

Opening Remarks for International Telecommunications Society (ITS) Chair, Stephen Schmidt

ITS webinar on *Information Problems during the Pandemic*, Dr. Joshua Gans, 11 May 2021

Hello and Welcome,

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening – depending on where you are, at this moment.

Our event, today, brings together members of the ITS (International Telecommunications Society) family stretching across almost the entire globe -- 21 out of 24 time zones – which is a wonderful opportunity for a truly global conversation about a truly global subject, “*Information problems during the Pandemic*”.

(And we will reserve a meaningful amount of time, for questions, to ensure that we can have a conversation together).

I have four important *Thank You’s* to start off:

- (1) **My first thank you is to all who have joined us, today, to make this a truly global and meaningful conversation. Thank you for sharing your time, attention and ideas with us today.**
 - o **And thank you in particular to those joining us in challenging time zones:** our friends on the West side of North America who may be in the pyjamas because it is 7am local or earlier; and to our many friends throughout East Asia who may also be in the pyjamas, because it is 10pm local, or later.
- (2) **Thank you to our academic host, Chalmers University (Sweden),** and to my friend and ITS Board colleague, Dr. Erik Bohlin, for the personal and institutional support of this event;
- (3) **Thank you to corporate host for this event, TELUS Communications and to Joe Rowsell, at TELUS, for making today possible.** Thank you, as well, to all of our ITS corporate members – thoughtful global companies in the telecom industry, who make conversations like this possible, on an ongoing basis.
- (4) **And, of course, most crucially, thank you to our speaker today, Dr. Joshua Gans.**

Context for Today’s event:

Dr. Gans is from the University of Toronto and is one of the world’s foremost experts on innovation, entrepreneurship, and artificial intelligence. Dr. Gans has recently written *two* books on the

pandemic, provocatively recasting the COVID-19 pandemic as, fundamentally, an information problem.

In comparing public health outcomes (e.g., hospitalizations, mortality rates, vaccination rates) across countries, one notices that they are very sensitive to the speed, character and quality of government interventions (in addition to other factors). And that these government interventions all have a clear relationship to information.

For example:

- Governments in Canada, the US, and some EU countries were slow to act on information about COVID-19 that was emerging from Asia in December 2019. As a result, lockdowns and travel restrictions were adopted too slowly (March/April 2020).
- Governments in some advanced countries failed to collect enough information about COVID-19, failing to adopt mass testing and contact tracing until late 2020/2021. For example, Canada's rate of testing per capita remains less than 1/3 the rate in the UK and 1/2 the rate in the US.
- Finally, in many countries, governments have struggled to communicate information in a clear, credible manner, shifting messaging even when the science was clear (e.g., masking, mass testing, playgrounds are safe). Moreover, Canada, the US, and many EU countries continue to struggle against misinformation about masking, the causes of the pandemic (e.g., 5G, China), and other issues.

Against this backdrop, I am delighted that Dr. Gans has agreed to spend some time with us today, to talk about the important role of information in defeating the virus.

Thank you!

Stephen Schmidt
ITS Chair