2 *Reading*: The Web

Read the following letter written by Tim Berners-Lee and then answer the questions.

Today, more than 30 years on from my original proposal for an information management system, half the world is online. It's a moment to celebrate how far we've come, but also an opportunity to reflect on how far we have yet to go.

The web has become a public square, a library, a doctor's office, a shop, a school, a design studio, an office, a cinema, a bank, and so much more. Of course with every new feature, every new website, the divide between those who are online and those who are not increases, making it all the more imperative to make the web available for everyone.

And while the web has created opportunity, given marginalised groups a voice, and made our daily lives easier, it has also created opportunity for scammers, given a voice to those who spread hatred, and made all kinds of crimes easier to commit.

Against the backdrop of news stories about how the web is misused, it's understandable that many people feel afraid and unsure if the web is really a force for good. But given how much the web has changed in the past 30 years, it would be defeatist and unimaginative to assume that the web as we know it can't be changed for the better in the next 30. If we give up on building a better web now, then the web will not have failed us. We will have failed the web.

To tackle any problem, we must clearly outline and understand it. I broadly see three sources of dysfunction affecting today's web:
Deliberate, malicious intent, such as state-sponsored hacking and attacks, criminal behaviour, and online harassment.
System design that creates perverse incentives where user value is sacrificed, such as ad-based revenue models that commercially reward clickbait and the viral spread of misinformation.
Unintended negative consequences of benevolent design, such as the outraged and polarised tone and quality of online discourse.

While the first category is impossible to eradicate completely, we can create both laws and code to minimize this behaviour, just as we have always done offline. The second category requires us to redesign systems in a way that change incentives. And the final category calls for research to understand existing systems and model possible new ones or tweak those we already have.

You can't just blame one government, one social network or the human spirit. Simplistic narratives risk exhausting our energy as we chase the symptoms of these problems instead of focusing on their root causes. To get this right, we will need to come together as a global web community.

At pivotal moments, generations before us have stepped up to work together for a better future. With the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, diverse groups of people have been able to agree on essential principles. With the Law of Sea and the Outer Space Treaty, we have preserved new frontiers for the common good. Now too, as the web reshapes our world, we have a responsibility to make sure it is recognised as a human right and built for the public good. This is why the Web Foundation is working with governments, companies and citizens to build a new Contract for the Web.

This contract was launched in Lisbon at Web Summit, bringing together a group of people who agree we need to establish clear norms, laws and standards that underpin the web.

Those who support it endorse its starting principles and together are working out the specific commitments in each area. No one group should do this alone, and all input will be appreciated. Governments, companies and citizens are all contributing, and we aim to have a result later.

Governments must translate laws and regulations for the digital age. They must ensure markets remain competitive, innovative and open. And they have a responsibility to protect people's rights and freedoms online. We need open web champions within government — civil servants and elected officials who will take action when private sector interests threaten the public good and who will stand up to protect the open web.

Companies must do more to ensure their pursuit of short-term profit is not at the expense of human rights, democracy, scientific fact or public safety. Platforms and products must be designed with privacy, diversity and security in mind. This year, we've seen a number of tech employees stand up and demand better business practices. We need to encourage that spirit.

And most important of all, citizens must hold companies and governments accountable for the commitments they make, and demand that both respect the web as a global community with citizens at its heart. If we don't elect politicians who defend a free and open web, if we don't do our part to foster constructive healthy conversations online, if we continue to click consent without demanding our data rights be respected, we walk away from our responsibility to put these issues on the priority agenda of our governments.

The fight for the web is one of the most important causes of our time. Today, half of the world is online. It is more urgent than ever to ensure the other half are not left behind offline, and that everyone contributes to a web that drives equality, opportunity and creativity.

The Contract for the Web must not be a list of quick fixes but a process that signals a shift in how we understand our relationship with our online community. It must be clear enough to act as a guiding star for the way forward but flexible enough to adapt to the rapid pace of change in technology. It's our journey from digital adolescence to a more mature, responsible and inclusive future.

The web is for everyone and collectively we hold the power to change it. It won't be easy. But if we dream a little and work a lot, we can get the web we want.
Sir Tim

1 How is the Web today used and abused?

2 how can malicious activity be dealt with?

3 What does the Contract for the Web stipulate?

4 Which principle should first figure on governments' agendas?

5 What can be done to ensure the contract's principles are respected?

6 Why is the fight for the web requiring immediate action?