

MODULE 3

News industry transformation: digital technology, social platforms and the spread of misinformation and disinformation

by Julie Posetti



Synopsis

The Digital Age has been described as a ‘golden era for journalism’⁷⁵. Indeed, it has enabled access to significant data caches leading to ground-breaking investigative journalism⁷⁶, new models of cross-border collaborative reporting, and access to treasure troves of knowledge and diverse sources at a mouse-click. It has also delivered unprecedented, ongoing challenges and structural changes to the news industry. Journalism is ‘under fire’⁷⁷, facing a virtual ‘perfect storm’ of convergent pressures that feed ‘information disorder’⁷⁸. These include:

- ▶ The rise of computational propaganda⁷⁹ and the ‘weaponisation of mistrust’⁸⁰
- ▶ The digital disruption of advertising, causing the collapse of the traditional business model for news publishing, and mass unemployment
- ▶ The failure of digital advertising to support journalism as a replacement for print advertising (Google and Facebook are now the main beneficiaries of digital advertising sales)⁸¹
- ▶ Digital convergence transforming content-commissioning, production, publication and distribution, significantly increasing deadline pressure and leading to additional job losses
- ▶ Targeted online harassment of journalists (particularly women), their sources and their audiences⁸²

75 Posetti, J. (2017). *Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age* UNESCO, Paris. p 104 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002480/248054E.pdf> [accessed 01/04/2018]. (Citing ICJ Director, Gerard Ryle)

76 Obermayer, B. & Obermaier, F. (2016). *The Panama Papers: Breaking the story of how the rich and powerful hide their money*, One World, London

77 UNESCO (2018). *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development 2017/2018*. UNESCO, Paris. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002597/259756e.pdf> [accessed 29/03/2018].

78 Wardle, C. & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Council of Europe*, Op Cit. Note: the video recording of a panel discussion at the 2018 International Journalism Festival, convened by the chapter author, is a resource that instructors may wish to use for the operationalization of this module. <https://www.journalismfestival.com/programme/2018/journalisms-perfect-storm-confronting-rising-global-threats-from-fake-news-to-censorship-surveillance-and-the-killing-of-journalists-with-impunity>

79 Clarke, R. & Gyemisi, B. (2017). *Digging up facts about fake news: The Computational Propaganda Project*. OECD. <http://www.oecd.org/governance/digging-up-facts-about-fake-news-the-computational-propaganda-project.htm> [accessed 01/04/2018].

80 UNESCO (2017). *States and journalists can take steps to counter ‘fake news’*. UNESCO, Paris. <https://en.unesco.org/news/states-and-journalists-can-take-steps-counter-fake-news> [accessed 29/03/2018].

81 Kollewe, J. (2017). *Google and Facebook bring in one-fifth of global ad revenue* The Guardian, May 2nd 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/may/02/google-and-facebook-bring-in-one-fifth-of-global-ad-revenue> [accessed 29/03/2018].

82 See Module Seven

- ▶ Social media platforms placing audiences at the forefront of content discovery and distribution⁸³, and making them collaborators in the production of news (which offers many benefits but destabilises legacy news media gatekeeping power and impacts on verification standards⁸⁴)
- ▶ Audience expectations of ‘on-demand’ news, mobile delivery and real-time engagement on social media further increasing pressure on news professionals facing diminishing resources in a never-ending news cycle
- ▶ News publishers struggling to hold onto audiences as barriers to publication are removed, empowering any person or entity to produce content, bypass traditional gatekeepers, and compete for attention – including powerful politicians seeking to undermine the credibility of critical reporting⁸⁵
- ▶ The limited impact and profitability of many new digital-only media start-ups filling the voids created by the failure of newspapers
- ▶ The erosion of trust in journalism and mainstream media organisations causing audiences to dissipate further, diminishing remaining profits and fuelling the spread of ‘information disorder’

As a result, the lines between fact, entertainment, advertising, fabrication and fiction are increasingly blurred. And when disinformation and misinformation are published, the social news distribution system, dependent on peer-to-peer sharing, frequently sends the content viral, making it impossible to pull back, even if journalists and other fact-checkers successfully debunk it.

This module will inform participants about how the Digital Era collapse of many commercial news media business models, in combination with processes of digital transformation and the advent of social media, has enabled the legitimisation and viral spread of disinformation and misinformation⁸⁶. It will also assist participants to critically analyse the news media’s responses to ‘information disorder’. Additionally, it should inform participants about emerging industry good practices for managing the problem.

83 Nielsen, R.K. & Schroeder, C. K. (2014). *The Relative Importance of Social Media for Accessing, Finding and Engaging With News* in Digital Journalism, 2(4) <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21670811.2013.872420> [accessed 29/03/2018].

84 Posetti, J. & Silverman, C. (2014). *When Good People Share Bad Things: The Basics of Social Media Verification* in Posetti (Ed) *Trends in Newsrooms 2014* (WAN-IFRA, Paris). http://www.wan-ifra.org/sites/default/files/field_media_image_file_attach/WAN-IFRA_Trends_Newsrooms_2014.pdf [accessed 29/03/2018].

85 Cadwalladr, C. (2017). *Trump, Assange, Bannon, Farage... bound together in an unholy alliance*, The Guardian, October 28th 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/28/trump-assange-bannon-farage-bound-together-in-unholy-alliance> [accessed 29/03/2018].

86 Posetti, J. & Silverman, C. (2014). op cit



Outline

Teasing out the issues

Structural causes of ‘information disorder’ affecting the news industry

i) Collapsing traditional business models

The rapid decline of traditional advertising revenue - the funding model that supported commercial journalism for nearly two centuries - and the failure of digital advertising to generate sufficient profit have led to an era of increasingly urgent experimentation designed to make the business of journalism sustainable. However, the collapse of the news industry has only accelerated, with the sharp decline of newspapers, dramatic restructures and mass layoffs now a common cyclic experience in Digital Era newsrooms. Changing media consumer behaviours and the proliferation of social media, along with the arrival of affordable, app-enabled smartphones have also seen a bleeding of audiences from traditional news products to peer-to-peer modes of information sharing, further draining revenue.

The impacts with relevance to ‘information disorder’ include:

- ▶ Depletion of newsroom resources (staff and budgets), leading to less scrutiny of sources and information, and less ‘on-the-ground’ reporting
- ▶ Increased deadline pressure coupled with reduced quality control processes and job losses, while the demand to churn out content continues in order to feed homepages and social media channels
- ▶ Less time and resources for ‘checks and balances’ (including reporter fact-checking and sub-editing)
- ▶ Over-reliance on poorly identified but lucrative ‘native advertising’⁸⁷ and on ‘click-bait’ headlines which risks further eroding audience trust

ii) Digital transformation of newsrooms and storytelling

The decade from 2000 shook much of the media world⁸⁸, disrupting patterns and processes of news creation, distribution, and consumption as the Digital Era took hold. It presented unprecedented opportunities and challenges in tandem. The digital transformation of the news industry and the craft of journalism is now understood as a perpetual process that is driven concurrently by changing audience behaviours

⁸⁷ ‘Native Advertising’ is a term used in the media industry to refer to paid content that mimics reportage. It is considered ethical practice to very clearly label the content as ‘paid’ but fear of deterring readers has resulted in an absence of transparency in some cases

⁸⁸ Nielsen, R. K. (2012). *The Ten Years That Shook the Media World: Big Questions and Big Trends in International Media Developments* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford). https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-09/Nielsen%20-%20Ten%20Years%20that%20Shook%20the%20Media_o.pdf [accessed 29/03/2018].

(e.g. peer-to-peer distribution of content, on demand-access) and technology (like the advent of social media platforms, the arrival of Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence and the increasing accessibility of smartphones).⁸⁹ There is, therefore, an ongoing need for digital capability-building.

The impacts relevant to ‘information disorder’ include:

- ▶ Media convergence: many journalists are now tasked to produce content for multiple platforms concurrently (from mobile to print), further depleting time available for proactive reportage, as distinct from reactive modes such as reproducing public relations content without adequate scrutiny
- ▶ Reporters are increasingly required to sub-edit and publish their own content without appropriate review⁹⁰
- ▶ Digital-first deadlines are always *now*; heightening the risk of errors
- ▶ Social-first publishing is commonplace, with reporters posting their stories to their individual social media accounts and/or those of their publishers to meet audience demand for real-time news. Practices include ‘live tweeting’, ‘Facebook Live’ videos, and other journalistic acts which do not necessarily involve editorial oversight (akin to live broadcasting), potentially resulting in a ‘publish first, check later’ mindset
- ▶ Reliance on rudimentary data analytics that focus on the number of article clicks and unique website visitors instead of ‘attention minutes’ and ‘time spent’ (more useful markers for long-form and quality journalism) used to justify higher prices for increasingly scarce and low-rate digital advertising
- ▶ Clickbait practices (understood as the use of misleading headlines to entice readers to click on links under false pretences) designed to drive traffic but which have been associated with erosion of trust in professional journalism
- ▶ Pursuit of virality at the expense of quality and accuracy. This is a problem likely to be exacerbated by ‘machine learning’
- ▶ The rise of fact-checking units within newsrooms, and as outputs of media development projects

⁸⁹ For detailed global analysis of digital media trends, see the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism’s (RISJ) *Digital News Report*. The 2018 edition is available at: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/overview-key-findings-2018/>

⁹⁰ See Australian Community Media (ACM) case study: Robin, M. (2014). *Who needs subs? Fairfax turns to reporter-only model* Crikey. <https://www.crikey.com.au/2014/10/16/who-needs-subs-fairfax-turns-to-reporter-only-model/> [accessed 29/03/2018]. (Note: this method is now entrenched across Fairfax Media’s regional, rural and community publications)

iii) Virality: how disinformation spreads rapidly in the new news ecosystem

a) *The rise of the audience*

The Digital Era removed barriers to publication⁹¹ and signalled “the shift of the tools of production to the people formerly known as the audience,”⁹² who became co-producers, of content, including news - a function and practice described as ‘produsage’⁹³. They initially built audiences via email and chat-rooms before social media platforms dramatically amplified their reach.

b) *The arrival of social media*

In many countries, by the late-2000s, Twitter and Facebook had joined YouTube as social media mainstays, influencing the practices and professional identities of journalists (especially regarding verification, audience engagement, and the clash of the personal and public spheres that occur on social platforms⁹⁴), and the distribution of content. As individuals formed networks built around trust, peer-to-peer distribution of content (particularly on Facebook) began to challenge traditional methods of content dissemination.

Users curated their own content streams - including content from news services, journalists and other reliable information providers - without mediation. As a result of distribution via ‘trust networks’ (users and peers), inaccurate, false, malicious and propagandistic content masquerading as news found increased traction. Researchers have discovered that both emotive content, and content shared by a friend or family member is more likely to be redistributed on social media⁹⁵.

While journalists and news organisations have necessarily embedded themselves within these platforms for the purposes of newsgathering, audience engagement and content distribution (they needed to be where their audiences were active), ‘filter bubbles’⁹⁶ or ‘echo chambers’⁹⁷ developed (even if they are not quite as hermetic or insulated as sometimes suggested). These reduced many individual users’ exposure to alternative views and verified information. This development has amplified the risks associated with ‘information disorder’.

91 Gillmor, D. (2004). *We, the Media: Grassroots Journalism By the People, For the People* (O’Reilly). <http://www.authorama.com/we-the-media-8.html> [accessed 29/03/2018].

92 Rosen, J. (2006). *The People Formerly Known as the Audience*, PressThink blog (June 27th, 2006). http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html [accessed 29/03/2018].

93 Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. Peter Lang, New York. See also: Bruns A (2006) Collaborative Online News Production. Peter Lang, New York.

94 Posetti, J. (2009). *Transforming Journalism...140 Characters at a Time* Rhodes Journalism Review 29, September 2009. http://www.rjr.ru.ac.za/rjrpdf/rjr_no29/Transforming_Journ.pdf [accessed at 29/03/2018].

95 Bakir, V. & McStay, A. (2017) *Fake News and the Economy of Emotions* Digital Journalism (Taylor and Francis) July, 2017. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21670811.2017.1345645> [accessed 29/03/2018].

96 Note: Filter bubbles are the inflated space populated by like-minded people as a result of algorithms serving up individualised content to users c.f. Pariser, E. (2012). *The Filter Bubble*. Penguin and Random House, New York

97 ‘Echo chambers’ refers to the effect of confirmation bias on people of like mind on social media platforms and Module 5 has more on ‘confirmation bias’.

Benefits of audience-networked journalism include the ability to crowdsource diverse sources, undertake collaborative verification⁹⁸ (useful to correct misinformation, debunk disinformation, and call out malicious actors), and build loyal audiences (supported by direct engagement between the journalistic actor and the news consumer).⁹⁹ They also empower the audience to ‘talk back’ in order to correct the record where reporters are in error, or to contribute collaboratively to research. The networked public sphere also helps journalists and audiences to bypass arbitrary restrictions and censorship (e.g. layers of ‘spin doctors’), which can be a fetter on access to information and open societies.

Journalists’ engagement with audiences and information sources via social media channels can also be seen as a noteworthy new feature of accountability frameworks that aid self-regulation. These interactions allow journalists to publicly and swiftly respond to valid critiques of their work, to instantly correct errors, and to increase the transparency of their practice by ‘making content out of process’.¹⁰⁰

Downsides include:

- ▶ Increased likelihood of disinformation and misinformation going viral with distribution amplified by ‘trust networks’¹⁰¹ and emotional reactions (e.g. triggered by confirmation bias). (See Module 5)
- ▶ The ability of governments and other agencies to side-step news media interrogation and verification by ‘going direct to audiences’ to avoid scrutiny. There is evidence of increased manipulation of the power of social media by those seeking to influence election outcomes and public policy¹⁰²
- ▶ Sensational information is more likely to be shared¹⁰³
- ▶ The inability to easily pull back or correct disinformation and misinformation

98 Garcia de Torres, E. (2017). *The Social Reporter in Action: An Analysis of the Practice and Discourse of Andy Carvin in Journalism Practice*, 11(2-3). <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/2017512786.2016.1245110> [accessed 29/03/2018].

99 Posetti, J. (2010). *Aussie #Spill Breaks Down Barriers Between Journalists, Audience* PBS Mediashift, May 24th, 2010. <http://mediashift.org/2010/05/aussie-spill-breaks-down-wall-between-journalists-audience144/> [accessed 29/03/2018].

100 Posetti, J. (2013). *The ‘Twitterisation’ of investigative journalism* in S. Tanner & N. Richardson (Eds.), *Journalism Research and Investigation in a Digital World* (pp. 88-100): Oxford University Press. Available at <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2765&context=lhapapers>

101 ‘Trust networks’ are networks of people sharing information online via trust-based relationships (e.g. family and friendship groups) in an unmediated manner, peer-to-peer. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that social media users are more likely to share information derived from such ‘trust networks’ regardless of whether it’s accurate or verified

102 Freedom House (2017). *Freedom of the Net 2017: Manipulating Social Media to Undermine Democracy* Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2017> [accessed 29/03/2018]. See also Cadwalladr, C. (2018). *I made Steve Bannon’s Psychological Warfare Tool: Meet the data war whistleblower*, *The Guardian/Observer* <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/2017/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump> [accessed 31/03/2018].

103 Kalsnes, B. & Larsson, O. A. (2017). *Understanding News Sharing Across Social Media: Detailing distribution on Facebook and Twitter* in *Journalism Studies* (Taylor and Francis) March, 2017. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1297686?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=rjos20> [accessed 29/03/2018].

once it has gone viral - no amount of debunking or reportage exposing a falsehood will completely eliminate the impact of a fabricated story, a malicious meme, a propagandistic video masquerading as news, or an erroneous report caused by a failure of verification.

- ▶ The demand to publish instantly on social platforms can lead to the inadvertent sharing of disinformation and misinformation or material from spurious sources¹⁰⁴
- ▶ The low level of media and information literacy and verification skills within broader society. This means that in many cases, general social media users are ill-equipped to determine if content is authentic before sharing it
- ▶ The risk of States undermining freedom of expression through unjustified censorship and shutdowns in response to the urgent problems outlined above
- ▶ The development of filter bubbles which theoretically confirm biases and reduce exposure to quality, verified information
- ▶ The risk of poor quality journalism practice further downgrading audience respect for the profession and giving legitimacy to attacks on news media by those who seek to silence critics
- ▶ The risk of audience confusion about what constitutes news, as distinct from disinformation masquerading as news¹⁰⁵
- ▶ The ill-preparedness of newsrooms to deal with disinformation and the need for editorial social media teams to develop updated strategies to better combat the problem¹⁰⁶

c) *The rise of the platforms*

The Guardian Editor-In-Chief Katherine Viner has assessed that “Facebook has become the richest and most powerful publisher in history by replacing editors with algorithms.”¹⁰⁷ The social platforms have been hailed as ‘the new gatekeepers’¹⁰⁸, although they remain reluctant to accept responsibility for traditional publishing

104 Posetti, J. (2009). *Rules of Engagement For Journalists on Twitter* PBS Mediashift, June 19th 2009. <http://mediashift.org/2009/06/rules-of-engagement-for-journalists-on-twitter170/> [accessed 29/03/2018].

105 Nielsen, R. K. & Graves, L. (2017). “News you don’t believe”: *Audience Perspectives on Fake News* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism Factsheet (RISJ, Oxford). https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Nielsen%26Graves_factsheet_1710v3_FINAL_download.pdf [accessed 29/03/2018].

106 Elizabeth, J. (2017) *After a Decade, It’s Time to Reinvent Social Media in Newsrooms*, American Press Institute <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/strategy-studies/reinventing-social-media/single-page/> [accessed 29/03/2018].

107 Viner, K. (2017). *A mission for journalism in a time of crisis* The Guardian, November 17th, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/16/a-mission-for-journalism-in-a-time-of-crisis> [accessed 29/03/2018].

108 Bell, E. & Owen, T. (2017). *The Platform Press: How Silicon Valley Reengineered Journalism* Tow Center for Digital Journalism. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/platform-press-how-silicon-valley-reengineered-journalism.php [accessed 29/03/2018].

oversights - including verification and curation - despite making decisions to censor some content in a manner that undermines media freedom.¹⁰⁹ Efforts by the platforms to address disinformation and misinformation are evolving rapidly but their resistance to a) responding adequately, on a global scale, and b) taking publisher-style responsibility for the social and democratic impacts risks them becoming used as factories for ‘information disorder’ and online abuse.¹¹⁰

The function of the Facebook algorithm in news dissemination and the spread of disinformation, particularly in developing States, has come under scrutiny since 2016¹¹¹, especially in the context of computational propaganda, which affects a range of open social media platforms.¹¹² However, after initial commitments and actions in partnership with news organisations and journalism academics to address the crisis, including moves to surface reliable content and flag false and misleading posts, Facebook retreated dramatically from this function in January 2018.¹¹³ A shift from open to more closed social media systems of audience engagement is likely to follow, with a whole new set of implications for news dissemination and the sustainability of quality journalism. There are also additional risks for the creation of filter bubbles and the viral spread of disinformation.¹¹⁴ These include issues with search engine algorithms like Google’s, which the company admitted in early 2018 have a tendency to reinforce confirmation bias. At the time of writing, Google had indicated that it was working on the problem: “There are often legitimate diverse perspectives offered by publishers, and we want to provide users visibility and access into those perspectives from multiple sources.”¹¹⁵

Consequences of ‘information disorder’ for journalism and the news industry:

- ▶ Further erosion of trust in news brands, journalism and individual journalists who share inaccurate, fabricated, or misleading information
- ▶ Conflation of quality reporting with disinformation and poorly labelled native (paid) advertising content designed to mimic news, increasing general distrust

109 Hindustan Times (2016). *Facebook Says Will Learn From Mistake Over Vietnam Photo*. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/facebook-says-will-learn-from-mistake-over-vietnam-photo/story-kwmb3jX6lKgMwalgZeKlyN.html> [accessed 29/03/2018].

110 Posetti, J. (2017). *Fighting Back Against Prolific Online Harassment*, The Conversation, June 29th 2017. <https://theconversation.com/fighting-back-against-prolific-online-harassment-in-the-philippines-80271> [accessed 29/03/2018].

111 Finkel, Casey & Mazur (2018). op cit

112 Grimme, C., Preuss, M., Adam, L., & Trautmann, H. (2017). *Social Bots: Human-Like by Means of Human Control?*. Big Data 5(4) <http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/publishing/academic-articles/social-bots-human-like-by-means-of-human-control/> [accessed 29/03/2018].

113 Wang, S., Schmidt, C. & Hazard, O. L. (2018). *Publishers claim they’re taking Facebook’s newsfeed changes in their stride - is the bloodletting still to come?* NiemanLab. <http://www.niemanlab.org/2018/01/publishers-claim-theyre-taking-facebooks-news-feed-changes-in-stride-is-the-bloodletting-still-to-come/> [accessed 29/03/2018].

114 Alaphillipe, A. (2018). *Facebook’s Newsfeed Changes Are Probably Going to be Great for Fake News*, The Next Web. <https://thenextweb.com/contributors/2018/01/2018/facebook-news-feed-changes-probably-going-great-fake-news/> [accessed 29/03/2018].

115 Hao, K. (2018). *Google is finally admitting it has a filter bubble problem*, Quartz. <https://qz.com/1194566/google-is-finally-admitting-it-has-a-filter-bubble-problem/> [accessed 29/03/2018].

- ▶ Further stress on the journalism business model – audiences may no longer turn to news media in times of crisis and disaster believing that they will be served reliable, verified information shared in the public interest. Such trust underpins brand loyalty - the kind essential to building any sustainable news business model
- ▶ Weakening of the role of journalists as agents for accountability (e.g. via investigative journalism), with flow-on effects for broader society
- ▶ Crackdowns (sometimes justified as necessary to eradicate ‘fake news’) that undermine press freedom and freedom of expression rights, including internet shutdowns, the blocking of platforms, and censorship
- ▶ Malicious targeting of journalists (in particular female journalists) by disinformation purveyors leveraging online harassment to discredit critical reporting, along with deliberate attempts to entrap journalists in distribution of disinformation and misinformation.¹¹⁶

Emerging industry practice: how news organisations are covering ‘fake news’ and countering ‘information disorder’

The problems and risks outlined above demand professional vigilance, commitment to ethics, high standards of reporting and verification (including collaborative verification methods) of both information and sources, along with active debunking, and creative reportage on the problem.

Here are some examples of efforts by news organisations and individual reporters to cover the story, engage audiences in news literacy, and counter disinformation:

- ▶ *The Guardian’s* use of Instagram Stories to counter the spread of disinformation, with short videos designed to engage young audiences <https://www.instagram.com/p/BRd25kQBb5N/> (See also: *The Guardian’s* ‘Fake News’ interactive quiz <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2016/dec/28/can-you-spot-the-real-fake-news-story-quiz>)
- ▶ *Rappler’s* deployment of investigative journalism and big data analysis to reveal propagandistic ‘sock puppet’ networks impacting on democracy in the Philippines <https://www.rappler.com/nation/148007-propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet>
- ▶ *The New York Times’* use of strong explanatory reporting on the problem through a case study approach: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/business/media/how-fake-news-spreads.html>

¹¹⁶ See detailed analysis in Module Seven

- ▶ *Columbia Journalism Review's* commitment to reflective practice analysis of the problem: https://www.cjr.org/analysis/how_fake_news_sites_frequently_trick_big-time_journalists.php
- ▶ *Guardian Australia's* guide for reporters on challenging climate change denialism: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/planet-oz/2016/nov/08/tough-choices-for-the-media-when-climate-science-deniers-are-elected>
- ▶ A Japanese debunking collaboration between journalists and academics during national elections in 2017 which built on the principles of the highly successful CrossCheck election-watch project in France the same year: <http://www.niemanlab.org/2017/10/a-snap-election-and-global-worries-over-fake-news-spur-fact-checking-collaborations-in-japan/>
- ▶ In the USA, Electionland is an interesting example of a collaboration that includes journalism educators and students: <https://projects.propublica.org/electionland/>¹¹⁷
- ▶ The global investigative coverage of the Cambridge Analytica scandal (involving *The Observer* & *The Guardian*, Channel 4 News and *The New York Times*) and the knowledge-empowering way in which *Vox Media* explained the complex story to its audience: a. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/21/2017141428/cambridge-analytica-trump-russia-mueller> b. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/23/2017151916/facebook-cambridge-analytica-trump-diagram>
- ▶ *The Quint's* harnessing of audience power to counter the spread of disinformation stories on WhatsApp in India, and their creative curation of verified content on the app: <https://www.thequint.com/neon/satire/whatsapp-indian-elections-and-fake-propaganda-satire>¹¹⁸

Instructors are encouraged to add other examples from learners' own regions and languages.

Also valuable are Professor Charlie Beckett's strategies for boosting ethical journalism practice in an era of 'fake news'. He says journalists should:

¹¹⁷ Editors' note: CrossCheck and Electionland are part of an emerging phenomenon of temporary initiatives in the form of partnerships, to counter disinformation during elections. Such "pop-up" partnerships can be a valuable phenomenon that compensates for the absence or relative weakness or isolation of established fact-checking institutions.

¹¹⁸ Note: For research examining the role of chat apps in disinformation distribution see: Bradshaw, S & Howard, P. (2018). *Challenging Truth and Trust: A Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation*. Working Paper 2018.1. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda: <http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2018/07/ct2018.pdf> [accessed: 20/8/18].

- ▶ Connect – be accessible and present on all platforms¹¹⁹
- ▶ Curate – help users to find good content wherever it is
- ▶ Be relevant – use users’ language and ‘listen’ creatively
- ▶ Be expert – add value, insight, experience, context
- ▶ Be truthful – fact checking, balance, accuracy
- ▶ Be human – show empathy, diversity, [be] constructive
- ▶ Transparency – show sources, be accountable, allow criticism.¹²⁰



Module Aims

- ▶ To produce understanding among participants of the structural causes of the news industry’s weakening on the one hand and, on the other, the propulsion of disinformation and misinformation
- ▶ To enable participants to critically analyse the news industry’s responses to the phenomenon of ‘information disorder’
- ▶ To understand and critique the role of the platforms in the development and perpetuation of the disinformation crisis
- ▶ To learn from emerging good practice among journalists and news organisations responding effectively to the crisis



Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, participants should be able to:

1. Critically assess the structural causes and the broad consequences of the news media’s actions in reporting and distributing false information
2. Understand and critique the role of technology and the ‘new gatekeepers’ (i.e. the platforms) in enabling the viral distribution of disinformation and misinformation presented as news
3. Identify emerging best practices within the news industry for catching and combatting disinformation

¹¹⁹ Note: the editors acknowledge that it is not possible for all journalists to be across all platforms individually. It might be helpful, however, for newsrooms to assign individual journalists to emerging and less high-impact platforms in addition to the currently high-profile Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

¹²⁰ Beckett, C. (2017). op cit



Module Format

This module is designed to be delivered face-to-face, or online. It is intended for execution in two parts: Theoretical and Practical

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

A.Theoretical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
<p>An interactive lecture and question and answer session delivered traditionally, or via a webinar platform facilitating remote participation.</p> <p>Lecture content can be drawn from the theory and examples supplied above.</p> <p>However, lecturers are encouraged to include culturally/ locally relevant case studies in the delivery of this module.</p> <p>Learning outcomes would be particularly well-served by a lecture taking the form of an expert panel discussion, with journalists, editors and representatives of the platforms invited to participate in a discussion moderated by the lecturer or instructor with direct engagement of the course participants via a question and answer session.</p>	60 - 90 mins	1, 2, 3

B. Practical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
<p>A workshop/tutorial which could be facilitated in a traditional classroom setting, or via an eLearning platform like Moodle, Facebook groups or other services that enable remote online participation. The workshop/tutorial exercise could adopt the following format.</p> <p>Tutorial groups to be divided into working groups of 3-5 participants each. Each group should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Be provided with a case study involving a news organisation's coverage or unwitting distribution of misinformation/disinformation Collaboratively assess the material, researching the origins of the information and the context of the erroneous reporting (e.g. Was this a breaking news story?); discuss the possible causes of the incident (paying attention to structural factors like recent newsroom downsizing, and the role of social media platforms); discuss their own experiences of being duped by disinformation Collectively write a 250-word summary of their analysis of the likely causes of the publication, identifying three things that the journalist/s or news organisation could have done differently to possibly prevent publishing false information. This may be done using Google Docs or a similar collaborative editing tool and it should be submitted to their lecturer/tutor for review. 	90 - 120 mins	1, 2, 3, 4

**Suggested Assignment**

Case Study Report (2000 words). Identify three case studies (including one from your country/region) involving a news organisation's distribution of, or investigation into, a case of disinformation. Deconstruct each example (discussing the causes and consequences of the publication of misinformation/disinformation) and extrapolate lessons learned from each case study (Note: participants should choose fresh examples - not those provided for discussion in the workshop connected to this module).



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