

September 30, 2022

Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

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The urgency of the moment

Unfinished Live: part conference, part conversation space, part immersive art experience and part workshop “collaboratory.” This convergence of leading voices in tech and democracy gave us reason to hope — yet also reminded us of an ever-narrowing window to act.

Some key highlights:

- [Shoshana Zuboff](#) spoke about how surveillance capitalism has “eaten the world” when American democracy stood down in the crucial first decades of the digital century
- [Jonathan Haidt](#) explained the risk posed to democracy (and to ourselves) by the incentive structures and dynamics of social media
- [A panel of experts](#) discussed a risk assessment for the 2022 election and how the technology of the voting system influences voter trust, voter

turnout, and election integrity

Perhaps Unfinished Live is best summarized in [Maria Ressa's rousing conversation with Vivian Schiller on the rising threat of disinformation to democracies around the world](#) — earning her a standing ovation. Watch it fully in the video above!

Maria Ressa is the founder of the Filipino news organization, [Rappler](#), that is defending democracy by speaking truth in the Philippines. Ressa's work has earned her both a Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 and the ire of the Filipino government that is uncomfortable with her journalism and accountability. Undeterred by bogus criminal charges, investigations, arrest warrants, and the potential for jail time, Ressa presses forward with her work at home and abroad.

At Unfinished Live, she spoke passionately about how the “information ecosystem” is corrupted. When lies and corruption are rewarded, facts become disputed.

“If you don't have facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust.” Ressa said, “When you say a lie a million times, it becomes a fact.”

The nature of online virality makes this even more dangerous and more possible when algorithms amplify lies to millions of people. The end result is not that people will believe something is untrue, it's that they'll end up believing that nothing is true. This is what distinguishes misinformation from disinformation; disinformation is a deliberate attempt to change our worldview.

The problems of disinformation and the fight for truth extend beyond the Philippines. The resistance Ressa faces in the fight for truth at home is emblematic of similar challenges in democracies all over the world.

There are [fewer democracies now than there were 15 years ago](#), and there are major elections around the world in the next two years (from Brazil to the United States to India), making the next year a critical time to fight against disinformation and election fraud, and use journalism as an antidote to tyranny. If we're not careful, we risk electing more illiberal leaders, and this is where, according to Ressa, democracy could die.

With her fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureate [Dmitry Muratov](#), Ressa has outlined a [10-point plan](#) to fight the information crisis. To protect human rights above profits in the long-term, education is needed. In the medium-term, legislation is needed. But in the short-term, Ressa pleaded to the audience, “it is us” who are needed to defend democracy.

“Where America goes, the rest of us will go,” she continued. “Please hold the line.” Ressa's parting challenge to us all was “What are you willing to sacrifice for the truth?”



Other notable headlines

📰 Over five years, LinkedIn ran experiments on 20 million users by adjusting the "People You May Know" algorithm on its site, according to an [article in *The New York Times*](#). The algorithm is responsible for recommending new connections to LinkedIn users, and the study revealing the existence of the social experiment [found that relatively weak social ties](#) on LinkedIn proved twice as effective in securing employment as stronger social ties. Michael Zimmer, the Director of the Center for Data, Ethics and Society at Marquette University said, "The findings suggest that some users had better access to job opportunities or a meaningful difference in access to job opportunities."

🇮🇷 After Mahsa Amini was killed in police custody after being detained by Iran's "morality police," protests have broken out across 80 cities in Iran with thousands protesting, marching, and clashing with police. As the protests have spread, [Wired](#) reports that Iranian officials have shut down mobile internet connections, undermining citizens' ability to document crimes and organize protests. The Instagram account [1500tasvir](#), with 560,000 followers, has served as a watchdog of state brutality. In the last few weeks, it has received 1,000 videos per day.

🧬 Illinois has one of the toughest laws in the nation requiring companies to require consumer consent to track and use biometric data. The 2008 law forces companies to get consent for capturing and safeguarding consumer data, while prohibiting those companies from selling data and allowing citizens to directly sue tech companies for violations. Legislation in the US has not kept up with technology, and there is no federal law pertaining to the use of biometric data, making Illinois's law a model to follow, according to a [recent article by CNN](#). There have been 500 lawsuits alleging violations in Illinois alone, with major settlements from Facebook (\$650M), Google (\$100M), TikTok (\$92M), and Snap (\$35M).

📱 In response to an investigation nine months ago revealing that TikTok's algorithms were inundating teenagers with videos encouraging weight loss and eating disorders, TikTok claimed they made changes to their algorithm, but the [Wall Street Journal](#) reports the workarounds by content creators are outsmarting the company's bans on such videos. Two in three U.S. teens are on TikTok. While it has stepped up efforts to improve its filters and redirect people to the National Eating Disorders Association, it's still not enough for social media platforms to distinguish between content promoting healthy eating and content celebrating unhealthy dieting. Platforms like TikTok face similar challenges with election misinformation, as [John Bracken](#) and [Jennifer 8. Lee](#) discussed at Unfinished Live.

Thank you for reading.

Follow Unfinished ([@byUnfinished](#)) on Twitter for ongoing chitchat on the changing web.

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team

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