered information, much of which often aligns with or promotes specific ideological narratives. Thus, the United States finds itself at the forefront of contentious ideological battles, where various

factions—ranging from political organisations to foreign entities—are increasingly pouring financial resources into American institutions and media outlets.^{xii} Their goal is to sway public opinion and influence ongoing debates that shape the nation's political and social landscape. As such, the interplay of digital communication and ideological warfare makes the U.S. a complex battleground for competing ideas and interests on a global stage.

Simultaneously, certain hostile countries and organisations actively disseminate false information to manipulate public opinion and promote divisive debates in the USA and other democratic countries. They often utilise fake accounts on social media platforms to amplify their messages and create an illusion of consensus. These entities employ well-financed agents who strategically support specific individuals and institutions aligned with their interests, furthering their agenda and undermining trust in credible sources of information.^{xiii} This orchestrated effort not only spreads misinformation but also destabilises societal discourse and erodes democratic values.

Moreover, the most powerful country in the world, which once led in providing truthful and progressive information, has increasingly become a mouthpiece for falsehoods and disinformation. From top to bottom, the current structure of the U.S. government is influenced by a leader who promotes alternative news, ironically aiming to undermine the systems of truthful information established by various ideologically driven governments in the past. Most of all, federal branches of high

offices are occupied by knowledge and science deniers. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is led by a vaccine conspiracy theorist who already fired all seven CDC vaccine experts and is currently advising parents not to take specific vaccines, which were the cornerstone to prevent child and adult mortality and prolonging life.^{xiv}

The current administration in the United States has ceased, dismantled, or terminated its collaboration with various local and international institutions, including environmental agencies, development assistance programs, vaccine distribution initiatives, and organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF. These entities play a crucial role in addressing natural disasters, alleviating poverty, conserving our civilisation, and enhancing the quality of life for citizens worldwide. Furthermore, this administration appears to be pursuing partnerships with authoritarian regimes and populist leaders, thereby undermining democratic systems and the social cohesion that has been established over many decades. This shift threatens to disrupt the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultural groups within these progressive nations.

Previously, despite their ideological differences, the U.S. was a beacon of innovation in technology, medicine, and governance, and was working with the aforementioned agencies to promote peace and democracy. These achievements were built on the foundations of science, knowledge, and truthful information, and globally forged alliances with democratically elected governments.

It appears that an atmosphere of deception, authoritarianism, and cronyism is not only dominating the political landscape of the United States but is also exerting its influence on democratic nations around the world. This troubling trend involves manipulating information, suppressing dissenting voices, and fostering favouritism in government dealings, ultimately undermining the values of transparency and accountability that are vital to robust democracies. As a result, countries that strive to uphold democratic principles may find themselves swayed by unchecked power and misinformation, posing a significant threat to the integrity of global democratic institutions.

During the COVID-19 lockdown and the vaccination rollout, many expert-recommended measures to contain, prevent, and treat the virus were contested by both the far left and the far right with their own perceived belief rather than scientific and rational data. Ideologically driven individuals and corporations are pouring money into academia, media, and social institutions to sway public debates in their favour. As a result, blogs and podcasts have become primary sources of information.

The ideological debate is very intense in developing countries. As literacy rates increase and smartphones become more widely available alongside internet access, citizens are gaining access not just to selective information but also to data that was previously restricted by governments before the digital revolution. This moment can be compared to a "European Reformation" for many citizens in developing countries,

similar to when most people became literate and could read translated versions of religious texts. The invention of the mass printing press around 1450 led to questioning various aspects of divine revelation and other philosophical issues, ultimately encouraging civic discussions.

During the Reformation, religion and civic institutions faced intense scrutiny from all sides, leading to violent clashes and an environment of intolerance. However, these debates and discussions laid the foundation for a more cohesive, fair, and tolerant society in the years that followed, even amid ongoing ideological and civic disagreements, as mentioned in the previous section.

The unprecedented availability of digital information has profoundly empowered citizens worldwide, enabling them to explore and juxtapose a rich tapestry of ideological perspectives and scientific insights about our complex world. From political beliefs to social values, this remarkable accessibility allows individuals to delve deeply into diverse arguments and viewpoints. As a result, many find themselves reassessing their long-held convictions, fostering a spirit of critical inquiry that encourages them to challenge and reevaluate established social and political norms. This dynamic interplay between information and personal belief systems can lead to a transformative process of understanding and engagement that shapes the very fabric of society.

Historically, governments and authorities have sought to control the flow of information to shape societal and cultural values in accordance with their own

political agendas. This manipulation of information often reflects the ideological stance of the ruling regime, as seen in various authoritarian countries where dissenting voices are suppressed. Despite the implementation of strict regulations, censorship, or outright bans on popular digital platforms—including social media and independent news websites—many citizens in these repressive environments have found ways to bypass these restrictions. Utilising tools such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and virtual local area networks (VLANs), they are able to access uncensored information and diverse perspectives. This technological empowerment allows them to explore alternative ideas, engage with global discourse, and ultimately seek a broader understanding of the world beyond the confines of their government's narrative.

Freedom of speech, along with the freedom to read and write, forms the cornerstone of democratic societies and is vital for expressing diverse opinions. These fundamental rights enable individuals not only to articulate their thoughts but also to engage deeply with others' ideas. By fostering an environment where various perspectives can thrive, these freedoms facilitate the contemplation and rationalisation of personal worldviews, thereby enriching public discourse.

The ability to exchange ideas and challenge established beliefs is crucial for societal progress. Throughout history, ideological debates have driven transformative change, allowing marginalised voices to emerge and shaping cultural norms. Knowledge is a powerful tool that empowers individuals worldwide to

question injustices and advocate for positive change. In the early stages of intellectual inquiry, individuals often grapple with prevailing notions and potentially controversial subjects, prompting discussions that can lead to significant advancements. Free speech and public discourse are imperative to a cohesive society in the long run.

As more people engage in these dialogues, we can anticipate the emergence of a larger cohort of well-informed and well-minded world citizens, equipped with critical thinking skills and a nuanced understanding of complex issues, as debate deepens across the world's regions. This evolution not only enhances the quality of public discourse but also strengthens the democratic fabric of society, fostering a climate of openness and mutual respect that is essential for collective progress, peace and co-existence.

As John Tosh asserted, “The common factor is that history is the property of ‘the public’ rather than academia, in the sense that the laity are the principal audience”.^{xv} At this critical moment, amid an overwhelming flow of information, both academics and enthusiasts across all fields of knowledge must take an active role in guiding this information revolution. We should not passively allow alternative news sources to become the dominant forces in our information landscape. It seems that experts from various fields, whether intentionally or unintentionally, tend to avoid the intense, tribal, and sometimes demeaning debates on the internet. Instead, their activities mainly focus on campuses and seminars, where most participants are

academics who share similar rational views on the progress of civilisation. The recent shift of Twitter to X has caused a significant move towards threads or BlueSky among experts. Despite this, X remains the trendsetter for social and political debates, and although it can be toxic, most social, cultural, and political discussions are published on X and then scrutinised elsewhere. Still, many academics and knowledge enthusiasts pay for yearly subscriptions to X to access a Blue Tick and combat misinformation and disinformation. It is a selfless commitment to supporting knowledge and knowledge-based institutions.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Threads, and BlueSky play an essential role in enabling discussions and spreading information. These platforms allow users from various backgrounds to share their thoughts and participate in conversations on a broad range of topics, from current affairs to personal experiences. However, it is evident that not all users follow the expected standards of respectful interaction. Rather than encouraging constructive dialogue, many choose to express their personal opinions or engage in personal attacks, often shifting attention away from the main issues. This behaviour diminishes the quality of the conversation and can discourage meaningful exchanges, emphasising the importance for users to act with civility and to concentrate on ideas rather than individuals in their interactions.

Participants in debates and discussions come from a wide range of ethnic, racial, and demographic backgrounds, each possessing different levels of knowledge and

education. As a result, interactions in digital media are distinct from traditional lectures and seminars. The goal of this experience is to combat misinformation, provide personal insights into the diverse demographics of global citizens, and engage in respectful debates.

Visiting museums, archaeological sites, and attending seminars have become vital components of the second tier of public information sources. These venues are primarily frequented by individuals who are already engaged in online learning and exploration. Such visitors seek to deepen their understanding and expand their imaginations through direct experience.

CONCLUSION

The world is undergoing a profound and rapid transformation, driven by billions of individuals who play an integral role in this evolution. Each person brings unique perspectives and worldviews, shaped by the complex interplay of personal knowledge, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Geography also plays a significant role, influencing how communities are structured and how people interact. Furthermore, individual beliefs—whether shaped by religion, philosophy, or personal experiences—add another layer of diversity to these viewpoints.

Engaging with these varied perspectives is essential not only for understanding the global landscape but also for fostering meaningful connections and collaboration

across cultures and societies. As we navigate a more dynamic and multicultural world, embracing these diverse viewpoints becomes increasingly important.

As individuals, communities, and regions, we humans are intricately interconnected through our shared ancestry. World history is a collective legacy from our ancestors, enriched by diverse cultures and regions across various eras, which have ultimately shaped contemporary civilisation.

Public history should play a crucial role in reinforcing scientific and historical facts that humans are one being and that reflect in evolutionary facts, embedded in our knowledge and anthropology. This engagement should facilitate constructive discourse while steering clear of deep-seated "cultural wars" that often polarise communities. Enhancing public understanding of information about our world can be achieved by illuminating historical truths through artefacts, data, statistics, presentations, and activism.

Experts from all branches of knowledge are essential to the battle against misinformation and disinformation, particularly in today's rapidly changing digital landscape. Public history, encompassing the practices of historians, anthropologists, and other professionals, can significantly contribute to this effort. Experts should dedicate time to actively engage with digital media platforms, scrutinise the information that circulates, and address inaccuracies head-on. By advocating the dissemination of accurate, evidence-based information, they can help counter the waves of false narratives that often arise during periods of societal unrest and

change. Digital engagement by experts from various fields will help promote critical thinking skills and media literacy among the public, fostering a more informed society capable of discerning fact from fiction. The evolution of digital media, driven by advances in artificial intelligence technologies, has significantly complicated existing challenges. As AI continues to enhance content creation, curation, and distribution, issues such as misinformation, privacy concerns, and the digital divide have become more pronounced. In this critical juncture, public history is the only tool to steer this transformation to the next level, and experts have a crucial role in explaining to the public and feeding information to AI for fostering a peaceful and inclusive world.

ⁱ Headrick, Daniel R., *Technology: A World History* (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-16

ⁱⁱ Kenny, Kevin, *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), P.17

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Middle Ages knew all about fake news and misinformation' *University of Winchester* (2025) <<https://www.winchester.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Press-Centre/Media-Articles/Middle-Ages-knew-all-about-fake-news-and-misinformation.php>> (accessed 7 December 2025)

^{iv} Takumi Naito, 'An asymmetric Melitz model of trade and growth, *Economics Letters*' Vol. 158 (2017) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2017.06.016>

^v 'How Democrats, Republicans differ over K-12 education' *Pew Research Centre* (2023) <<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/06/05/partisan-divides-over-k-12-education-in-8-charts/#:~:text=Mentions%20of%20diversity%2C%20social-emotional,of%20these%20hot-button%20topics.>> [accessed 7 December 2025]

^{vi} Tyrel C. Eskelson, 'States, Institutions, and Literacy Rates in Early-Modern Western Europe' (2021) <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1290524.pdf>>

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