GAM

SPECIAL EDITION

PRESENTS

Fake News

'Modern democracy is highly mechanical and deeply artificial.'

David Runciman, *How Democracy Ends*

Fake News – Introduction

By Pola Janowska

My name is Pola Janowska, and I am 16 years old. I am the Global Head of Projects at Global Awareness Movement. I am keen on exploring the issue of fake news and how the spread of misinformation influences political systems around the world.

In this GAM Times special edition, we will explore the issue of fake news. We will discuss misinformation from different perspectives. In the era of social media, it is crucial to be aware of fake news and how they impact our opinion. We talked to specialists in their fields to allow you to protect yourself from misinformation. The aim of this special edition is to spread awareness on the dangers that come with the spread of misinformation. We want to give you the knowledge to protect yourself from the negative impact of social media.

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'The impact of the spread of misinformation through social media on democracy' by Pola Janowska

Social media is a vital part of the everyday life of billions of people worldwide. It vastly impacted globalization, making it easier to communicate with people on the other side of the globe. Moreover, research shows that it impacts how we think and interact. In recent years it has become clear that social media allows individuals to manipulate elections using fake news. It has been an issue of broad discussion whether it is possible to have fair elections while using social media. There is no single solution to this problem. It is essential to study the usage and impact of *Facebook* during elections as it can destroy the current democratic system. It is impossible to have fair elections if political parties can pay communication companies to manipulate voters using misinformation. To fully understand the extent of this issue, this essay will explore case studies both globally and nationally. These include the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018, the USA 2020 Presidential Election, and the 2015 Presidential Election in Poland.

Facebook is the single, most popular social media platform with 2.9 billion users monthly. Social media use during elections has been questioned as *Facebook* is the most effective tool to influence a large number of people. *Facebook* determines what posts a user would interact with based on the posts they have liked, reposted, or saved in the past. This creates the *echo chamber effect* when users only see posts that mirror their views and opinions. They do not see any opposing views. The simplicity of *Facebook*'s algorithm makes it an easy target for manipulation. For instance, troll farms, are organizations or groups of people which create provocative online posts, which are often fake news, to manipulate public opinion. Troll farms create content based around controversial topics, such as gun control or immigration. They play with people's emotions to get the reaction that they want, in this case, an interaction with the post to further promote it. According to a study, 35% of adult US citizens use *Facebook* as their main source of news, without taking into account any different perspective. This is a major problem, as manipulation of information can have a significant impact on the outcome of any election.

Data analytics firms such as *Cambridge Analytica* have become extremely influential in the past few years. As a result, *Cambridge Analytica* took advantage of people who did not think critically of the news they were exposed to. Consequently, the election's outcome was unfairly intervened and voters ultimately elected the candidate of CA's choice. The prime example could be *Project Alamo* - the Trump campaign in 2016. Allegedly, *Project Alamo*, which was spending 1 million dollars a day on *Facebook* ads, was fully funded by Donald Trump. What adds to the size of the operation, CA claimed to have had about 5,000 data points on every American voter.

The main problem causing the spread of misinformation during elections is the lack of content moderation. *Facebook* allowed users to say whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted to do so, permitting users to share their false conclusions. Nowadays, It is possible for anyone to have a social media account and create content without any repercussions. Moreover, the ineffectiveness of *Facebook*'s restrictions enables users to continue spreading misinformation and not to be penalized as freedom of speech is a basic human right.

During the 2020 Presidential election in the United States misinformation was a huge issue. A report by a non-profit organization, *Avaaz*, clearly shows that *Facebook* could have prevented 10.1 billion estimated views of content from popular profiles that kept spreading misinformation for eight months before the election. Fadi Quran, the campaign director at Avaaz said "*False claims of voter fraud, early victory and election-stealing are helping plunge the country further into chaos and confusion, creating alternate realities for Americans.*" Further, the Biden campaign wrote *Tens of millions of Americans rely on Facebook as a news source, but the company continues to amplify misinformation and lets candidates pay to target and confuse voters with lies.*

A similar situation took place during the 2016 Polish Election, however on a much smaller scale. According to an *Oxford Institute* report published in 2017, throughout the 2016 Polish presidential election, a single communication firm created approximately 40,000 complex fake accounts. This allowed the candidate to spread misinformation undercover about his opponents. Each account had

multiple profiles on different social media platforms, unique IP addresses, and even their own personalities. According to the *Guardian*, the communication firm that was involved in the manipulation of the Polish election was *Cambridge Analytica*. The Polish president (and then a candidate back in 2015), Andrzej Duda responded to those allegations saying '*I never heard of this before. It's fake news.*' (Translated from Polish*).* It is commonly known that this is another example of how government officials have been taking advantage of the spread of misinformation on platforms like *Facebook*.

Facebook being used by political parties to control the outcome of elections is a major issue as it puts the future of the democratic process at risk. Sonia Gandhi, the Congress President in India said that she urges the government to end the influence of Facebook and other social media giants in the electoral politics of the world's largest democracy. It is impossible to have a fair election if users base their opinions on propaganda fed to them by outside parties. *People don't want to admit that propaganda works because to admit it means confronting our own susceptibilities, horrific lack of privacy and hopeless dependency on tech platforms ruining our democracies on various attack surfaces,* said David Carrol, who filed a lawsuit to get his voter's profile from *Cambridge Analytica*.

Social media can be used by government officials to change a voter's opinion and ultimately influence their choice. It is impossible to have fair elections anymore. It is widely believed that moderation of social media use is the most effective solution to reduce the spread of misinformation during elections. However, the decision to ban social media use during elections depends on the government of a particular country. For example, the Zambian government blocked access to social media apps such as *Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp*, and *Twitter* during the 2021 National Elections. This was not an effective strategy as voters in Zambia could use VPNs to communicate and use social media. After the shutdown, the Zambian government responded, '*if some people choose to abuse the internet to mislead and misinform, the government will not hesitate to invoke relevant legal provisions...'.* Governments have implemented this strategy in multiple countries, such as Cameroon, Congo, Uganda, and Tanzania. On the other hand, social

media lockdown does not enable the government to conduct campaigns through platforms like *Twitter* or *Facebook*, which are the main communication channels and are considered the most effective, as they reach most people. It is crucial to consider that these strategies started to be implemented in the last few years. As a result, there is no reliable data available to evaluate the effectiveness of this solution. However, in my opinion, temporary social media bans are not an effective solution to stop the spread of misinformation during elections.

Facebook (currently Meta) claims to have implemented new regulations to control the conduct of misinformation. *Meta* allegedly introduced regulations in 2016 and 2021 to stop the spread of fake news during elections. First, advertisers now must complete authorization and identity confirmation, making it harder to spread misinformation through Facebook ads. Furthermore, *Meta* started to work with independent fact-checkers in 2016 to eliminate misinformational content. On the *Facebook for Business* website, it is stated that it was *built to give people a voice, but this doesn't mean that people can say whatever they want*. There is still a long way to go before *Facebook* will be able to eliminate fake news. In my opinion, the strategies that they have put forward so far will have a long-term impact on the amount of misinformation on *Meta*'s platforms. However, it should be considered that it is impossible to measure the effectiveness of these solutions. I believe that *Meta* putting restrictions on content is an effective solution as it will limit the amount of misinformation-spreading ads, making it harder to steal identities and help eliminate the spread of fake news.

Democracy is backsliding. At this point, government individuals and private corporations can control the opinion of citizens, and ultimately change their vote. As I mentioned above, there are various solutions to the problem. I believe that the most effective solution is introducing more rigorous controls of fake news and misinforming content on social media platforms such as *Facebook* or *Twitter*. I assume that this strategy is effective as it would allow a consumer to perceive a post to evaluate its credibility. Concluding, the main issue with the spread of misinformation is that people who watch the content, often don't realize that it's simply not true or manipulated.

Extremism in the era of social media – Ph.D Leor Zmigrod

Ph.D. Leor Zmigrod is a political neuroscientist and psychologist. She completed her Ph.D at the Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge. Dr Zmigrod is an inspiring academic who was listed on 'Forbes 30 Under 30' (Science and Health) and won the 2'020 Women of the Future Science' Award. Her research focuses on the psychology of ideological extremism and group identity formation. Read more here: https://www.leorzmigrod.com/

I had the honor of listening to a lecture titled "How to counter political extremism and misinformation" which was led by Ph.D Leor Zmigrod and Professor Sander van der Linden, during the Cambridge Festival (March 2023). Ph.D Zmigrod was kind enough to answer a few questions about political extremism on social media for the Fake News Special Edition.

What is the difference between misinformation and fake news?

Fake news is usually considered a kind of misinformation – where false information is disseminated with the purpose of deceiving or manipulating readers.

How can we measure ideology?

We can measure individuals' ideological attitudes through a variety of methods. We can probe people's nationalistic ideologies by studying how much they believe their nation is superior to the rest and that it is defensible to use violence to protect it. We can study people's religious ideologies by measuring their beliefs in supernatural ideas and by the frequency with which they pray and attend religious services. Interestingly, we can also measure how extreme people's political ideologies are by giving them surveys that assess how willing they are to commit acts of violence against innocent people for their ideological cause. So while many researchers think that ideology is something that we can study only by investigating political leaders or their manifestos, I think we can measure each person's private ideologies.

How does extremism impact the spread of misinformation and fake news?

Misinformation is often designed to become viral and there is research that shows that the more extreme a piece of fake news is, the more likely it is to circulate. So extreme ideologies and intentions can accelerate the spread of fake news and make it more vicious and dangerous.

How can social media influence our political views?

Social media algorithms are designed to show us things we will like and agree with, and this creates confirmation biases and biases that make us more extreme. We see instances of sexist and misogynist influencers impacting young people's opinions and leading to old-fashioned and dangerous ideas that go against gender equality. However, it's important to remember that social media can also be an outlet for people to access alternative and more liberal interpretations of the

world – social media can be a form of access to information that goes against authoritarian regimes. So in my opinion, it's about using social media to increase our flexibility and progressive instincts rather than making people's ideas more rigid and conservative.

How have extremist political groups changed over the last 5 years?

This is a very interesting question. Over the last 5 years, we have seen extremist groups using social media platforms in more innovative ways – they're on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, and can use these platforms to radicalize young people. So while the methods of persuading people and radicalizing them might not have changed very much, the fact that it's happening online in young people's homes rather than on the streets or in physical spaces is changing.

How can we build rigidity when consuming information in the era of social media?

In the era of social media, I think we want to foster as much flexibility and battle rigidity wherever possible. I think that increasing people's cognitive resilience against misinformation is very important, and making sure people's psychological needs for community and meaning are met so that they don't seek these things out in extreme communities. Encouraging people to move away from habits and towards more dynamic ways of living is important in my eyes.

How can a state regulate the spread of fake news on social media while allowing free speech?

This is a great question and one that many governments and tech companies are facing now. I think it's essential to define clearly what hate speech and extremist speech look like so that we can separate violent ideas from free speech. One of the problems is that we often fall into a kind of relativism – all ideas are equally valid and should be heard. But not all ideas are equally valid and some ideologies are much more dangerous than others. So finding the line between hate speech and free speech is an important area of research and debate now.

How Big Data models are forcing us to redefine individual freedom? – Pola Janowska

The core principle of both traditional and modern liberalism is the freedom of the individual. In recent years, with the rise of social media platforms, big data has been posing a risk to individual freedom threw pressuring the privacy and autonomy of millions of social media users. The transgression of privacy and the misuse of confidential user information has given the ultimate power to private concerns and government entities to control the population.

The new virtual reality has forced us to redefine Mill's principles of what makes an individual meaningfully free, as Big Tech has undermined liberal principles. John Stuart Mill was a political philosopher, who published during the age of reformation, in the 19th century. [1] According to his principle of individual freedom, it originates from the liberty of consciousness. He argued that an individual should be free unless their actions cause harm to other members of society, "liberty of tastes and pursuits … doing as we like … without impediment from our fellow creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them." [2] The role of the state is to limit the freedom of the individual when their actions are harmful to society. Moreover, the philosopher distinguishes two types of freedom; *Negative freedom* is freedom that exists in the absence of obstacles, while *positive freedom* is the possibility of acting.[3] Mill's *On Liberty* was first published in London in 1859, which was almost 300 years ago. With the rise and influence of Big Tech, such as Cambridge Analytica, the structure of society has changed drastically over this period. Mill's principle of liberty simply cannot be applied and must be redefined so that it is applicable to the modern age.

Privacy is the foundation of freedom in modern liberal democracies. Big data, such as Cambridge Analytica has been posing a major risk to individual freedom, threw pressuring the privacy and

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[1] Richard Paul Anschutz, "John Stuart Mill", Britannica, 16.05.2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Stuart-Mill, accessed 3.06.2023.
[2] Mill, J. (2011). OF THE LIMITS TO THE AUTHORITY OF SOCIETY OVER THE INDIVIDUAL. In *On Liberty* (Cambridge Library Collection - Philosophy, pp. 134-167). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139149785.005
[3] N/a, "Positive and Negative Liberty", Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, first published 27.02.2003 and revised 19.11.2021, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative/, accessed 4.06.2023

autonomy of millions. Cambridge Analytica was a consulting firm, founded in 2013 by the SCL group. The firm advertised itself as a service for consumer research and target advertising. [4] Famously, Cambridge Analytica was hired by presidential candidate Donald Trump, in the 2016 US elections. The company illegally obtained data about 50 million Facebook users in the United States alone. The data was used for advertising without the knowledge of the individuals and was violating the terms and conditions of Facebook. [5] This was the biggest breach in privacy in the history of Facebook. The Cambridge Analytica framework is a prime example of threatening individual liberty. The firm was violating the privacy of millions of Facebook users, posing a constraint on their *negative freedom*. [6] Some scholars have argued that privacy should be a right. The transgression of privacy of users is a constraint on the *negative freedom* of the individual as the information gained can be later used to cause harm to other parties, like CA interfering in the democratic process threw Facebook user data that it has collected. However, there is this common notion that users consent to their information being used by third parties as a payment for "free" online services, such as Facebook. Hence why, regulatory framework such as the Federal Trade Commission cannot address this issue. [7] This clearly goes against Mill's principle of harm, which states that "liberty of tastes and pursuits … doing as we like … without impediment from our fellow creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them." [8] In other words, the state can only limit the liberty of an individual, when their behavior is causing harm to other members of society. [9] The question of who is responsible arises. It is impossible to decided who has agency for these actions, causing the effects of our actions to be removed.

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[4] Mathew Rosenberg, Nicholas Confessore and Carole Cadwaldr, "How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions", The New York Times, 17.03.2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html, accessed 1.06.2023

[5] David Ingram, "Factbox: Who is Cambridge Analytica and what did it do?", Reuters, 20.03.2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-cambridge-analytica-factbox-idUSKBN1GW07F, 3.06.2023

[6] DE BRUIN, BOUDEWIJN. "THE LIBERAL VALUE OF PRIVACY." *Law and Philosophy*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2010, pp. 505–34. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40926328. Accessed 4 June 2023.

[7] Sofia Grafanaki, *Autonomy Challenges in the Age of Big Data*, 27 FORDHAM INTELL. PROP. MEDIA & ENT. L.J. 803 (2017). Available at: https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/iplj/vol27/iss4/3

[8] Mill, J. (2011). OF THE LIMITS TO THE AUTHORITY OF SOCIETY OVER THE INDIVIDUAL. In *On Liberty* (Cambridge Library Collection - Philosophy, pp. 134-167). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139149785.005

[9] N/a, "Is Mill's principle of Liberty compatible with his Utilitarianism?", LSE Blog, 11.03.2022, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseupr/2022/03/11/is-mills-principle-of-liberty-compatible-with-his-utilitarianism/, accessed 1.06.2023

Moreover, the framework of the company was based on using Facebook algorithms and the collection of user data, to target posts that would influence their political standpoint, having a major influence over the autonomy of users. The firm created psychological profiles of users to make advertising as successful as possible. The goal was to increase the number of votes for Donald Trump. CA was creating social media content and post which were targeted at voters, with the use of Facebook algorithms. They were about 10,000 hidden ads, which were viewed millions of times in the few months prior to the 2016 presidential election. [10] *Psychometric targeting* was used to convey a new voter demographic to vote for Trump in the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. [11] The mass manipulation campaigns were successful, despite the odds, Donald Trump won the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States due to the manipulation of the public opinion by CA. [12] Allegedly, Cambridge Analytica was also involved in the "Vote Leave" Brexit referendum in 2016, and numerous other elections around the world. [13] The company has exerted meaningfully influence over the decision-making process of millions of people, threatening the democratic process. [14] The spread of propaganda online has resulted in automated decision-making. [15] Moreover, the *positive freedom* of citizens has been constrained threw the meaningful influence of third parties on their reason and conciseness. According to Schwartz, this process can be defined as *self-determination,* which occurs when government or private action interferes with a person's control of her reasoning. [16] This clearly violates Mill's liberal principle

[10] Paul Lewis and Paul Hinder, "Leaked: Cambridge Analytica's blueprint for Trump victory", The Guardian, 23.03.2018, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/23/leaked-cambridge-analyticas-blueprint-for-trump-victory, accessed 1.06.2023

[11] David Ingram, "Factbox: Who is Cambridge Analytica and what did it do?", Reuters, 20.03.2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-cambridge-analytica-factbox-idUSKBN1GW07F, 3.06.2023

[12] Prichard EC (2021) Is the Use of Personality Based Psychometrics by Cambridge Analytical Psychological Science's "Nuclear Bomb" Moment? Front. Psychol. 12:581448. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.581448

[13] James Ball, "The real story of Cambridge Analytica and Brexit", The Spectator, 11.10.2020, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/were-there-any-links-between-cambridge-analytica-russia-and-brexit/, accessed 29.05.2023

[14] Susser, D. & Roessler, B. & Nissenbaum, H. (2019). Technology, autonomy, and manipulation. Internet Policy Review, 8(2). https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.2.1410

[15] Sofia Grafanaki, *Autonomy Challenges in the Age of Big Data*, 27 FORDHAM INTELL. PROP. MEDIA & ENT. L.J. 803 (2017).
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[16] Sofia Grafanaki, *Autonomy Challenges in the Age of Big Data*, 27 FORDHAM INTELL. PROP. MEDIA & ENT. L.J. 803 (2017).

of the liberty of continence. Nowadays, free will is just an illusion. [17] It is extremely difficult to tell when we are being manipulated online threw hidden propaganda, and there is very little framework put in place to stop interference in elections from happening. Furthermore, there is no legal or regulatory framework that would hold Cambridge Analytica responsible for its actions.

Social Media has forced us to redefine Mill's principle of individual freedom as the circumstances have changed. Mill's principle of liberality cannot be applied to the current situation online. Big data has posed a challenge to liberal order, by undermining liberal principles. Facebook breached data protection laws by distributing the confidential information of millions of users to Cambridge Analytica, allowing the company to extern meaningful influence over the democratic process. Big data has transgressed the privacy of millions, using their personal information to cause harm to other members of society. As the users from which data was taken are not aware of what is being done with their information, it is difficult to tell who has agency for this action. Moreover, it is difficult to redefine Mill's principle of liberty without invading free speech, which was one of the principles of freedom for the philosopher. Upholding the liberty of speech online is crucial, however, it clearly defines the potential for harm from falsehood. According to Cass Sustain, a professor at the Harvard Law School, the role of the state should be the correction of misinformation, rather than putting limitations on free speech. He states that most citizens spreading misinformation is not aware of it as they strongly believe their standpoint. Moreover, it is important to specify the regulations and legislation concerning user privacy on online platforms. This would allow the agency of Cambridge Analytica to be somewhat more clarified.

It is important to recognize that hidden propaganda in the form of advertising is a widespread issue which touches millions, if not billions of social media users worldwide. The Cambridge Analytica scandal that was discussed is only one of many elections that CA, or other similar models was involved in. The liberal order in most modern democracies has been undermined. Mill's liberal

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[17] Alexis Papazoglou, "What would John Stuart Mill do - to fix Facebook?", The New Republic, 28.01.2019, https://newrepublic.com/article/152939/john-stuart-mill-doto-fix-facebook, accessed 1.06.2023

principles have clearly been pressured by big data companies, and his argument about the sources of liberty needs to be redefined, to decide who has agency over the manipulation of public opinion. Social media has opened doors to new methods of controlling the population, which could lead to catastrophic consequences to the liberty of citizens, and possibly a totalitarian regime.

Countering fake news: Center for Media Literacy

Elizabeth Thoman founded the Center for Media Literacy in 1989 as a nonpartisan organization. Currently, she is the CEO and President of the organization. CML I is an organization that aims to provide education, leadership, professional development, and evidence-based educational resources nationally and internationally.

They promote and support media literacy education as a framework for analyzing, evaluating, and creating media content. Center for Media Literacy works to help citizens, especially the young, develop critical thinking and media production skills needed to live in the 21st-century media culture. They want to help young people make wise choices when consuming content.

The Vision of CML is to provide resources for individuals to communicate effectively in all forms of media. Their mission is to translate media literacy research and train teachers to help children and adults prepare to live and learn in a global media culture.

Their most significant milestones include designing and implementing community engagement projects in partnership with California State University Northridge in 2017 and 2018. Moreover, CML's framework was evaluated by UCLA in 2013. The evaluation was published in the peer-reviewed journal Injury Prevention.

The organization has developed the *CML MediaLit Kit*™, which gives direction to introduce media literacy in classrooms and community groups. The organization's framework is based on five key questions and concepts. The first one focuses on the authorship of the message. The second evaluates the techniques used to attract the reader's attention. The third question focuses on the audience and how different people will react to the message.
Moreover, it discusses the value that is represented in the piece of media. Lastly, analyze why the message is sent. The most common reason to produce media is money and power.

Media literacy is key to reducing the spread of fake news. However, it's not the only component. CML is a fantastic initiative aiming to build more resilient media consumers through educational projects. Read more about the Center of Media Literacy here (https://www.medialit.org/about-cml)
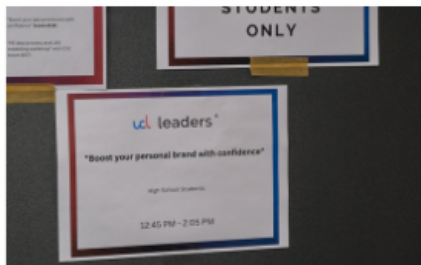
UCL Leaders - Fake News Workshop

This year, thanks to Jolanta Kulik, I had a great opportunity to attend the UCL Leaders Conference in London. The conference was organized by the University College London Polish Society and took place on the university campus.

I found the *Separating fact from fiction: learn how to effectively filter information* workshop particularly memorable. The event was led by three incredible journalists, who are experts in their fields; Emma Lacey-Bordeaux, the senior director for Standards and Practices and an award-winning journalist, Małgorzata Bonikowska, the founder of *Gazeta* and *POLcast,* and a journalist from *Polsat News*.

The journalists shared how we can differentiate types of false information, as well as how to fact-check information. During the workshop, there were some technical difficulties and the speakers were unable to share the presentation they prepared. The journalists handled the situation, and we started discussing the impact of social media on the spread of misinformation. I was surrounded by people my age, which made me less intimidated and more confident to share my opinions. As a highschool student, being able to discuss a greater issue with experts was an eye-opening experience. It made me even more passionate and keen to learn more about the spread of fake news.

I am extremely grateful for being able to take part in this conference. I would like to thank Olga Drygała and Kaja Pośnik, who were the lead organizers of the event for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. More about UCL Leaders - https://uclleaders.co.uk/

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