Trustworthy Digital Society

Youth, Trust & Technology

In what ways can young people's participation in the governance of AI-generated images and deepfakes foster civic, technological, and cultural trust in digital society?

The project explores youth-led pathways for governing deepfakes through participatory research that connects governance, technology, and culture as interdependent spaces of digital trust.

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BACKGROUND

The spread of AI-generated images and deepfakes has eroded trust in institutions, technology, and civic culture. While technical safeguards such as watermarking are emerging, these alone cannot rebuild public confidence. The YTT project recognises that trust must be restored collectively—through civic participation, education, and youth-led innovation.

SIGNIFICANCE / WHY IT MATTERS

Deepfake harms are not only technological but cultural and systemic. Current solutions often reflect neoliberal logics of self-responsibility, overlooking shared accountability. The YTT project reimagines trust as a collective practice—one that extends beyond detection tools toward civic participation, education, and moral responsibility.

The YPAR will first be trialled with UTS and UNSW students in 2026, before being implemented in schools in 2027.
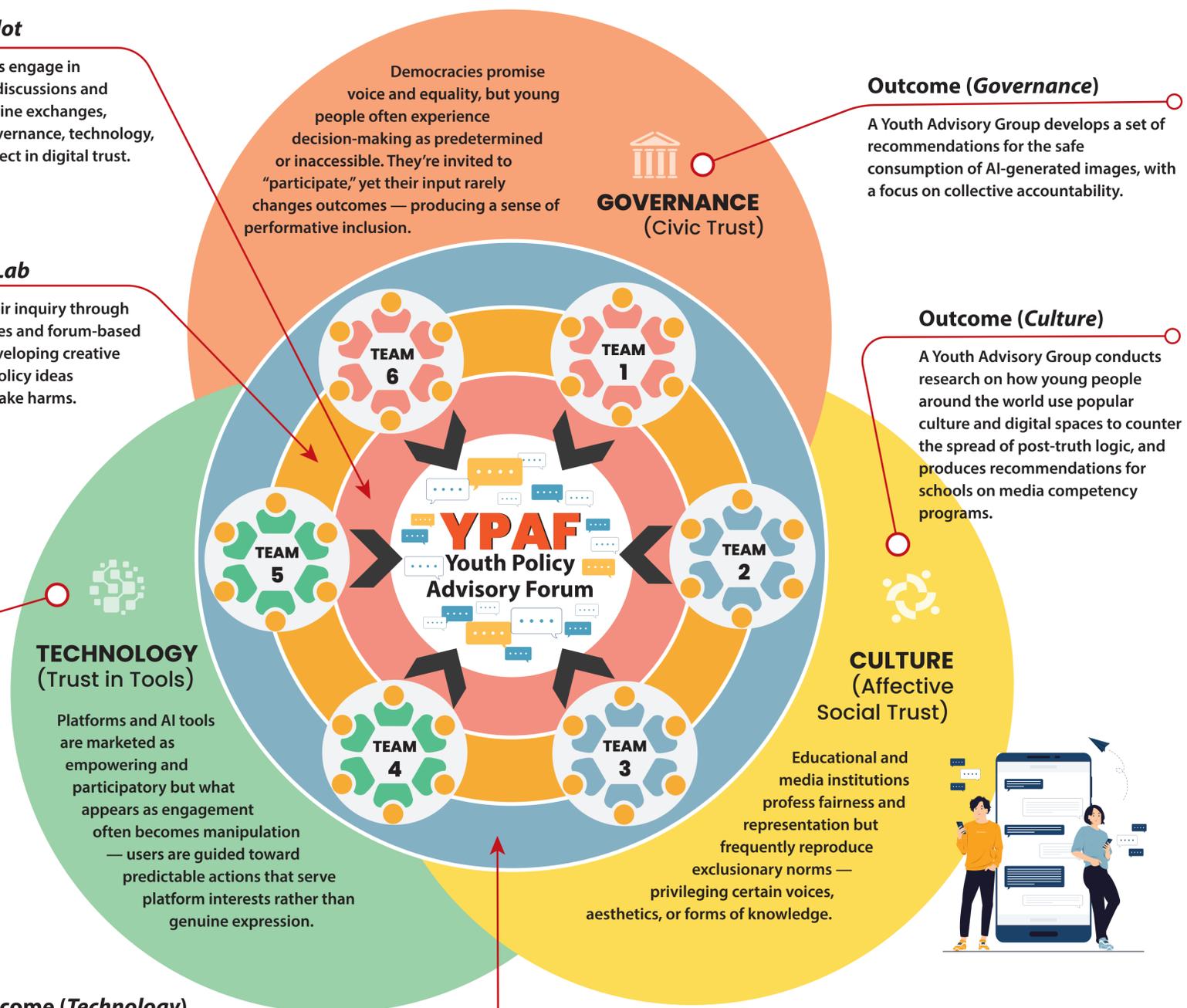
Phase 1 — *Pilot*

Youth participants engage in fortnightly team discussions and asynchronous online exchanges, mapping how governance, technology, and culture intersect in digital trust.

Phase 2– *CoLab*

Teams extend their inquiry through co-design activities and forum-based collaboration, developing creative prototypes and policy ideas addressing deepfake harms.

Democracies promise voice and equality, but young people often experience decision-making as predetermined or inaccessible. They're invited to "participate," yet their input rarely changes outcomes — producing a sense of performative inclusion.

GOVERNANCE (Civic Trust)

Outcome (*Governance*)

A Youth Advisory Group develops a set of recommendations for the safe consumption of AI-generated images, with a focus on collective accountability.

Outcome (*Culture*)

A Youth Advisory Group conducts research on how young people around the world use popular culture and digital spaces to counter the spread of post-truth logic, and produces recommendations for schools on media competency programs.

YPAF Youth Policy Advisory Forum

TEAM 6
TEAM 1
TEAM 5
TEAM 2
TEAM 4
TEAM 3

TECHNOLOGY (Trust in Tools)

Platforms and AI tools are marketed as empowering and participatory but what appears as engagement often becomes manipulation — users are guided toward predictable actions that serve platform interests rather than genuine expression.

CULTURE (Affective Social Trust)

Educational and media institutions profess fairness and representation but frequently reproduce exclusionary norms — privileging certain voices, aesthetics, or forms of knowledge.

Outcome (*Technology*)

A Youth Advisory Group researches the effectiveness of watermarking, labelling, and other fake-detecting technologies.

Phase 3 — Policy & Media Literacy Framework

Findings from earlier phases are consolidated into actionable recommendations for schools, educators, and policymakers.

Transforming Distrust into Civic Agency