The Palgrave Handbook of Media Misinformation

Edited by
Karen Fowler-Watt · Julian McDougall

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Introduction

A Challenging Context

The *Palgrave Handbook of Media Misinformation* combines work originating from and/ or investigating different continents; it brings together academic research, media industry perspectives and the work of educators and of activists. The idea for this edited collection shaped in the throes of a global pandemic, an event that, in the wake of the Trump presidency and the Brexit vote in the UK, amplified existing issues around 'fake news'. An 'info-demic' of coronavirus misinformation, conspiracy theories and online abuse have compounded distrust in the media, mirroring social trends that tend towards division and lack of cohesion. There was brief respite in the heart of the COVID-19 crisis, when publics seemed to be turning to mainstream media (TV news in particular) for information, but the issues around trust and active engagement persist. In the early part of 2022, the final drafts of chapters came together, as Russia invaded Ukraine, a shocking act of aggression that adds another chilling dimension to the current phase of 'information disorder' (Wardle & Derakshan, 2017). Clare Wardle and her fellow verification experts at First Draft define information disorder as the toxic environment created by "the many ways in which our information is polluted"—and conspiracy theories have exacerbated the problem; societal fissures aggravated by the global pandemic that has further eroded social cohesion and underlined socio-economic disparities. "Without truth, democracy is hobbled … those seeking democracy must recognise it" notes Michiko Kakutani in her prescient *The Death of Truth* (2018, 173).

Saturation and Weaponisation

The political ramifications of misinformation and threats to democracy are increasingly well-documented, but there are other, less obvious, equally pernicious effects: referring to the pandemic, The World Health Organization discerns an 'info-demic':

an overabundance of information, both online and offline. It includes deliberate attempts to disseminate wrong information to undermine the public health response and advance alternative agendas of groups or individuals. Mis- and dis-information can be harmful to people's physical and mental health. (WHO, 23 September 2020)

Over-saturation impacts on humanity, on our health and wellbeing, so that democracy and its institutions are not the only sick patients. Politicians have resorted to Churchillian rhetoric and warlike metaphors when talking about the fight against coronavirus: In 2020, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the world is not only fighting coronavirus "but our enemy is also the growing surge of misinformation" about Covid (Lederer, 2020), however, information was already becoming weaponised prior to that. This 'weaponisation' of information by many governments, as well as abuse by an industry of public relations companies, often under contract to political entities and actors has spawned this toxic environment, this 'information disorder'. It risks an 'arms race' of disinformation efforts, which is arguably a recipe for mutually assured contamination of information environments in general as well as high potential blowback (Posetti & Matthews, 2018: 2). This is exemplified by the UK government's underestimation of the influence of Russia in the 2016 Brexit referendum (Ruy, 2020).

So, the current context is a challenging one in which to curate a collection of work such as this around the concept of misinformation. It requires 'radical acceptance' of tension and the need to always use terms 'under erasure'. The concept assumes, or at least implies, an epistemology which many, even most scholars and critical readers, will challenge. Elif Shafak reflects:

We live in an age in which we have too much information, but little knowledge, and even less wisdom. These three concepts are completely different. In fact, an overabundance of information, and the hubris that comes with it, is an obstacle to attaining true knowledge and wisdom. (Shafak, 2022: 33)

Shafak was writing about Western apathy towards the plight of Uyghurs in China, citing such as the biggest threat to democracy, a matter of days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Apathy towards atrocities, or the more active complicity of silence in return for the maintenance of economic relations, is combined with a casual accep-tance of populists' 'alternative facts', each authoritarian regime or Western populist gaining confidence from the other, while the neoliberal world observes with mild concern but little urgency. In 2019, leading thinkers from 21 European countries who considered themselves to have been 'too quiet' to date were prompted by a sense of looming crisis to craft a manifesto mourning the loss of liberal values, warning against the rise of populism and declaring that Europe as an idea was "coming apart before our eyes". As Brexit took hold

in the UK and Europe witnessed a wave of political victories for the right, these philosophers, historians and Nobel laureates urged that:

> We must now will Europe or perish beneath the waves of populism. We must rediscover political voluntarism or accept that resentment, hatred and their cortege of sad passions will surround and submerge us.

The manifesto presented a wake-up call, in which the intelligentsia and the *philosophes* claimed to discern challenges greater than anything seen since the 1930s in the prevailing 'noxious climate' that set the landscape for what they perceived to be a "battle for civilisation".

Sleepwalking into Information War? Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Three years later, on 24 February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine presented *another* wake-up call. In further seeking to understand how we got here, writers and journalists Timothy Snyder, Peter Pomerantsev and Carole Cadwalladr have all warned of the paradoxical mindset in Russia whereby audiences come to see media distortion as more honest by virtue of being openly false. This 'baroque contradiction' as Snyder calls it should seem now far more familiar to people elsewhere in the world than it might have done in 2014. The role of misinformation in Putin's 'hybrid war' is not to be underestimated, producing a dangerous mix when combined with political and military tactics in physical and virtual spaces. Putin's regime relied on the falsification of history as the pretext to invade and recolonise Ukraine deploying misinformation to soften up the terrain over a period of 8 years before the tanks rolled in. Russians turning to state media for information did not hear the words 'war', 'attack' or 'invasion' in coverage "carefully calibrated to show the war the Kremlin really wanted to wage" (Roth, 2022): a 'special operation' to 'de-Nazify' Ukraine, that would end swiftly with Russians the liberators. Pomerantsev's (2015) assertion that in Russia virtually everything is PR has been taken to dangerous levels. Cracks in Putin's core message were exposed when in the first weeks of the conflict, Marina Ovsyannikova, a Russian news editor employed by state-owned television Channel One, displayed incredible courage, as she walked across the backdrop of a live newscast, with a placard calling to "Stop the War", only to be arrested and any reporting of her protest was heavily edited or expunged. In a BBC interview after her release, she claimed that Russians are 'zombified' by propaganda: "I understand it's very hard … to find alternative information, but you need to try to look for it" (Ovsyannikova quoted by Davies, 2022). A number of journalists resigned from state-owned news organisations following her high-stakes protest. In this misinformation war, punishment and threat comprise key weapons in Putin's regime's armoury, with alternative narratives from independent local media shutdown and global news organisations, like the BBC and CNN temporarily suspending reporting in

Russia, after accusations of publishing 'fake news'—the whipping boy for populist leaders from east to west.

'Fake News'

> What is common to the Brexit campaign, the US election and the disturbing depths of Youtube is that it is ultimately impossible to tell who is doing what, or what their motives and intentions are. It's futile to attempt to discern between what's algorithmically generated nonsense or carefully crafted fake news for generating ad dollars; what's paranoid fiction, state action, propaganda or Spam; what's deliberate misinformation or well-meaning fact check. (Bridle, 2018: ch 9, para 51)

Back in 2018, a long time ago now for this topic, Bridle and many others were challenging the notion of 'fake news' being either something new or anything that Western democracy hadn't been complicit in as 'collateral damage' from the economic benefits of platform capitalism. The business model has a moral panic around fake news 'baked in' to a logic which invites us to blame The Kremlin (justifiably, of course, as things have developed) but not Google or the 'mainstream media':

> To hear professional journalists complain about this problem without acknowledging their own culpability further undermines one's faith in expertise. Democracy may or may not be drowning in fake news, but it's definitely drowning in elite hypocrisy. (Morozov, 2017: 2)

The term 'Fake News' came to widespread public attention during the 2016 US presidential campaign when inaccurate social media posts were spread to large groups of users, a form of 'viral' circulation later attributed to sources in Veles, Macedonia, leading to concerns about the automated trolling from factories of 'bots'. The idea of 'fake news' was immediately both the subject of rapid response research and challenged as an oxymoron. False information cannot be categorised as news as defined by journalistic codes of practice, and thus affording it the oxygen of academic attention plays into the hands of those who wish to undermine mainstream media but also reproduces the 'false binary' between real and false that this handbook's broader assessment of misinformation problematises.

Fake news is often presented as an aspect of a temporal 'post-truth' condition, accelerated by the impact of the economic crash of 2008 and the failure of neoliberal politics to respond, whilst at the same time it *has* succeeded in dismantling traditional conceptions of 'the public sphere', putting the workings of the market in its place. The impact of the crash and the rise of new forms of digital and surveillance capitalism on democracy, politics and the public sphere are assessed in contributions by Moore (2018) and Zuboff (2019), whilst a comprehensive situating of post-truth in the history of globalised conspiracy discourse is provided

by Consetino (2020). But in that space, more activist projects to respond to post-truth and restore the public sphere can also be found, for example from Rushkoff (2019) who sees the 'post-truth' situation as dehumanising, coercing and controlling and calls for a humanist response.

In 2018 we all observed the incoming 'perfect storm' for fake news—economic hardship, austerity politics, the subsequent failure of centrist politics to satisfy disenfranchised publics, the erosion as a result of trust in democracy and the opportunity provided by this for populists and dictators to offer false hope through an attack on both public interest media and elected politicians as 'the establishment'. But in 2022, this seems like a permanent weather event, rather like the long-term impacts of climate change are now perennial. As Carole Cadwaller got in deeper and deeper to her investigations of attempts to influence elections, she warned:

> It's like a driver going past a car wreck; we're transfixed by it, but we have no idea what to do about it. We're just at the beginning of recognizing the scale of this. We're in the middle of a huge transition, the fourth great communications transition after speech, writing and printing. And even breaking up Facebook is not going to save us from this, it's so much bigger than that. (Cadwaller, 2019: 13)

The overwhelming challenge for a critical and hopeful response—what to 'do about it'—is that any sense of fake news 'as a thing', as something to identify and challenge, is false binary thinking. Stuart Hall's legacy is in part his critique of formalised media spaces that house 'official discourse' and thus, the critical deconstruction of the idea of 'the media' itself involves understanding that, in the sense of always being representational, gate-kept, ideological and subject to bias arising from commercial and political imperatives, "all news is fake news". In COVID-19 infodemic times, or as we deal with a deadly hybrid war with weaponised 'fake news', we can't dispense with this critical lens in favour of discerning 'fact from fake'. What's required is a more nuanced assessment of the relationship between ontological *truth* and epistemological *trust*:

> There seems to be a fundamental contradiction here. On the one hand, a healthy democracy depends upon trust: we need to trust our elected representatives, and we have to rely on trusted sources of information. Yet on the other hand, we don't want people to place blind faith in authority: we want people to be sceptical. Too much trust is a bad thing, but so is too little. So how much trust do we need—and especially for those of us concerned with education, how much trust do we want to cultivate? Are people who are more 'media literate' more or less likely to trust the media? Ultimately, I don't think there is an easy answer here. (Buckingham, 2019: 3)

A Question of Trust

Journalists are often bemused as to why they are not *the* answer to fake news, since journalism is traditionally seen as a fact-based route to distinguishing truths from untruths. But as former editor of *The Guardian* Alan Rusbridger (2018) laments in his memoir, the problem here is that journalists are not themselves trusted: "If only people trusted journalism more, society would have a system in place for dealing with fake news" (Rusbridger, 2018: 373). In the first half of February 2022, the latest Edelman Trust survey revealed that a majority of people around the world are worried that journalists are lying to them: 67% of respondents said that they believe reporters intentionally try to mislead with gross exaggeration or falsehood—an increase of 8% on its findings in 2021. Trust levels in media across the world had fallen, with concern over 'fake news' at an all-time high (Majid, 2022) and 76% fearing information could be weaponised—prophetic in the light of Putin's 'hybrid war' waged in Ukraine later that month.

Demagogic narratives feeding fear and spawning distrust in a media fashioned by Trump as 'the opposition' have combined with audience disengagement from mainstream media, turning instead to personalised social media feeds, to create a heady cocktail. The result? Plummeting trust levels and rising scepticism. This is not to say that a healthy dose of scepticism is a bad thing, as Buckingham (2019) reminds us, critical evaluation of all information is crucial for robust democratic discourse—but the so-called post-truth context is a challenging one, in which truth is an endangered species (Kakutani, 2018), trust levels touch rock bottom—despite a temporary reprieve in the pandemic—and indifference and/or lack of awareness hold sway. In 2016, Trump used his first press conference as president to "wage war on journalism"; it rapidly became a toxic relationship, as one of our contributors to this book, the BBC's North America editor Jon Sopel observed:

> We were all inveterate liars, he said, while standing on a podium and claiming that the number of electoral college votes was the highest since Ronald Reagan. One of the journalists at this unforgettable news conference pointed out that both Barack Obama and George H.W. Bush had won way more, and the president just shrugged and blamed it on duff information. (Sopel, 2017: 321)

Building trust is supremely difficult in a world where lies become 'alternative facts' and facts are called 'fake news'—and by those in power. No wonder news consumers globally are distrustful, if less so when living with the simpler information diet dished out by authoritarian regimes, such as in China or Saudi Arabia (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2022).

Journalists have always acknowledged that they can only report an incomplete, but fact-based version of the truth (Rusbridger, 2018), tomorrow's fish and chip wrapper, but now journalism could be once again drinking in the last chance saloon. Concern over fake news is higher: this is reassuring on one level,

if indicative of more media literate publics, but if a majority of news consumers believe that the media is peddling lies, this is deeply concerning. As already noted (Buckingham, 2019), there are no easy answers to a question of declining trust, but it does present a significant problem.

The Problem

So, to assume a comprehensible distinction between information and its distorted variants is problematic, at best. Indeed, if we accept we live in an age of 'information disorder' then the entire point of such an awareness is that the distinction has been lost, in more or less Baudrilardian terms and with the Wachowski brothers as prophets of this moment, of this 'vertigo of interpretation'.

In advocating for an 'ethics of difference', the philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard (1988) offered a reading of Herzog's *Where the Green Ants Dream* as an example of his 'differend', a state of thinking where two completely irreconcilable language games come into conflict, with it being impossible to judge either without recourse to the idioms of the other. In this case, the story is about an Australian mining company wishing to dig, for profit and in the name of progress, into land occupied by Aborigines who believe, without doubt, that the green ants who live in the land dream, and it is their dreaming that maintains the universe. Lyotard offers this as, we can probably assess, a positive example of how western metaphysics, scientific rationalism and colonial epistemologies need to give ground to alternative, hitherto marginalised truthclaims, advocating his micro-politics of 'parology', an ethical process where justice is the outcome of different rules for each differend, different, shifting and fluid notions of truth and knowledge, changing every time they are enacted, locally situated and contingent and de-centred.

This is a seductive discourse, and has been influential in the kinds of poststructuralist, deconstructive thinking that media, cultural studies and communication scholars on, broadly speaking, 'the left' have put to work in their research, writing and partnerships with activists. But we can see where this is going. The differend has 'come true', as with Baudrillard's hyper-reality and Foucault's truth-knowledge-power, in, for these communities, a very bad way. For today's protectors of the green ants, look to Q Anon, the Brexit campaign, Trump and Putin. Most theses on the 'decline of the West' cite the acceptance of relativist truth and 'culture wars' as a significant factor, and—to return to Lyotard—the jury is very much out with regard to the efficacy of fact-checking, media and information literacies for the preservation of democracy if publics are insufficiently inclined to protect it. As Biesta puts it, "Democrats are not born, they are made" (2018).

The 'groundwork' for the kinds of ontological upheaval we have been witnessing first-hand during this project, as we moved through Brexit and Trump to Covid and now Ukraine, is often understood as politically strategic. Attacking experts and intellectuals, claiming to speak for the disenfranchised, working the

algorithms to disorientate, these are all, by now, familiar features of what we casually refer to as 'the playbook':

> We are living through a period of pop-up populism, where each social and political movement redefines 'the many' and 'the people'; where we are always reconsidering who counts as an 'insider' or an 'outsider'; where what it means to belong is never certain, where bubbles of identity burst, crack and are then reformed as something else. And in this game the one who wins will be the one who can be most supple, rearranging the iron filings of disparate interests around new magnets of meaning. (Pomerantsev, 2019: 215)

And yet, we also live in a time where it is not only possible, but required, for philosophers to try to help us understand the conditions of possibility for our existential working through of 'Reality+' (Chalmers, 2022). This is a moment in which attempting to distinguish between real and simulation, a la *The Matrix* and postmodernism, even for the purpose of arguing that we cannot, is outmoded. Facebook's 'Meta' may not be the tipping point, but, argue Chalmers and others, we are already in a state of extended reality, beyond any sense of virtual which requires a relation with what it simulates. If so, then, in looking for the kinds of educational response, to equip emerging citizens with the critical capacity to read this environment as free agents and thrive in it with others in public and civic spaces, then the kind of media literacy people will need to learn is going to need to involve reading reality itself as textual, as a genre (Ahn & Pena, 2021). But this will also require a critical understanding of the 'architecture' of 'deceitful media' (Natale, 2021) we now not only tolerate but enthusiastically adopt in our everyday lives. As we live with artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented, *extended* realities, we will need to be at one 'in the affordance' and at the same time critically engaging with it:

> Our vulnerability to deception is part of what defines us. Humans have a distinct capacity to project intention, intelligence, and emotions onto others. This is as much a burden as a resource. After all, this is what makes us capable of entertaining meaningful social interaction with others. But it also makes us prone to be deceived by non-human interlocutors that simulate intention, intelligence and emotions. (Natale, 2021: 132)

Media Literacy: Beyond Solutionism

Many of the contributions to this collection are solutions focused and media literacy is often presented as such, quite rightly, as signposted by our inclusion of a section on it. But the kind of critical media literacy which can foster genuine, sustainable change in the media ecosystem is a long-term commitment, and very much at odds with current policy discourse in much of the world. Such discourse, and the attendant commitment to funding and resource, tends to favour a reactive 'treatment' of the effects of misinformation, as opposed to a critical media literacy that builds and then boosts resistance prior to infection,

building critical antibodies, more like a vaccine than an antiviral medicine, to use the obvious analogy at the time of writing.

In our own research, we have developed a theory of change with regard to media literacy for resilience to misinformation. This framework has four overlapping elements:

- *Access* (the means to be included as a full citizen in a diverse media ecosystem);
- *Awareness* (of how media texts and information sources represent reality);
- The *Capability* to use this media literacy for particular purposes in civic and social life and, crucially;
- A desire for positive *Consequences in* our own media behaviours and in our expectations of the media and information environment—not simply to take a position in a 'false binary' between true and fake, but for our media to be plural and diverse.

Those *consequences* are far more than mere skills or competences, they require an active desire for our media to promote equality and social justice. If this sounds like an inevitable result, then that assumption is the crux of the problem, part of the same crisis of complacency, the same walking in our sleep, that has enabled and energised the protagonists of misinformation as the lack of accredited, resourced and sustainable media literacy education on 'home fronts' has been coupled with a detached 'watching brief' on misinformation on a global scale.

The challenges of curation are significant and this handbook can only present a snapshot, but we hope it makes a useful contribution in difficult times. Through the five parts, we group the work into overlapping and interesting themes and share perspectives on media misinformation from a deliberately eclectic blend of approaches, from journalism, the outcomes of research, practitioner interventions, lived experiences and experimental responses. The writing brought together in this handbook is global, with case studies from or about Colombia, Mexico, Thailand, Hong Kong, China, Nepal, Tunisia, sub-Saharan Africa, the US, Europe and the UK.

Part I: Democracy, Disruption and Civic Crisis (Diagnosis)

This first part offers diagnosis and provides a framework for the issues covered in subsequent parts. We live in an age of disruption, in which the role of big-tech is under scrutiny for the threats it poses to democracy and free speech, including the war over digital rights and the contemporary frontline of disinformation. In 2019 the UK government's report into 'fake news' and disinformation concluded that the polarising impact of fake news was unlikely to recede, placing responsibility for moves towards greater transparency with the

big-tech companies. It noted that, whilst "propaganda and politically-aligned bias" are nothing new, this activity had been "hugely magnified by information technology and the ubiquity of social media" (DCMS report, 18 February 2019). It emphasised the importance of human agency and a plurality of voices, important to counter the propagation of populist and extremist narratives and so that "people stay in charge of the machines" (p. 6). Internet-watchers in the US observed that the algorithmic spread of hate speech, disinformation and conspiracy theories online had exacerbated political polarisation, enabled white supremacist groups and seriously impaired America's response to the COVID-19 crisis (McNamee, 2020). In the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal (2018) calls for the regulation of Facebook have got louder, but are countermanded by the freedom of expression arguments. Issues of digital rights, privacy versus the public interest frame the debates about civic empowerment and response to crisis in the face of fake news. This part also looks specifically at and deconstructs fake news, the relationship of misinformation to power and the ways in which the fake news phenomenon has exacerbated—and shone a spotlight on—inequality in society. The global pandemic provides a relevant context for an examination of the relationship between misinformation and marginalisation. In offering diagnosis of the disruptive impact of the disinformation crisis, this part also considers issues of connectivity in civic life and the role played by radical interventions in partisan environments where traditional narrative strategies are blocked, for example in Latin America.

Part II: 'Fake News', Conspiracy, Propaganda (Diagnosis)

This part moves on to explore these 'variants' of misinformation in detail and in context. 'Information disorder' is complex and a sum of many moving parts, including confusion, cynicism, fragmentation of public discourse, irresponsibility of powerful actors and a pervasive apathy in the face of the situation. This part looks at the enduring features of conspiracy thinking and strategic, deliberate propaganda as well as the more idiosyncratic elements of 'fake news'. These features are often performative, as theorised most notably for our frame of reference by Hannah Arendt (2009) and Judith Butler (2013). When the latter writes "The 'We are here' that translates that collective bodily presence might be reread as 'We are still here'", meaning: "We have not yet been disposed of" (p. 196), we are minded to think of Occupy, protest camps (see Frenzel, Feigenbaum and McCurdy, 2014), the 'Arab Spring' or Extinction Rebellion. But this performative bodily presence is, in these times, equally or more prominent in the Capitol Hill riots or in the virtual spaces inhabited by Q-Anon, or indeed in the hybrid zones between and across them. These forms of misinformation involve deliberate, more systematic attempts to manipulate and coerce, to influence attitudes and confuse perception, but they are able to do so by working in the conditions of possibility for anxiety and indifference to truth. Conspiracy thinking has never been far from the surface in the age of networked, anonymised truth claiming. Resurgent, perhaps, during a

pandemic, but equally harnessed for political ends by populist campaigners and subsequently presidents and prime ministers, conspiracy thinking is another configuration of elements—false equivalence, fake authority, patterning coincidences, the invisible 'other', intuition over reflection, reassurance in times of uncertainty and confusion through socially constructed expertise (see Robson, 2020), we can see this play out frequently in these times:

> Citizens are at increased risk of contracting a dangerous illness, and their usual freedoms are heavily constrained by governmental lockdown measures to reduce the spread of the virus. In their minds, conspiracy theorists have connected these dots. (Van Proojen, 2020)

Paul Mihaildis (2017), who contributes a chapter to this collection, pre-empted some of these developments with an assessment of the 'civic agency gap' which we might now understand as having been occupied by right-wing, conspiracy thinking, citing the crisis as "a direct result of a civic culture that has normalized spectacle, and become less trustworthy of media institutions, and that uses digital media to perpetuate and promote concern, spectacle and distrust" (Mihaildis & Votty, 2017: 441).

But equally, we see powerful operations of "strategic ignorance" (McGoey, 2019). The intersection of knowledge and power is often characterised by more than stating 'known unknowns' but also in the act of deliberately not knowing, as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom during the production of this text so adeptly performs. Propaganda, in this sense, becomes a duality of manipulating information *and* the deliberate absence of knowledge as a political asset. This is most commonly understood, and increasingly in public discourse and, we would argue, accepted to a disturbing extent in the act of 'Gaslighting', which is explored with specific regard to climate change misinformation in the next part.

Part III: Health, Science and Data (Diagnosis)

This part continues the assessment of the complex nature and diverse range of misinformation by presenting current writing on the relationship between public health, environmental crises and misinformation and also explores the role of data in misinformation, but also with regard to strategies for 'mining back'.

With regard to climate change, the separation between misinformation and 'mainstream media' is especially difficult, with political backlash discourse emerging about 'net zero dogma' into the bargain. The resurgent practice of 'greenwashing', whereby politicians and corporations are, it is argued, enabled by media to create the impression of environmentally friendly activity when the opposite is the reality, a classic case study in 'gaslighting', the term now in common parlance, but referring back to the 1941 film in which Ingrid Bergman's character is subjected to psychological abuse by her husband, who interferes

with the gaslights in their home and denies seeing the changes in the light this causes. In time, she comes to doubt her own perception of reality, hence the application of the phrase to describe the function of misinformation in sowing confusion.

This climate change gaslighting is perpetuated by an alliance of 'Big Media' and Big Carbon as opposed to extreme conspiracy thinkers at the margins of public discourse. Media Lens accuse the mainstream media of complicity in the climate crisis to the extent that "the major news media are an intrinsic component of this system run for the benefit of elites. The media are, in effect, the public relations wing of a planetary-wide network of exploitation, abuse and destruction. The climate crisis is the gravest symptom of this dysfunctional global apparatus" (Edwards & Cromwell, 2018: 208).

During the pandemic, the intersection of the health of the media and information ecosystem and public health itself was highly charged. What we know at this point (2 years into the pandemic at the time of writing) is that the political nature of public health decisions is widely accepted as the order of things and whilst this may have been ever thus, publics were rarely aware of it to this extent. But also, we know that individual and societal responses to public health decisions being made in urgent real time are ideological, with the same epidemiological data used for competing arguments. In the middle ground, between those claiming 'covid hoax' or anti-vax demonstrators on the one hand, and those in favour of stringent measures to protect the vulnerable, often claiming the moral high ground, were many shades of more complex and nuanced 'truth-claims' about health, economy, science, data and political communications. Everything was up for grabs in the media and information space, but this was not only about the science, it was also about 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009). Every argument about working from home, online education and the future of human interaction in the 'normal new', as Bennett and Jopling describe it (2021), oscillated around the media representation of the 'essential worker' and the precarious under-class who were expected, or not, to put their livelihoods at risk for the greater public good, a discourse of 'subsidising normalcy', described by Rubin and Wilson (2021) as "the expectation that the working class would ultimately suppress their concerns about the coronavirus and lay their lives on the line to sustain the illusion that capitalism will revert to its prior successes" (2021: 56). Returning to Bennett and Jopling, their 'normal new' observes the understandable, but ultimately sobering, desire of people to retreat from the brave new world futuring we mobilised at the start of the pandemic, in favour of this very reversion to what we now see as stability, even though some 2 years ago we were embracing its disruption:

> The pandemic is made up of both the virus and our responses to it. In fact, the promise of a return to 'normal' manifests as both a forlorn hope and a considerable threat: being lost is ever more attractive than being found. (Bennett & Jopling, 2021: 1)

Where health, science, climate, media and information converge is in the ways our lives are visualised in data. Again, this is nothing new, but what is is our obligation to interpret the mediated datafication of our existence, and the various threats to it. Critical data scholars find more prominence for their work in the fields of media, communications and cultural studies, and likewise with the work of data journalists. Nearly a decade back, Gitelman (2013) set out a framework for analysing data as representation, which is never 'raw' but always speaking to human values and therefore "needs to be understood as framed and framing" (2013: 5) in order to "expand representations of personhood beyond traditional statistical ways of symbolizing people in data visualizations" (Alamalhodaei et al., 2020: 362).

This third part is still, then, concerned with our collating and curating a wide ranging and eclectic, though focused, set of evaluations of what we are thinking about when we talk and write about media misinformation. It serves to extend our reach, not only geo-culturally, but also, into those connecting fields of science, health and data. It concludes our diagnostic parts, as we turn our attention to how 'the media' itself (in the form of journalism) and education (in the form of 'media literacy') can offer responses to the crisis.

Part IV: Journalism (Response)

This part focuses on journalism to consider the impact of 'information disorder' on the practice of journalism—its normative values of truth, accuracy and objectivity, and journalistic responses to the misinformation crisis. The aftermath of the Trump Presidency in the US scopes out a wider landscape against which to analyse the effects of fake news on the *modus operandi* of news reporters, fashioned as 'the opposition' and embattled in an era of distrust. Social media is a crucial tool in the dissemination of news, but the dissonance and fracture that prevail in the current media environment are arguably also complicated by the ubiquity of social media—where everyone is a storyteller—and the attraction of personalised news feeds as trustworthy sources. Challenges presented by the imperative to verify, the abundance of fakes, deep fakes, the growth of AI and the agenda-setting power of fake news, all in the context of a shrinking business model and a voracious 24/7 news environment complicates the long-term outlook for journalism. Participatory media offers a partial response to crisis, also new modes of storytelling—many have engaged with news from Ukraine via Tik-Tok for example (Chayka, 2022)—yet there is a precarity evident across all journalisms: not only mainstream news organisations, but also community reporting, local and regional, national and international.

As we have noted already, trust in institutions and media organisations is now a rare commodity (Kakutani, 2019; Rusbridger, 2018) with journalism often seen as core to the problem rather than the solution (Brants, 2013). This leads to anxiety for journalists about lack of trust in their work: A deluge of mis/disinformation and conspiracy theory about coronavirus has further complicated the journalistic imperative to report with accuracy, fairness and

impartiality. These observations are supported in a recently published Open Society Foundation for South Africa report (2021), that noted the "out-sized and positive role" played by journalism in the pandemic in a context of economic precarity and the potential for misinformation to flourish in the vacuum created by the demise of local news.

The inherent danger here is that, despite best efforts, voices that were already marginalised become more voiceless—a stark illustration of this was evident in the Grenfell Fire tragedy in the UK in 2017, where the absence of a robust, inquisitive local media enabled rumour and misinformation to flourish, whilst any remnants of trust in journalists or reliance on them to hold power to account rapidly disappeared. The veteran broadcaster Jon Snow, from Channel 4 News in the UK, noted to his shame as he arrived at Grenfell that he was part of a disconnected elite of journalists, angrily criticised by the residents for their negligence. Moreover, as he observed, "The dissonance evident in the Grenfell tragedy was exacerbated by the media's framing of the story as it unfolded… people were talking about overstayers, immigrants. This was not true at all" (Snow in Fowler-Watt & Jukes, 2020: 33). Poor journalism practice resulted in reinforcing stereotypes and the publication of unverified information—journalism can often be the problem as much as it can offer a response or a solution.

Against this background, the weight of responsibility borne by journalists, striving to report the truth, is significant. Journalists reporting on the frontline of the COVID-19 crisis have been operating in an extremely fraught and challenging context, characterised by a precarity that they are also experiencing themselves, in terms of personal safety, trauma and economic security, whilst seeking to tell the stories of others affected by coronavirus, to hold officials in power accountable for their handling of the crisis and, importantly, to purvey reliable and accurate public health information to keep citizens safe. This can give rise to a sense of moral injury (Feinstein & Storm, 2017), of helplessness and distress:

> The heightened interest in a conception of moral injury derived from combat experience is consistent with some familiar rhetorical tropes of the pandemic: talk of fight, battle, front lines, winning the war and circumstances said to be unprecedented. (Shale, 2020)

This professional and personal precarity has a destabilising effect on democratic society, dependent on robust, healthy, accurate and effective communication and media. In the heart of the pandemic, a survey conducted by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University (Posetti et al., 2020) raised 'red flags' for journalism: it collated responses from 1400 journalists in 125 countries, with 81% saying they were working in a context where dis/misinformation heightened their sense of precarity. The challenges for journalism and journalists as first responders in the misinformation crisis are therefore complex and manifold, with the long-term prognosis uncertain.

Part V: Media Literacy (Response)

Media literacy's prominence as part of the response to misinformation is widely accepted. In application, models for media literacy tend to move through stages, from equal and safe access to digital media to awareness of the source, critical reading of media representation and finally the active, creative and/or civic making *of* media (see UNESCO, 2013). But the more agentive uses of media literacy for positive change are the most elusive to shorter term media literacy projects because this requires more longitudinal evidence of media literacy in society, beyond education and also with a commitment to good consequences, as opposed to the gaining of competences which can be, and often are, at this point in history, used for negative ends. In other words, they address the paradox that the problems with media ecosystems are often not caused by a *lack* of media literacies, but rather the harmful *uses* of them. To move beyond skills and competences alone to focus on the *uses* of media literacy, using Sen's capability approach (2008) emphasises the significance of active media behaviours and decision-making and offers more sensitivity to variations and local contexts. This more *dynamic* understanding of media literacy as an agentive capability can offer a conduit for social praxis and the *potential* to give voice, reduce marginality and develop communicative resilience (Buzzanell, 2010) and the capacity for citizens to act to make positive change in media ecosystems. Therefore, the significant challenge is to promote, resource and sustain this kind of approach to media literacy with such a theory of change in education and lifelong learning which can, over time, increase publics' resilience to information disorder, with supplementary benefits for governance and rights; health and wellbeing and humanitarian responses to climate change.

As media literacy raises people's expectations for access to a trustworthy and diverse media ecosystem then exposure to misinformation reduces and resilience to it increases, when people are exposed. Increased access to positive advocacy media and more diverse and inclusive media representation increases trust in media. Critical media literacy enables evaluation and assessment of the accuracy of information, representation of groups within the society, ideology in media discourse and the persuasive intentions of content. Again, this heightened awareness of media representing and more self-reflexive awareness of bias increase resilience and mitigate against the media environment in which misinformation can thrive. As the ecosystem is strengthened through increases in media literacy, this enables people to assess and deal with resilience to content abundance and to act positively in response to and with media and information. Mediated societal engagement increases, with benefits to public health, equality and diversity, climate literacy and with aligned reductions in polarised discourse. As higher-level media literacy moves from awareness of media representation and the persuasive/ideological context of information, the capability to act differently and positively in the media ecosystem combines with an understanding of the consequences of how people act in their social media lives, share their data and subject ourselves to socio-technical algorithms and

surveillance. The ultimate goal of media literacy, with all these things combined, is to increase awareness of all conditions in which all media, information and data are produced and circulated to the extent that information disorder is reduced through the development of 'critical antibodies'.

To these ends, this part explores, from an evidence-base, media literacy as a response to misinformation from a range of approaches and international contexts. We include a meta review of media literacy work during the COVID-19 infodemic; accounts of youth-led alternative media in Tunisia; media literacy linked to Thai mindfulness; a cross-EU project to promote social media resilience across and between generations and a school programme in Hong Kong. The work in this part is very much 'beyond solutionism', in favour of a set of nuanced, situated and 'living' media literacies. These literacies are not suggested as neutral skills or competencies, assumed to be in themselves always-already positive and innately beneficial to the project of reducing information disorder. Rather, in their more ethnographic 'g/local' modalities, they directly link media literacy to positive change in the media ecosystem.

In focusing on diagnosis and response, the chapter authors in this volume bring a wide range of expertise, backgrounds and reference points—cultural, political and socio-economic—to their contributions. Each has considered context, current research in the field and provided a case study, before drawing some tentative conclusions.

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Democracy, Disruption and Civic Crisis (Diagnosis)

PART I INTRODUCTION: KAREN FOWLER-WATT

This part is framed by the current age of "fundamental disruption and detachment" (Stiegler, 2019), characterised by increasingly disordered media ecosystems and fragile socio-political entities. In attempting to navigate this prevailing civic crisis, in this first part we have canvassed insights from academics and media artists from the United States, Europe and Latin America. In Chap. 1, American academic and media literacy scholar, Paul Mihailidis, takes as his starting point the term 'infodemic', coined in 2021 to describe the state of misinformation about health and science that has the potential to undermine public health initiatives and endanger lives. Mihailidis argues that the current infodemic emerges in a digital culture that exacerbates three phenomena: distributed propaganda, the hollowing of local media ecosystems, and rampant media cynicism. In his chapter, he uses these phenomena to introduce the concept of "civic distance." In his definition, civic distance reflects the increasing space between our media lives and the human interactions necessary for meaningful engagement in civic life. The comparison to the automobile is made to reinforce the impacts of "distance" on how we interact with others.

Disordered contemporary information ecosystems provide the focus for US media artist and writer Ivan Sigal's chapter, which is presented as a transcript of a keynote that he delivered on 31 March 2021 for the virtual, international Media Education Summit, hosted by two universities in the UK: the University of Leeds and the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice (CEMP) at Bournemouth University. Sigal is Executive Director of Global Voices: a transnational, multilingual community of writers, translators and rights activists who work to build understanding across borders. In this chapter he shares one of their recent projects, designed to address disorder in information ecosystems: Driven by mass media outlets with little allegiance to facts, and decontextualised by social media platforms, he argues, we often turn to familiar narratives to help make sense of the world. To understand how those narratives affect what we know and how we learn, Global Voices has developed a research and

digital literacy method called the Civic Media Observatory. In his talk, Chap. 2, Sigal describes how this approach can develop the contextual knowledge required to understand, assess and respond to emerging events around the world.

Prevailing disorder is often sourced back to the big tech giants, but their—arguably tardy and merely palliative—self-regulatory response of blocking and censoring content brings other problems in its train. The problem is diagnosed in Chap. 3. Ursula Smartt is a law professor in the UK who asks whether platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are breaching freedom of expression by regulating and blocking content on their platforms and de-listing individuals such as Donald Trump. She asks whether this amounts to self-regulatory censorship by the big US tech companies: Are they right to ban the promotion of self-harm, suicide, bullying and incitement to racial hatred? In this chapter, the Facebook Oversight Board is also assessed, the meaning of media plurality is explored as well as the re-examination of fake news and disinformation on social media platforms. Case law is presented, looking at the meaning of "publishers" in relation to ISPs and operators of websites in both US and UK law. Legislative steps taken by the EU Commission as well as the UK government in relation to "online harms and safety" end the discussion, leaving the unanswered questions whether it is possible to legislate the internet or whether it should be left to the big social media tech giants to self-regulate content on their platforms.

Social networks constituted young people's information source of choice, even before the pandemic. Chapter 4 takes us to Greece for an analysis of the levels of civic engagement of teenagers, emerging from consecutive lockdowns, that dramatically reduced their social spaces, making screens their main channels for communication and self-expression. In this chapter, Katerina Chryssanthopoulou, a PhD researcher in Media and News Literacy based in Athens, acknowledges the close connections between civic engagement, power and information in her exploration of teen attitudes to social media and news. Teenagers care about the world, she argues, and want to act to cure inequalities and injustice, but usually function within family, school or online environments. With reduced social opportunities in the pandemic, the danger was exacerbated that they were growing up, lacking suitable information structures, in a vacuum of meaningful content about how society is organised or how to get involved. She asks whether today's teens, as voters and decision makers of tomorrow, are sufficiently empowered to get civically engaged? Can they spontaneously become news literate or should they be educated to navigate the 'fake news' environment, to sort truth from fiction?

The next two chapters focus on misinformation and disinformation in Latin America: The first of these assesses the impact of disinformation on political processes in Colombia in the 2016 plebiscite in a so-called post-conflict context. Chapter 5 is authored by Colombian academics, Jesús Arroyave and Martha Romero. After more than half a century of civil conflict, the saying that "the first casualty of war is the truth" rings true, they assert, in a media

ecosystem characterised by censorship, and control of information by the official authorities, management of information that benefits the interests of the economic groups that own many media outlets, and intimidation of journalists. Thus, the path to peace is significantly hampered by the ways in which disinformation has seriously affected citizens' ability to be well-informed. In this chapter, Arroyave and Romero describe the challenging socio-political context within which Colombian citizens function and make decisions, where disinformation is "a way of life." They assess the role of disinformation in a particular and important political moment—the plebiscite of 2016—through an analysis of social media and the ways in which it was utilised to influence the public vote. Through their research, in which twenty-eight accounts with a base of 761,017 tweets were analysed, they conclude that the old forms of propaganda that were rife in Colombia throughout 50 years of conflict are still very much alive in the digital era, evidenced by the number of citizens "led by the hand of disinformation" to reject the peace process in 2016.

Mexican documentary-maker, researcher and media artist Pablo Martínez-Zárate turns to the archive to imagine alternative ways of engaging with civic crisis. In Chap. 6 he proposes a critical methodological approach to misinformation and offers creative strategies to confront deviation or manipulation in different moments of the communication process. This chapter draws on the author's experience as a documentary artist and combines theoretical and practical insights in the imagining of alternative models for understanding and narrating historical events. Here, Martínez-Zárate uses his own films, installations and interactive projects as examples of critical media making as a way of resisting misinformation in partisan environments, such as Mexico, where traditional narrative strategies are blocked.

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Civic Distance: Digital Culture's Intrusion on Trust, Engagement, and Belonging

Paul Mihailidis

The Insertion of Distance into Our Daily Lives: Cars as Platforms

Around the world today, the automobile is ubiquitous. Roads built for the automobile dominate our urban, suburban, and rural landscapes. The car, long the enduring symbol of independence, flexibility, and autonomy, persists in Western culture, and increasingly around the world. The evolution of the car has led to vast development, and created dependence on fossil fuels and other finite natural resources. The impacts of the automobile on society are complex and well documented. The car has played a central role in the evolution of society and contemporary life. Amongst the largest impacts of cars on society, it has contributed to one constant that now pervades communities and societies: *distance*.

Distance, here, takes on a dual meaning. In one sense, distance refers to the physical expansion of our lived space. As cars improve, they are able to take us further to facilitate our daily lives, expanding the places we can reach. In another sense, they create distance within and around our communities, as we rely less on our immediate surroundings to meet our needs and engage with those directly around us. We are able to move beyond our immediate

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communities to shop, to facilitate activities, and to work. As a result, we lessen our reliance on our communities to facilitate daily life.

As populations grow, the number of automobiles and drivers has increased. This means more people on the roads, more traffic, and more people in close proximity to one another, separated by the structure of the car. As more cars crowd more roads, they place pressure on infrastructures to support them (roads, tolls, fuel, etc.), and require more resources to ensure proper regulations (policies, government agencies, police and highway departments) to ensure that society is bound to a common set of rules for safety.

These requirements for cars are tenuous. They rely on resources from people in the form of taxes, parking meters, and tolls. They also require the willingness of people to obey driving rules, to engage in the transaction costs associated with a public good, and to look out for their fellow drivers. There is an official set of laws, and policing to oversee that such laws are upheld, however uneven and inequitable that oversight may be. There is also a large unofficial social contract that drivers must adhere to, to ensure that the systems in place work. From merging and switching lanes, to entering into traffic, we consistently negotiate with others in real time, where we both assert our movements and help facilitate movement for others. And we do so while we are distant from others, unable to communicate, and forced to make assumptions about the intentions, rationale, and behaviour of other drivers.

In our cars we are often alone, and captive. We see others, protected by glass and metal, near us physically perhaps, but distant in every other way. We depend on each other to act civilly in cars. To not only obey the "rules of the road," but to also treat other drivers with civility and care. But we do so without engaging with the other, and without the necessary "rigors of human communication" (Bugeja, 2017) that are crucial to understand how others are approaching these shared public spaces. We rarely, if ever, know who the other driver is, or what their situation is on any given day. We must assume they are rational actors, within the same set of constraints as we have while driving.

Cars, however, are not places for engagement or dialogue. Because of the speed of the car, the real-time decision making, and the general lack of accountability for our actions—few drivers are actually punished for disobeying laws or skirting general rules of the road—we rush to judgment, we make assumptions about motivations, and we are often angered, however fleeting, by fellow drivers. Think about when a driver makes an illegal turn. Think about when they aggressively merge. Or in traffic when drivers refuse to let others into a lane. This causes frustration, anger, and in some cases, rage. We don't know if the other actor is intentional, or if they are under other pressures that are hurting their judgment. We simply believe they are acting badly. When we are pedestrians, walking or running, we generally feel the same towards drivers: they are acting maliciously, or intentionally unhelpful. We don't have the affordance to stop and engage with them. We don't have the ability to understand their backgrounds, or to understand if they are acting badly on purpose, or if another

reason motivates them. The distance created by the metal and glass that encases us in cars forces us into judgments, for better or worse, about those around us.

People don't engage in rigorous human dialogue as we facilitate our daily lives. But we often use cues and human signals to negotiate, passing others on sidewalks, or in the supermarket. We have the opportunity to apologise, to physically signal to others, and to ignore or adjust to certain scenarios where negotiations are needed. In cars, these cues are largely unavailable. In cars, we are bound to a set of rules and regulations that allow us to assume a semblance of order and safety. In cars, distance has been normalised in our lives.

The automobile is a metaphor for our mediated lives today. Cars are like platforms. They offer the chance to feel engagement, to connect amongst a sea of others, without the real-time rigour of human connection. Mobile technologies and social media platforms are so embedded in our daily lives they now occupy the majority of daily information and communication routines, and have impacts on how we see the world (Mitchell et al., 2020), and on how we process information, understand our world, and engage with those around us (Pew Research Center, 2021). Just like cars, media platforms expand our worlds. They provide us with more access to the world through ubiquitous information flow, the ability to connect across distances, and to have more information readily available to us than ever before. They increase the possibility space for new knowledge, expand our ability to advocate for causes, support initiatives, and exchange information around issues that we care about (Weinberger, 2019). They expand our knowledge production, from how much we write, listen to stories, express ourselves, and engage with the vast information architecture (Thompson, 2013).

Social media, like automobiles, expand our surroundings, and offer the possibility of a bigger world around us. But they also evoke distance. Distance that poses grave risks to the social fabric that makes up our communities, our publics, and our democracies.

SOCIAL MEDIA, PLATFORMS, AND DISTANCE

In his book *Reset,* Ronald Deibert (2020) highlights the shift from a time when social media was seen as "a way to bring people closer together and revitalize democracy" (p. 5), to their perception as a sort of "social sickness." Writes Deibert:

> A growing number of people believe that social media have a disproportionate influence over important social and political decisions. Others are beginning to notice that we are spending an unhealthy amount of our lives staring at our devices, "socializing," while in reality we are living in isolation and detached from nature. (p. 5)

We often oscillate between seeing the opportunities that our new technological realities provide for connections, while lamenting their encroachment

into our lives and the tactics they use to create dependence. The increasing commodification of our social media spaces, combined with a lack of regulatory oversight, has created a whirlwind of information disseminated at faster and faster speeds, with the intention of driving users to engage often, deeper, and with less control (Wu, 2016).

Like automobiles, "digital technologies have so deeply embedded themselves into everything we do," writes Deibert (2020), "it is unrealistic to expect that we can turn the clock back entirely" (265). Unlike cars, however, in our digital spaces there are little to no regulations that limit, for example how fast we can drive, the efficiency standards necessary for cars to exist, or the policies that limit how many cars we can have on roads at any given time. In the United States in particular, very few regulations exist around the extent to which our main information platforms can share information, and with little regard to the civic or environmental impact of such messaging. The more time we spend in these unregulated information ecosystems, the more distance grows between us and our physical surroundings. And the more we are immersed in spaces that design to usurp our attention (Marantz, 2019), to engage in manipulative and inequitable information dissemination (Noble, 2018), and to maximise the extraction of data from users to maximise profits (O'Neil 2016).

One of the largest impacts of these platformed norms is on what media scholar Douglas Rushkoff (2020) calls an "anti-human agenda" which is "embedded in our technology, our markets, and our major cultural institutions, from education and religion to civics and media. [this anti-human agenda] has turned them from forces for human connection and expression into ones of isolation and repression" (3). This anti-human agenda, Rushkoff argues in his book *Team Human* (2020), emerges with intentionality amongst the vast array of communication technologies that are now at the centre of our daily lives:

> We live in a bounty of communication technologies at our disposal. Our culture is composed more of mediated experiences than of directly lived ones. Yet we are also more alone and atomized than ever before. Our most advanced technologies are not enhancing our connectivity, but thwarting it. They are replacing and devaluing our humanity, and—in many different ways—undermining our respect for one another and ourselves. (p. 5)

Rushkoff argues that our dependence on technologies has intervened in the human values we need to trust in one another, and in our institutions that support inclusive and robust communities. "Values," Rushkoff (2020) writes, "once gave human society meaning and direction. Now this function is fulfilled by data, and our great ideals are reduced to memes" (211). The values that Rushkoff reflects upon—"love, connection, justice, distributed prosperity" (211)—have been reduced in their complexity by snippets of mediated texts that reduce and distort their place in our lives, while idealising it in others.

Turkle (2016), exploring the loss of connection that our technologies create, references studies that find markers for empathy in young people to be in decline, and connects to their increasing time spent in digital ecosystems. Like the automobile, social platforms shield us, with smaller sized metal and glass, from those around us. They offer us compelling reasons to forgo the efforts of human engagement, for distracting tidbits of information that we return to again and again to fill the voids that we feel. In her visual treatment on loneliness, Radtke (2021) reminds us that with every new technological evolution, we "harken back" towards some more idyllic past. "By now it's clear that waves of cultural nostalgia are so often geared towards reclaiming what never quite existed," argues Radtke (2021, 202). Radtke, however, does believe that the sheer ubiquity of media in our lives, and its ability to distort our self-identities, creates new challenges for how we exist in the world alongside others. We may have always been a lonely people, but Radtke now sees little time to process that loneliness, and embrace it.

Where distance exists, trust wanes. Research has shown declining trust in our media and public institutions for some time now (Brenan, 2021), and while new research shows that echo chambers and filter bubbles may not be as prevalent as assumed (Arguedas et al., 2022), what's clear is that our digital ecosystems allow for the insertion of disinformation and misinformation that cast doubt on our ability to trust, connect, and be together in the world. Like cars passing each other on highways, messages on social media pass us at increasingly fast speeds, forcing us to make assumptions, to react without thinking, and to make decisions in information vacuums. This reality, combined with the intentional design of platforms to prioritise that which receives the most attention, offers a landscape for misinformation and disinformation to spread and sustain itself online. One recent case where, around the globe, the spread of misinformation is having significant impacts on public health, community health, and civic life: the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 Infodemic

Consider the Covid-19 pandemic and the proliferation of misinformation around the world. As the Covid-19 virus spread, causing significant death, and placing extreme pressure on public hospitals and local and national governments around the world, it also exacerbated the spread of misinformation with grave consequences for societies around the world. The spread of misinformation has become so prevalent that the World Health Organization attached the term "infodemic" to explain the "false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak" (WHO, n.d., Para 1).

The Covid-19 pandemic was a health emergency first and foremost, but the sheer amount of misinformation shared online sowed confusion among many, and supported "mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health response" (WHO, n.d., Para 1). A recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that, in the United States, 60% of the population believe that public

institutions are exaggerating and falsifying information about the pandemic (KFF, 2021). Across a range of statements supporting Covid-19 misinformation, the survey found that approximately 30–50% believed false information to be true. These numbers increased with those who self-reported as unvaccinated, and with those that spent more time on social platforms and with hyperpartisan news outlets (KFF, 2021). This data reinforces research that shows people are sceptical of large organisations in general, and advances in science have a history of inequity connected to them, making underrepresented populations sceptical of science-based mandates.

Of course, the public should not be held responsible for the sustained spread and proliferation of misinformation around the Covid-19 vaccine. Media companies routinely lament the spread of false information through their platforms, but as Donovan (2020a, 2020b) writes, "The pandemic lays bare how tech companies' reluctance to act recursively worsens our world. In times of uncertainty, the vicious cycle is more potent than ever. Scientific debates that are typically confined to a small community of experts become fodder for mountebanks of all kinds" (Donovan, 2020b, Para 2). That platforms take little initiative to quell the spread of misinformation creates an environment where we ask people to take the responsibility to navigate these information ecosystems, which are increasingly complex, lack algorithmic transparency, and function as private entities in public arenas. The implication of this reality is one in which "many governments and health authorities are doing everything in their control, but real-time crisis communications in an age of digital platforms has become a lethal challenge" (Donovan & Wardle, 2020, para 3).

The Covid-19 pandemic and the parallel infodemic that has emerged expose the very real dangers of our digital culture to social, civic, and physical wellbeing. The problem lies not in the tools themselves, as they have brought much opportunity to the world to connect and collaborate. The implications of the infodemic have taught us that digital platforms often give space to the loudest voices, perhaps not the majority voices, but those with the savvy to extract and manipulate platform principles for their ends. This creates a scenario where users must navigate information ecosystems that blend truth and falsehoods, fact and hearsay, with few boundaries and with fleeting opportunities for deep engagement. And with lacking regulation, the onus of responsibility falls to the user, which is an unrealistic burden to place. Write Donovan and Wardle (2020) "society cannot shoulder the burden wrought by rampant medical misinformation, scams, and hoaxes" (para 4).

Our ability to engage meaningfully with credible information in digital culture continues to present challenges, and opportunities. In *Reset*, Deibert (2020) offers an approach to meaningful engagement in digital culture around three core approaches: *retreat, reform, restraint*. These approaches combine individual behaviours towards time online, policy reform, and designing of technologies with restraints geared towards supporting a common good. These approaches take time, effort, and will. The Covid-19 pandemic shows that more information may not necessarily lead to more enlightened social structures.

In his book, *New Dark Age*, James Bridle (2018) interrogates the idea that supported the enlightenment period: "more knowledge—more information—leads to better decisions" (p. 10). Instead, Bridle (2018) articulates what he calls a "darkness" that has enveloped our society in the digital age:

> As so we find ourselves today connected to vast repositories of knowledge, and yet we have not learned to think. In fact, the opposite is true: that which was intended to enlighten the world in practice darkens it. The abundance of information and the plurality of worldviews now accessible to us through the internet are not producing a coherent consensus reality, but one driven by fundamentalist insistence on simplistic narratives, conspiracy theories, and post-factual politics. (10–11).

The challenges, then, perhaps lay not in the reform of our media systems, which will never match the pace of technological innovation, but rather how we choose to understand the ways in which we engage in the world with others, and how we combat the distance that our technologies have placed in between us and those around us. The factionalisation of media and information, in the case of the Covid-19 infodemic, creates significant risk for our collective well-being. Donovan and Wardle (2020) note, "Some of the most engaging disinformation efforts tap into people's deepest fears about their own safety and that of their loved ones. That's in part why the Covid-19 pandemic features the latest swarm of bad and misinformed actors pushing dangerous narratives" (Para. 9).

Civic Belonging in a Culture of Distance

The implications of civic distance are vast. On the one hand, they create detachment from our public institutions, like schools and local governments. On the other hand, they create detachment from those people and places around us, neighbours, environments, and community spaces. How we negotiate these distances will dictate the future of our digital culture and its place in daily life. Bridle (2018) acknowledges the human element in this digital time: "how we understand and think about our place in the world, and our relation to one another and to machines, will ultimately decide if madness or peace is where our technologies will take us" (11). This dichotomy may feel extreme, but it allows us to think about the future of our communities, and the ways in which we created belonging, within and beyond the technologies that facilitate our lives.

With automobiles, we see a recent shift to create regulations and incentives that help the environment. Electric vehicles lessen the burden on fossil fuels, new driverless cars hope to reduce human accidents, and technological innovations have improved safety features and alert features for drivers. There is the will to both regulate and innovate for more responsible automobile use. At the same time, there's a push to build better and more robust public infrastructures for transportation, for living in communal spaces, and for lessening the burden on the car. More flexible working environments may lead to less reliance on

automobiles and more time in our local communities, where work and life balances can be improved.

In our digital culture, we will need to explore what incentives and regulations are needed to focus to reclaim our media for more equitable and robust civil societies. A renewed focus on community, and how that relates to a *human agenda*, how Rushkoff sees a renewed commitment to belonging in our mediated world. "Our personal contributions," writes Rushkoff, "have greater effect when they are amplified by a network of peers working in solidarity" (p. 213). Contributions, amplified by networks, occur frequently in digital culture. This type of transactional support is beneficial. Online, however, it's often designed with groups who think alike and act alike, with little engagement across ideas, and across differences. A human agenda allows us to be in the presence of others, connected and engaged. The physical proximity of our communities creates meaning, value, and purpose. In our mediated spaces, we imagine such meaning, but it is easily distorted amongst the lack of human engagement and the abundance of information that we are asked to navigate. Raghuram Rajan, writing in *The Third Pillar,* (2019) sees reinvigorated physical communities as a path to more robust and inclusive belonging:

> When members are in close proximity and work together for the community, they build a stronger community. As people run into one another, as they have to work with one another for local projects, social capital—as embodied in mutual understanding, empathy, and reservoirs of goodwill—accumulates. (p. 328)

To build a sense of belonging, we will need to build a human-centred approach to our digital culture. Efforts to educate the public about media and technology must be done within community- and human-based contexts. Focusing on the platforms or technologies themselves will push us further into a reality of distance from others, and not meaningful connections with others. This does not mean that we should turn away from the technologies that provide us with convenience and connection. Rather, we should work to create spaces of solitude, and community, that are focused on our distinctly human values, and allow media to support such spaces, and not be those spaces.

In an 1857 essay titled *Solitude and Sympathy*, Ralph Waldo Emerson reflects on the need to be present in the world, in solitude and solidarity, to truly embrace our surroundings:

> Society and solitude are deceptive names. It is not the circumstance of seeing more or fewer people, but the readiness of sympathy, that imports; and a sound mind will derive its principles from insight, with ever a purer ascent to the sufficient and absolute right, and will accept society as the natural element in which they are to be applied. (Para 16)

In our present digital culture, in which distance pervades our digital lives, we must see our belonging as necessarily human first, and technological thereafter.

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The Civic Media Observatory: Decoding Information Networks with Narrative Analysis

Ivan Sigal

This chapter is a transcript of the keynote delivered by Ivan Sigal, Executive Director of the participatory media project, Global Voices, on 31 March 2021 at the virtual Media Education Summit 2021 hosted by University of Leeds, UK, and the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice (CEMP) at Bournemouth University, UK.

Our contemporary information ecosystems seem increasingly disordered. Driven by mass media outlets with little allegiance to facts, and decontextualized by social media platforms, we often turn to familiar narratives to help make sense of the world. To understand how those narratives affect what we know and how we learn, Global Voices has developed a research and digital literacy method called the Civic Media Observatory. In this talk, Ivan Sigal describes how this approach can develop the contextual knowledge required to understand, assess and respond to emerging events around the world.

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<div align="center">INTRODUCTION</div>

Global Voices[1] is a project that was created in 2004 out of a research endeavour at the Burkeman-Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. It was created to offer a response to the potential for the open Internet to provide us with a diversity of voices, perspectives, kinds of knowledge. We are all familiar with the theory that the Internet was going to be a democratising force in terms of information access and information creation, in terms of what we know and who we are hearing from, what languages we are hearing. But we also know that in practice if we don't shape our communities and our discourse spaces to be attentive to a range and diversity of voices and perspectives then the Internet as it is currently constituted actually amplifies those who already have power and resources. So, when we started Global Voices we asked a key question: how we can ensure not just that people are speaking, but that we are listening and hearing from a range and variety of voices, and that listening is as important as speaking when it comes to realising these underlying ideals about what the Internet might be. I am sure many of you are familiar with the 'Attention Economy'—a concept that was created over 50 years ago—that talks about how information is an abundant commodity in online spaces and what is scarce is our ability to attend to, or to hear different perspectives and of course that is true and we often see that those with fewest resources have less power, less cultural capital and receive less attention. This provides a background for today's talk—which is about what it means to try and create context for diverse voices to be heard in ways that foster understanding and to show you one project that we have been working on for the past 2 years called The Civic Media Observatory.

In addition to being a volunteer newsroom, Global Voices has about 1000 participants a year from about 160 countries around the world who write and translate and work as digital activists. Most of the people who participate in Global Voices are volunteers as part of a community, but they are not necessarily amateurs. Almost everybody who is part of our community is multi-lingual, many have a professional degree, many teachers, many journalists, scientists, people working in one field of advocacy or another. We all collaborate and combine our effort to analyse local conversations, local issues of importance and share them by writing about them, translating then and analysing them for global audiences. It's like a global newswire, but run by volunteers, on the basis of what matters to local communities. That local expertise and the ability to explain context and decipher local meaning is central to what we do. In addition to that main activity, which we call the newsroom—that you can see at https://globalvoices.org/—we have a couple of specialised projects: *Rising Voices*, which works with communities that have structural impediments to

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[1] Global Voices is an international, multilingual, mainly volunteer community of writers, translators, academics and human rights activists. Global Voices leverages the power of the Internet to build understanding across borders in a participatory space.

online participation—political, religious, ethnic or sectarian, for example. For the past 5 years we have concentrated on indigenous and minority language communities, who do not have a lot of content online and do not have a lot of access to technology and platform tools that are in their own languages—and worked with them to build networks, build policy, build advocacy and a range of other activities in that space. We also have a translation community which is called *Lingua*, a group of volunteer translators that translate our site into 40 languages. We also have a project called *Advox*, which focuses on online freedom of expression, online human rights and digital rights. So that is the architecture of Global Voices, and adjacent to those main projects, we have always run a series of research projects focused on media ecosystem analysis: ways of seeing how media ecosystems are structured, who is speaking and how to understand the larger space of conversation that we are finding information from and explaining the power infrastructure underlying it. The Civic Media Observatory Project is the latest version of that. One of the reasons we have done this is that, we have seen time and time again that 'information disorder'[2] is hard to navigate in many ways, and one of the big challenges that we have identified in this space is that the mode of analysis does not pay sufficient attention to the need for contextualisation, the need for sub-textual analysis and the need to understand that ideas and ecosystems are constantly linked across different media platforms and are moving through different cultural, linguistic and social and national spaces. In order to understand them, it is not necessarily sufficient to just do fact-checking, for example. Fact-checking can be useful to establish the factuality or truthfulness or accuracy of a particular media item, but it isn't going to be meaningful to understand the larger context in which it exists. So, in order to do that, we focused on narratives.

The Problem

With the Observatory we focus on narrative as a way of building context and responding to and understanding the information complexity with which we are currently faced. We are seeking to advance a method of analysis that can work almost like a social mind amongst the participants of this project. It is a kind of media literacy, and this set of ideas might be applied to a media literacy approach to thinking about and understanding media, but at the moment the work is done by people who are quite sophisticated in terms of their ability to do analysis of media ecosystems. So, we talk about it as a method to investigate and to code how people understand information and create knowledge in complex media ecosystems. As the illustration (Fig. 2.1) shows, we have a couple of really strong focuses around: contextual knowledge; vulnerability to harmful information or misinformation and a news media that does not have the capacity to see or focus on different marginal or diverse, multilingual or

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[2] See: Wardle, C., and Derakshan, H. (2017) 'Information Disorder: Towards an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy-making'.

THE PROBLEM

1. Social media platforms lack the local and contextual knowledge, subtext and language capacity required to understand, assess and respond to emerging events around the world.

2. Media environments are vulnerable to the spread of harmful information: a phenomenon that increasingly disrupts democratic processes.

3. News media often neglect marginalized voices, and are ill-equipped to build understanding across language, culture and geographic borders. Key events or trends are often ignored, leaving institutions and communities unprepared to deal with what should have been foreseeable shocks.
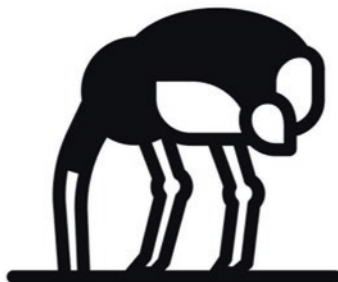
Fig. 2.1 The problem

transnational groups that then leave them incapable or unable to prepare for what we call foreseeable shocks, as opposed to unforeseeable shocks. With the Observatory, we try to bring these different kinds of benefits:

- *Local knowledge*: clarifies sub text and context—the researchers working on the project all have strong language skills, local contextual knowledge and the ability to perform media analysis research either as journalists or as academics who are skilled in analysing content.
- *Editorial rigour:* serves as a method to ensure that the research analysis is impartial—the method that we use for analysis has multiple layers of individuals looking at each item and we apply an editorial standard to the dataset that we are building.
- *Civic impact score*: evaluates material based on potential harm or benefit to civic discourse—this is applied to information that is valuable information as well as misinformation and provides a rough analysis in accordance with human rights norms. This requires researchers to openly say not just what something is but to think hard about whether or not it does have a public good and then to explain what that public good or public harm might be.

We thought about doing this as a numerical analysis, but this is qualitative research and we found that too precise an analysis here is actually not helpful, but the civic impact score forces researchers to ask nuanced questions of the value of the items that they are looking at.

- *Suggested actions:* a range of tactics to inform journalistic coverage support content moderation and platform governance strategies and help frame research to promote the protection of human rights within media ecosystems.

Once we have performed analysis of a media item, we are then reaching out to a media platform and saying 'this is problematic content, you need to do something about it' or we are writing a story about it or producing research on it. In some cases, we are bringing it up to the proper authorities if it is truly harmful. So, we want to make sure that the research we are doing has some applied value.

The Method

The core of our method is an investigation, a time-bound and theme-bound focus on a topic: For example, the 2019/20 presidential elections in Taiwan or the possibility of EU accession for Northern Macedonia and Albania are topics that we have analysed. We also monitor other media ecosystems, using a larger set of more general terms—for example, monitoring Ethiopia's media ecosystem, where we tend to look at scale at the level of a country. The research focuses on themes, which are pre-defined events, trends or phenomena that are identified by the research teams and narrative frames, used to describe and debate themes. So, themes are *what* people are talking about, narrative frames are *how* people are talking about them—the ideologies, subtexts, the understanding that they bring to an idea that may be explicit, but often is implicit in the choice of what verbs, adjectives, focus, what to emphasise, what to de-emphasise. By making the narrative explicit in our analysis, we find that we can interlink lots of different media items and help to explain how they work in different cultural and social contexts. The most granular level of analysis for this project is a media item and a media item is any kind of media that can be defined or captured as having an edge. A news article is a typical example, but a social media post or a tweet or a YouTube video could also be one. Likewise, a book or a PhD thesis, a poster on the street or a piece of graffiti or a meme. A media item has a definable and recognisable characteristic and it is important that we keep a general openness to the idea that media items are fungible in this way, because that is how media ecosystems are actually working in practice. We spend a lot of time tracing and analysing the relationships between media items as they move through our ecosystems. I explain how we do that later.

OUTPUTS

Through a rigorous assessment/analysis of the provenance, messaging and contextual impact of media, we will generate an extensive base of knowledge for use by partners, editorial teams and researchers comprising database files, stories, special reports, media ecosystems analyses, description and analysis, periodic newsletters. For each piece of research, we have a dataset, we produce stories for the Global Voices site, so we are using data from the Observatory as a way of adding rigour to our editorial process; we write special reports on items and sometimes we are generating weekly or bi-weekly reports. We are often working with partners as well, for example, BBC Media Action, a media development organisation, or Facebook. With social media platforms, where there are large structural problems that might take longer to address, there are immediate needs that we are helping to answer.

WORKFLOW

Each investigation has a team of 5–15 people working on it. There is a very clear process that they have to follow in order to enter information to the platform (Fig. 2.2):

Discovery, Capture, Description, Analysis, Scoring and Action

WORKFLOW

Discover → Capture → Describe → Analyze → Score ⟶ Action

Discover	Capture	Describe	Action
Media item collected.	Full text and screenshots entered into platform; item assigned to researcher with local knowledge.	Researcher annotates item with metadata, describes and analyzes meaning, and assigns it a theme, a media frame, and a civic impact score.	Analysis may trigger actions such as writing a story, reporting item to moderators, or more research.

Fig. 2.2 Workflow

To simplify—there is metadata, then analysis and description, then scoring and action, so we can break this down into three big chunks. The discovery part of the conversation is the whole big piece on its own, because it relies on a combination of quantitative analysis, big data and research and the skills of the researchers in their own communities to already know or highlight what is happening in a given place because of what they see. The dataset that we complete is about 40 different fields for each media item, but it can go pretty quickly because half of it is metadata and half of it is analysis and description.

We do our best to remove the possibility for bias or gaming of the dataset by the researcher, so whilst we need local knowledge, we also have a lot of processes to ensure that people are using the strategy part of their brains to answer questions, they are stepping back from their own positions and they are engaging with the material through a critical approach. So, the narrative frames are pre-defined through an editorial process—here are some examples of questions asked, where claims are defined as an assertion of truth or of factuality: 'Are the claims made in the item supported?'; 'Are the claims made in the item true?'; 'What trends are related to the item?' For example, sometimes people make claims in their writing but those claims are not backed by any kind of evidence, so we ask: 'Do you see a claim? Does that claim have evidence?' 'Is that evidence true?' We ask these types of questions in a structured way and this allows us to go back later and perform a whole range of cross-cutting and really rich data analysis on the types of responses that we are getting.

Civic Impact Scoring

Each media item is scored on a plus 3 and minus 3 scale (Fig. 2.3).

We really want to encourage people to find and share high-quality and original material, that adds to our knowledge, so that is why it is important that we have plus as well as minus on the scale.

We work in a data project called Air Table, which is a relational database. This is a wonderful tool if you like playing with data! It brings us the ability to link items across different tables and I will come on to show how that works in practice. It is a great tool for rapid iteration of questions and for structuring the research. It is responsive and now we are settling into questions and methods that are working for us, so may move to a different database, but for now it works really well. I would like to describe to you what the database looks like for our Covid-19 Observatory.

You can see about eight different tables at the top that are all media related: we track media sources, we track themes, frames as already described, but also stories, people of interest-related items.

In one particular story, from Brazil, there are five different themes that we are working on and three different narrative frames. It is a really powerful tool: you can look at this and say: 'what other stories are there about the idea that fascism is increasing in Brazil since Bolsanaro took office?' and click on that tab to bring you to the other stories that are also focusing on that same question.

CIVIC IMPACT SCORING

−3 hateful, inciting, illegal, disinforming or otherwise harmful material, with a large audience, coordinated activity and likely to result in harm

−2 hateful, inciting, illegal, disinforming or otherwise harmful material without mass audience or coordinated activity; or false or misinforming material with a mass audience

−1 false, misinforming, inaccurate or biased material

0 material containing no substantive information/knowledge

+1 generally accurate material with little influence or importance

+2 accurate, original material that has value and importance

+3 accurate, highly original material that expands understanding and deserves a wide audience

Fig. 2.3   Civic impact score

In total, over the last 18 months [speaking in April 2021] we have run four significant transnational investigations, we have run monitoring in seven countries, we have looked at elections focused in six different countries and that includes topics such as EU accession, Covid-19, Chinese soft power influence in Belt and Road initiative countries—monitoring India, Myanmar, Venezuela, Brazil and Ethiopia. We have had 40–50 people working on this project all together and we are discerning a lot of fascinating trends through the narrative analysis that then have impact later on. These two case studies from the Civic Media Observatory project provide an insight to some of the outcomes from this work—and eventually each of them will be public on the Global Voices website (some of them are right now), but we have to be careful to ensure that there is no risk to the people involved before we publish any data—for example in Myanmar, or Ethiopia, this is a particular consideration where we have individuals who are part of the research team but cannot be publicly affiliated with the work for security reasons, so we are careful to ensure that we are removing all markers of identity for the researchers before publication of the dataset. There can also be copyright issues, so we have to be careful about that too, but we are working to get every one of these investigations into public shape.

Case Study I: Covid-19 Investigation

In January 2020 we began working on Covid-19 related themes, because we were working on the presidential elections in Taiwan. We found what was then known as the "Wuhan virus" was being used as a disinformation effort by mainland Chinese to try and suppress the Taiwanese vote, saying that 'if you come out and vote, you'll get the virus'. So, we saw, what is commonly known as the 'info-demic' or the misinfo-demic around Covid-19 as early as the second week of January 2020. We thought that was really interesting, so we started tracking and documenting it first in Hong Kong and Taiwan, then eventually this research grew to encompass 20 languages working in India, Brazil, Russia, Nigeria, especially, with a smaller focus on Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Venezuela, Bolivia and a bunch of transnational themes. So, in April 2021, the research set now has 194 narrative frames, 118 themes and over 1300 media items that we have analysed. It is a massive and fascinating compilation of how narratives crossed different countries over the past year and a half. It has generated really interesting research as well as stories on the back-end[3] and we are contributing to projects that have helped the social media platforms to identify toxic and harmful, misinforming and disinforming expression around Covid-19 that has resulted in numerous pieces of harmful content being removed. Figure 2.4 shows attention to Covid-19 in mass media using the tool Mediacloud reported editorial stories from all over the world, showing a significant shift in attention on the topic over time.

Some of the themes that we saw for Covid-19 were, obviously, mis- and disinformation, protest, activism and the pandemic, religion and the pandemic, restriction of movement, stigma against medical staff and survivors, disease-related statistics. Then a subset of some of the narrative frames that we detected such as *The World Health Organisation (WHO) is inefficient, compromised or untrustworthy*; *a strong state capacity is essential to manage Covid-19 response*; *centralised authoritarian governments are better at responding to the pandemic than democracies.*

Here is an example (Fig. 2.5) of a stripped-down version of those analyses from Russia: the frame here is that *religious belief protects us from Covid-19*; this is a narrative that we found in every single country that we performed analysis on and it provides a fascinating misinformation piece and it is really complex, because it clashes with different freedoms, making it especially hard for social media platforms to deal with because they are on the one hand faced with the freedom of religion argument, on the other hand the same groups are also actively misinforming people about treatment and care for Covid-19. This is a Telegram channel in Russia and this is about a group in the North Caucasus claiming that the Zikr, which is a widespread devotional dance of Muslim origin, can kill the coronavirus and presents no threat to its participants. The

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[3] Stories generated by the Civic Media Observatory: https://globalvoices.org/special/observatory/

Fig. 2.4 Covid-19 graph for July-August 2020 media attention

argument is that when people perform the Zikr, their body temperature rises to 42°C and that kills coronavirus. This is a rumour that is being spread through Telegram in the North Caucasus in the middle of 2020. We found similar arguments amongst Hindus, Buddhists, Christians—regardless of the faith, some version of this argument has been replicated in every faith that we have looked at, that a faith-based act of some sort will kill Covid-19.

Another example from Russia offers the narrative that a strong government that is competent has led to a strong response to Covid-19. The theme is *stigma against medical staff and survivors*. This was a very popular item produced by a Russian broadcaster, a pro-Kremlin journalist attacking the Doctors' Alliance, a trades union that was raising awareness of the struggles faced by frontline medical workers working with Covid-19. The (completely untrue) argument that was made here was that the Doctors' Alliance is fake and they were putting out harmful information and maligning the national government's Covid response. We were able to find 63 related items to this type of engagement at the time this research was conducted, so it gives us a sense of how we can track and document the effect of this reporting in lots of other contexts.

One more example from India presents a narrative frame that a centralised authoritarian government is better responding to a pandemic than democracy. This is fascinating for anyone interested in arcane forms of

Fig. 2.5 Russia media item

misinformation—there is a whole universe of quasi-real academic journals out there in the world and in this case there was a research paper that was published that claims that coronavirus can be killed by sound vibrations, specifically a Thali or Ghanti ceremony using a certain kind of steel plate and this was extremely popular on Facebook. Here we have an untrue academic paper that was used as the basis for an argument put forward by the government to misinform communities about potential Covid cures. After this came out and news that it was falsehood came out, it was eventually retracted by the publisher, with apologies for the inconvenience caused, so it is a fascinating example of how you see context and how a story can hop from one space to many other different social media platforms and what effects that has.

Case Study II: Myanmar Investigation

We did an investigation into the presidential election starting in September 2020 and spent five months tracking and documenting the Myanmar media ecosystem, focusing on the elections, military, disinformation, role of religion, state power, ethnic conflict. By April 2021, this dataset had almost 360 different media items, 25 different themes and narrative frames, so in terms of the election these are some of the main themes that emerged: transparency in election fraud and Islamophobia were *huge*, and I am sharing this as a premonition

of democratic collapse—all of the justifications for the coup are here, five months before it happened. One of the main narrative themes said that the National League for Democracy (NLD)—the main party in power—had become a Muslim party, which is untrue. It is the case that they had a number of Muslims on their slate of candidates at the previous election, but that is very far from turning it into a Muslim party. The Hindu nationalist groups used that as a way of saying, 'if you vote for the NLD, they will turn Myanmar into a Muslim country' and this is tied to the fallout from the Rohingya genocide as well. The second narrative theme is that the NLD is creating electoral fraud—two media items indicate what this propaganda and misinformation are about:

1. A pro-nationalist, pro-military supporter claiming that Muslims pose a danger to the nation of Myanmar and to Buddhists. The narrative frame here is that Muslims will eventually constitute the majority of the population and will rule the country. This is untrue, yet it received a huge amount of Facebook interaction, reactions and comments and it was re-posted and re-shared widely across different information platforms in Myanmar. In Myanmar's media ecosystem, a huge amount of activity takes place on Facebook, so we focused on that platform for this research (Fig. 2.6).
2. An item on Radio Free Myanmar, a pro-military platform that asserted that the NLD is taking power illegitimately and purporting to use quasi-

Description Facebook post by a pro-nationalist, pro-military USDP supporter claiming that Muslims pose a danger to the nation of Myanmar and to Buddhists. The post is illustrated with fabricated/decontextualized photos of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The post's author says Muslims are the root cause of every problem in Myanmar and pins responsibility for the alleged increase in the size of the country's Muslim population on the ruling NLD administration. He also slams civil society organisations for being naive about the real intentions of Muslims, and calls the government corrupt and untrustworthy because they accepted funding from George Soros.

Context The poster, "Shwe Ay," has other Facebook accounts called "Lay Shwe" and "Shwe Myanmar". He uses the three accounts to spread hate speech and disinformation, attack NLD election campaigns and promote ultra-nationalist ideology and doctrines of Buddhist fundamentalism supremacy. The post has attracted many hateful comments.

The Islamophobic disinformation and hate speech presented by this item has the potential to inflame sentiment in a nation with a history of violence against Muslims.

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(Just post it again as every citizen should know)

[MEDIA ITEM]

Theme/s

2020 general elections

Transparency and election fraud

Islamophobia

Foreign influence in elections

Narrative frames

Voting NLD will be the end of Buddhism

Non-members of Myanmar's official ethnic groups are not legitimate citizens

The Tatmadaw (Burmese Military) is the true and only guardian of Myanmar

NLD party supporters are idiots and savages

People should not vote for Muslim parties

Muslims will eventually constitute the largest percentage of the population and will rule the country in the near future

Popularity

118,663 Facebook interactions, 16,594 reactions, 12,333 comments and 89,736 shares

Civic impact -3

Post hyperlink

https://bit.ly/34RBLg9

Fig. 2.6   Myanmar media item 1

scientific and unsubstantiated evidence around local elections that point to the local authorities helping to create fraud around the election.

We hope that what we can do with this way of engaging with the material that we work with is to create a lighter weight version that could be useful as a media literacy tool, for the larger Global Voices community, but eventually also for our audiences and other interested people who might want to think about what it means to use a method of analysis related to the media ecosystems that people find themselves in. There is a way of reconstituting and recontextualising their information. This is really fun work; it is fascinating research and people who participate in it get really excited!

Here are a few questions asked after the talk.

Q: What are the challenges around scalability of this project?

Ivan: This project could scale in a number of different ways: the method is transferable across any particular topic or subject that you might be interested in and it can be picked up by teams of people who want to work on it and scaled, in the sense that any research method can be scaled just by being used. It can also be scaled in any particular research project, so we can have 5 researchers, or 50 researchers working on it. The challenge with that scale is that it is not exponential, it scales at the level of the editorial work, because the way we ensure the accuracy of material is that every media item we look at is looked at by at least two people, even three. So, there are researchers and co-ordinating editors. The co-ordinating editors are reading every item, asking questions, making comments, making sure that there is not bias implicit in the work, because obviously you have got people who have their own positions. We are not pretending that our researchers are going to be objective, that is not the way we feel the world works, but we do think that we can create a system where people are being transparent about what they are doing and their processes, so when they are answering a very specific question about sourcing and claims and accuracy, they have to do it in a common way. So, this project is scalable at the level of projects and at the level of researchers, but you cannot scale it exponentially in the way that social media platforms work. It needs careful attention, and I think that is of value in a lot of ways, because the people participating in it are the ones who are learning the most.

Q: A question about the mechanics of the project: how do you ensure objectivity and levels of interpretation within the data?

Ivan: In a sense some kinds of objectivity are built into the question, so when a researcher comes to a media item is they have to answer a set of questions about it, which are metadata, where there is no space for anything but objectivity. This is just evidence. The second set of questions are analysis and in the analysis questions we have to ask for description, context analysis, subtext analysis and related themes and then we ask a set of questions about claims and I want to focus on this because it is really important around

objectivity. Those claims questions are evident to anybody who looks at it, so if you make a claim, you say does this story make a claim about the factuality of something, anybody who reads it can see whether that is true and is that claim supported? Is there any evidence presented to support that claim? That is an objective question that can be answered objectively. So those types of questions are there to ensure that if a researcher puts a negative 3 on something, they have to back it up.

The second way we handle objectivity is through the editorial process of the research itself—so the editorial co-ordinators who are examining the research are questioning the choices made by the researchers, challenging them by saying 'did you do this in a way that clearly expresses what has actually occurred?' 'When you made the determination that this was a negative 3, what was that determination based on?' Researchers have to justify it, they cannot just say 'this was a negative 3' they have to give a reason why they made that decision. So, there is pushback and that editorial process is what gets us to, not objectivity, but a general level of transparency about why people make choices and then the dataset is there and is public and anyone can question it, once we get to the end of this process and publish the data. This is also why we don't have a very strict civic impact score, because very often the types of impacts we are analysing are deeply contextual and a certain kind of expression that in one context might be controversial but not harmful, in another might actually cause harm. Here is a great example: last year in Ethiopia, the musician Hachalu Hundessa, from the Oromia region, gave an interview to an Oromia media outlet on YouTube and if you just watched that video (which we did) and listened to it, you might not see that what was being said was inflammatory. A week later Hundessa was assassinated and that assassination caused the Internet to be shut down in Ethiopia for 2 weeks and a series of ethnically inspired killings and attacks—so, very clearly this was a negative 3—but because of the context in which it happened. If it had happened in a context where ethnic issues were not so tense, it would not have resonated in such a negative way, so we want people to use this as a guide to help us understand rather than to say this is a negative 3 therefore this has to happen. It is almost like a heuristic.

Q: What your sense is of the role of religion in the increase in misinformation based on your assessment of work in the Observatory?

Ivan: I will say that this is a very hard one, because it is impossible to make a general statement about religion and so I am not going to try. I will say that we did see, in every religion that we looked at, many different narratives that purported religious justification for the treatment of Covid, but we also saw many examples of religious figures supporting a scientific attitude towards Covid. I think it is really challenging especially in a qualitative project like this to try and make any kind of large quantitative or broad generalised statement around a particular group or set of behaviours. It is very important when you talk about this type of research that it is really focused on the granular, on helping us to understand the effect of narrative, but it isn't

necessarily saying again with qualitative research that there are going to be quantitative effects, what this research can do is help you to say this is an area worth studying in the quantitative space. I see this topic coming up again and again, I see these effects, I see different social media platforms, audiences that are reacting in certain ways, there are a huge number of comments that are in support of or against a certain idea, and now I am going to apply a different quantitative method to see what the actual scope and scale of that kind of expression might be, and then make a set of evaluations around its potential harm or benefit. This is a way of helping us to listen carefully, but we are trying for a qualitative and ethnographically inspired project, it is very important not to extrapolate beyond what we are seeing in the data, it is a small-scale data project.

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Upholding Digital Rights and Media Plurality: Does Self-regulation by Social Media Platforms Contravene Freedom of Expression?

Ursula Smartt

INTRODUCTION

In June 2021 Facebook announced that former US President, Donald Trump, would be banned from its platform for at least two years. This move did not only inflame tensions with allies of the former US president but also many who support freedom of expression, accusing the company of censoring conservative views. The ban was a revision from a previous indefinite suspension by Facebook, which was criticised by the company's 'Oversight Board'. The board upheld the decision to kick Trump off the platform but found fault with the lifetime ban. The new suspension was effective from the date of Trump's initial suspension on 7 January 2021, the day after the attack by the ex-president's supporters on the US Capitol building in Washington. The company had barred him from its platform for voicing support for the Capitol rioters (for Capitol breach cases and criminal charges 6 January 2021—see District of Columbia United States Attorney's Office: https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/capitol-breach-cases).

The ban would only be lifted if Facebook feels 'the risk to public safety has receded' according to former Lib Dem Leader, Nick Clegg, now Facebook's Vice President of Global Affairs, in a blog post explaining the decision on 4 June 2021. He continued, 'when the suspension is eventually lifted, there will

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be a strict set of rapidly escalating sanctions that will be triggered if Mr Trump commits further violations in future, up to and including permanent removal of his pages and accounts'.[1]

Since its creation in April 2021 Facebook's Oversight Board (https://transparency.fb.com/en-gb/oversight) published its decisions on a wide range of highly significant content issues, including the 'Zwarte Piet' (Black Pete) decision (Case 2021-002-FB-UA).[2] In this case the Oversight Board upheld Facebook's decision to remove specific content that violated the express prohibition on posting caricatures of black people in the form of blackfaces, contained in its 'Hate Speech Community Standard'.

The background to this case was that on 5 December 2020, a Facebook user in the Netherlands shared a post, including text in Dutch and a 17-second-long video on the platform. The video showed a young child meeting three adults, one dressed to portray 'Sinterklaas' (Santa Clause) and two portraying 'Zwarte Piet'; they had their faces painted black and wore Afro wigs under hats and colourful renaissance-style clothes. All the people in the video appeared to be white, including those with their faces painted black. Facebook removed the post for violating its hate speech policy. Though part of the Dutch Christmas celebrations, the use of blackface by white people is regarded as racist and is widely recognised as a harmful racial stereotype. The majority of the Board saw sufficient evidence of harm to justify removing the content. A minority of the Board, however, saw insufficient evidence to directly link this piece of content to the harm supposedly being reduced by removing it. They noted that Facebook's value of 'voice' specifically protects disagreeable content and that, while blackface is offensive, depictions on Facebook will not always cause harm to others. They also argued that restricting expression based on cumulative harm can be hard to distinguish from attempts to protect people from subjective feelings of offence.

The Donald Trump and Zwarte Piet decisions came as part of an announcement detailing broader changes to Facebook's policies on how it moderates speech by influential public figures, following criticism from the Oversight Board that its existing approach had created 'widespread confusion'.

So, who or what is Facebook's Oversight Board? The platform's 'Transparency Centre' informs us that the board is an external body that people can appeal to if they disagree with Facebook's content enforcement decisions on the Facebook app or Instagram.[3] Facebook implements the Oversight Board's decisions across identical content with parallel context if it exists and when it is technically and operationally possible. Facebook's 'Community Standards' are

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[1] Source: 'In Response to Oversight Board, Trump Suspended for Two Years; Will Only Be Reinstated if Conditions Permit', by Nick Clegg, VP of Global Affairs June 4, 2021: https://about.fb.com/news/2021/06/facebook-response-to-oversight-board-recommendations-trump/

[2] FB-S6NRTDAJ Case decision 2021-002-FB-UA Zwarte Piet (originally in Dutch) of April 2021: https://www.oversightboard.com/decision/FB-S6NRTDAJ

[3] Facebook's Oversight Board cases can be read here: https://transparency.fb.com/oversight/oversight-board-cases/

extremely wide-ranging, from violence and criminal behaviour, to hate and objectionable speech to cyber security and breach of intellectual property.[4] The Oversight Board comprises a supposed global independent panel of twenty people, featuring academic, political and civic leaders (for a list of Facebook Oversight Board Members (2021), see Appendix 1).

In a statement from 2019, CEO Mark Zuckerberg pledged freedom of speech, explaining the Board's main purpose and remit.[5] Membership, structure and 'bylaws' are contained in what appears to the public as 'the law'.[6] Facebook reportedly pays lofty salaries to members of its 'Supreme Court' as the Facebook Oversight Board has been named by *The Guardian*, which could theoretically even overrule Zuckerberg. The tech giant paid its twenty board members a reportedly six-figure salary each in 2020–21, though Zuckerberg reiterates that the Oversight Board is an independent trust. According to *The New Yorker*, Facebook gave the trust $130 million to manage the board's salaries and operations for what amounts to about 15 h per week work for each board member.[7]

A look at the Oversight Board's recent rulings, Facebook is now stifling any debate about Coronavirus lockdown policies, the Covid-19 vaccines and even blocks links to peer-reviewed scientific papers that appear in international journals, such as *Nature*. As per its regulations, Facebook deletes any discussions about herd immunity, natural immunity or alternative remedies, such as Ivermectin. If you find yourself blocked by Facebook/Instagram you may well have to wait up to a week before the organisation unblocks some of your webpages.

Since 2016, Facebook employs thousands of fact-checkers and uses fact-checking programmes across more than 80 organisations working in over 60 languages globally. The idea is to fight the spread of misinformation and to provide people with more reliable information across Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Whilst this appears to be a good idea Facebook, Twitter and Google now employ fact-checking algorithms to block and silence some possibly valuable research in virology or biochemistry. Videos advocating right wing hate speech by Tommy Robinson, aka Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, have long been blocked by Twitter since 2018. The far-right founder of the English Defence League has now been permanently banned from Facebook and Instagram for repeatedly breaking policies on hate speech.

[4] Facebook Community Standards: https://transparency.fb.com/policies/community-standards/
[5] See: Facebook's Commitment to the Oversight Board by Mark Zuckerberg, 17 September 2019: https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/letter-from-mark-zuckerberg-on-oversight-board-charter.pdf
[6] See: Facebook's Oversight Board Bylaws: https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Bylaws_v6.pdf
[7] Source: 'Inside the Making of Facebook's Supreme Court. The company has created a board that can overrule even Mark Zuckerberg. Soon it will decide whether to allow Trump back on Facebook,' by Kate Klonick, The New Yorker, 12 February 2021.

Fake News and Media Plurality

With the arrival of social media and most young citizens now obtaining their news from Facebook as opposed to bona fide news sources, such as the BBC or Reuters, this has meant real and fictional stories are now presented in such a similar way that it can sometimes be difficult to tell the two apart. Currently, nearly three billion people use at least one of the Facebook-owned social media platforms—Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram. Individuals typically use a combination of Facebook-owned platforms. Socio-demographic research by a team of psychologists found that WhatsApp is the most widely used application and therefore has the strongest reach.[8] The other popular media platforms are Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Tik Tok, Pinterest, Reddit and YouTube (owned by Google).

When Donald Trump beat Hillary Clinton in November 2016 by becoming the 45th US president, 'fake news' became his buzzword. In record time, the phrase morphed from a description of a social media phenomenon into a journalistic cliché and an angry political slur. Of course, fake news has always been around as Mark Twain, Jonathan Swift or possibly Winston Churchill allegedly said, 'a lie gets half the way round the world before the truth gets its shoes on'. And even that quote is disputed and might even be fake news.

We often do not really know news sources. During the Trump election campaign in 2016, *BuzzFeed News* identified more than a hundred pro-Trump websites being run from a single town in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

So, what's wrong with Facebook, Twitter or YouTube selecting and censoring what is right and wrong for their platforms? How impartial should the media be? What is the difference between comment, conjecture, fact or fiction, and what are the boundaries of a free press and freedom of expression?

Freedom of Expression and Media Pluralism

One of the few certainties in the world of journalism and editorial policy is that the age-old tension between freedom of expression and the right to robust and occasionally rude debate will, from time to time, come into conflict with the sensibilities of those who feel insulted or abused and minorities who can feel oppressed by the slights, real or imagined, of the majority. Populist politics and shifts in media consumption via social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter mean that it is harder than ever to be sure about the quality of the news and information we consume. Coupled with citizen journalism and increasing public debate via social media it is difficult to discern what is deliberate

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[8] Marengo, D., Sindermann C., Elhai J.D. and Montag, C. (2020) 'One Social Media Company to Rule Them All: Associations Between Use of Facebook-Owned Social Media Platforms, Sociodemographic Characteristics, and the Big Five Personality Traits'. *Front. Psychol.* 11:936. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00936: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00936/full

misinformation (for advertising, commercial or political reasons) and what amounts to 'the truth' in media reporting.

Media plurality supports democracy by ensuring that people can receive a wide range of viewpoints from a variety of different sources and that no one media owner has too much influence over public opinion and the political agenda.

In *Centro Europa* (2012),[9] the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) re-affirmed the importance of media plurality under Article 10 of the Convention. The case concerned an Italian TV company's inability to broadcast for nearly ten years, despite having a broadcasting licence, due to lack of television frequencies allocated to it. The Court concluded that the Italian legislative framework had lacked clarity and precision and that the authorities had not observed the deadlines set in the licence, thereby frustrating Centro Europa's expectations. These shortcomings had resulted in reduced competition in the audio-visual sector. The Italian state had failed to put in place an appropriate legislative and administrative framework to guarantee effective media pluralism.

The ECtHR held that this amounted to a serious breach of Article 10(1) ECHR and of Article 1 of the First Protocol, noting that

> there can be no democracy without pluralism. Democracy thrives on freedom of expression. It is of the essence of democracy to allow diverse political programmes to be proposed and debated, even those that call into question the way a state is currently organised, provided that they do not harm democracy itself.[10]

The Italian state was not allowed to justify their actions under Article 10(2) ECHR and were ordered to pay the TV company €10,000,000 and €100,000 to Mr. di Stefano in respect of costs and expenses, plus any tax that may be chargeable in respect of pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage—a substantial fine in 2012.[11]

Regulating Online Safety

The EU Commission is taking steps to regulate social media companies and their platforms though this is of course difficult since all major companies are located in the United States. In its communication of September 2017 on tackling illegal content online, the European Commission promised to monitor progress in tackling illegal content online and assess whether additional measures were needed to ensure the swift and proactive detection and removal

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[9] *Centro Europa 7 S.R.L. and Di Stefano v Italy (Application No 38433/09)*, [2012] ECHR 974 (ECtHR). Grand Chamber judgment of 7 June 2012. The applicants were Centro Europa 7 S.R.L., an Italian analog TV company based in Rome, and Francescantonio Di Stefano, its statutory representative.

[10] Ibid. at para. 129 (Françoise Tulkens, President, Grand Chamber, ECtHR).

[11] Ibid. at paras 214–227.

of illegal content online, including possible legislative measures to complement the existing regulatory framework. The Commission then recommended a set of operational measures to be taken by companies and Member States to determine and propose future legislation. These recommendations would then apply to all forms of illegal content ranging from terrorist content, incitement to hatred and violence, child sexual abuse material, counterfeit products and copyright infringement. Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus Ansip said:

> Online platforms are becoming people's main gateway to information, so _they have_ a responsibility to provide a secure environment for their users. What is illegal offline is also illegal online. While several platforms have been removing more illegal content than ever before—showing that self-regulation can work—we still need to react faster against terrorist propaganda and other illegal content which is a serious threat to our citizens' security, safety and fundamental rights.

These EU recommendations remain just that: recommendations. They encourage various voluntary initiatives to ensure that the internet is free of illegal content and reinforces actions taken under different initiatives in each country.

The UK Government has already set up a Digital Markets Unit (DMU) with a new regulatory regime under the auspices of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to oversee a pro-competition regime for social media platforms that currently dominate the market, such as Google and Facebook. The UK Government aims to introduce and enforce a new code to govern social media companies' behaviour when interacting with competitors and users.

Ofcom the communications regulator in the UK has a range of statutory duties, introduced by Parliament in 2003, to support media plurality in the UK by way of the _Communications Act 2003_. However, 2003 is a long time ago in a field which is now dominated by AI and fast changing technology, and the UK Parliament has to date not advanced the Online Safety Bill 2022 as the time of going to print. The way that people access news and information has changed significantly since the legislation was introduced. The influence of online news sources has grown substantially and social media, search engines and news aggregators are increasingly acting as intermediaries between news content and the public.

Freedom of expression and media pluralism online have been protected by the UK Government by the _Communications Act 2003_, supported by the courts in common law, believing that people's rights to participate in society and engage in robust debate online must be safeguarded. The _Online Harms White Paper_ (2019) argued that existing regulatory and voluntary initiatives had 'not gone far or fast enough' to keep users safe. The Online Safety Bill 2022–23 proposes a single regulatory framework to tackle a range of

online harms. At its core would be a duty of care for internet companies, including social media platforms.

The UK communications regulator Ofcom has an inherent duty of care role required by the *Communications Act 2003.* Should the Online Safety Bill become law in 2023, Ofcom would have the power to require social media companies and online media service providers to address online harms, such as misinformation and disinformation about vaccines, for example, that have taken place on their platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic. Services accessed by children need to protect underage users from harmful disinformation. Services with the largest audiences and a range of high-risk features are required to set out clear policies on harmful disinformation accessed by adults. Social media companies would then be required to set out what content, including many types of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms, such as anti-vaccination content and falsehoods about Covid-19, and what is and is not acceptable in their terms and conditions.

If these rules are breached, Ofcom would then have the power to take enforcement action. The bill proposes that companies are expected to remove illegal disinformation, for example where this contains direct incitement to violence. Ofcom already has the power to levy unprecedented fines of up to £18m or 10% of global turnover on social media giants. This could leave a company such as Facebook potentially paying a £5bn fine for serious breaches. By contrast, GDPR laws cap fines at €20m (£18m) or 4% of global turnover. In future Ofcom may well have the power to block services from the UK entirely.

Are Social Media Platforms Publishers?

US law is quite clear on the matter: social media platforms are *not* publishers. They are conduits or walls on which 'graffiti' can be plastered—as the New York court ruled in the Prodigcase in 1999 (*Lunney (Alexander G.) & c. v Prodigy Services Company* et al. (1999) 99 NY Int 0165). Companies such as Facebook, Twitter and Google rely on US law which confirms that they are platforms only, covered by the legal protection of section 230 of the US *Communications Decency Act* of 1996 (CDA). This means they cannot be sued for libellous content, hate speech or any other damaging material which appears on their platforms. Section 230 removes the duty of care element.

The *Communications Decency Act* (CDA) was the United States Congress's first notable attempt to regulate pornographic material on the internet. Section 230 ('Protection for private blocking and screening of offensive material') provides immunity for website platforms from third-party content.

At its core, section 230(c)(1) provides immunity from liability for providers and users of an 'interactive computer service', who publish information provided by third-party users:

No provider or user of an interactive computer service *shall be treated as the publisher* or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.

The statute in section 230(c)(2) further provides 'Good Samaritan' protection from civil liability for operators of websites ('interactive computer services') in the removal or moderation of third-party material they deem obscene or offensive, even of constitutionally protected speech, such as the First Amendment of the American Constitution. Certain sections of the CDA were subsequently challenged in courts and ruled by the Supreme Court to be unconstitutional, though section 230 was determined to be severable from the rest of the legislation and remains in place.[12]

Facebook and other social media companies are platforms in US law and are afforded legal protection under s. 230. Facebook and Twitter's policies include the importance of freedom of speech protection yet censor or ban content which then leans towards the fact that they are publishers. We could of course go further and include video and communications platforms such as Comcast, Netflix, Verizon, AT & T. These are also platforms which primarily serve to facilitate communication and distribute information. They cannot be regulated by UK law for streaming harmful material to children before the watershed.

In the Prodigy case (1999),[13] the New York court ruled that an ISP *cannot* be held liable for any material posted on its server since it is merely a 'host'. In this case an unknown imposter had opened several accounts with the ISP Prodigy, by assuming and usurping the (real) name of Alexander Lunney, a teenage Boy Scout claimant in this appeal. The imposter posted two vulgar messages in Lunney's name on a Prodigy bulletin board and sent a threatening, profane email message in Lunney's name to a third person, with the subject line: 'HOW I'M GONNA'KILL U'. Lunney sued Prodigy (via his father), asserting that he had been stigmatised by being falsely cast as the author of these messages. The court accepted Prodigy's defence argument, that the ISP had not actively participated in the message and could therefore not assume any responsibility. The US court held that Prodigy was not a publisher.

The British courts have sent mixed messages and we can find the answers largely in the tort of defamation, mostly online libel cases. The first case which raised the issue whether an ISP was a publisher was that of Godfrey v Demon Internet (2001).[14] *Godfrey* hinged on whether the ISP Demon—located in the UK—could be treated as publisher of the defamatory material posted by an unknown person about the university lecturer in 1997, Dr. Lawrence Godfrey, on a foreign website located in Thailand (soc.culture.thai). Importantly, Dr. Godfrey had asked Demon to remove the defamatory posting, but Demon failed to remove the message for 12 days. Mr. Justice Morland held Demon

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[12] *Reno v American Civil Liberties Union* (1997) 521 U.S. 844 (US Supreme Court).

[13] Lunney (Alexander G.) & c. v Prodigy Services Company et al. (1999) 99 NY Int 0165.

[14] [2001] QB 201.

Internet liable for the defamatory statement hosted on its server. He said that the defendants Demon knew of the defamatory posting but chose not to remove it from their Usenet news group servers (this service is no longer in use).

Dr. Godfrey was awarded £15,000 plus legal costs, totalling £200,000, by Demon Internet. The judgement sent the message to ISPs and operators of websites in the UK that they were publishers which in turn gave rise to the unwelcome practice of ISPs simply removing material upon complaints without a great deal of scrutiny, causing a chilling effect on freedom of expression and freedom to receive information. The common law message in *Godfrey* had been clear: an ISP was a publisher not a mere 'conduit' of information. Demon's defence argument in court wore rather thin with the High Court when it referred to US case law such as the *Prodigy* case on electronic commerce where US law clearly states that an ISP is only 'hosting' information on its servers.

As English common law developed, we saw a groundbreaking judgement by Mrs. Justice Sharp, in Budu v BBC (2010),[15] when she ruled that publishers *cannot* be held liable for libellous material republished out of context on internet search engines. The case concerned a long-running dispute between the BBC and Ghanaian-born Sam Budu. When putting his own name into the Google search engine, he had found three articles about himself which he claimed as libellous. The BBC had reported that Cambridgeshire Police had been compelled to withdraw a job offer from Mr. Budu when it transpired that he was an illegal immigrant. The High Court deemed that neither a search engine nor operator of website, such as the BBC, should face libel claims for republished material accessed only via its web-archives and Mrs. Justice Sharp ruled that the BBC was not liable for the Google 'snippets'.

A couple of years later, the question whether an ISP was a 'publisher' was raised once again in *Tamiz v Google inc.* (2012).[16] Google argued successfully in this case that it was *not* a publisher for the purposes of the English libel laws. And even if Google was to be regarded as a publisher of the words complained of by Payam Tamiz, the ISP argued that it was protected against liability by Regulation 19 of the Electronic Commerce (EC Directive) Regulations 2002.

The difference between a news media organisation and social media companies is that a media organisation whether in print or online is a publisher. There is then not only a semantic difference between 'platform' and 'publisher' but also a legal one. Media companies publish views, news, editorials and opinions. The BBC, Reuters, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun* or the *Glasgow Herald* all make editorial decisions about what news to publish, have editorial boards, publish op-ed pieces and make every effort possible to fact-check (and fact-check again) about every single item they publish. If they publish a defamatory article about a high-profile individual, such as Johnny Depp, they can expect to be sued in court as ample case law tells us.

[15] [2010] EWHC 616 (QB).
[16] [2012] EWHC 449 (QB).

We have plenty of cases which deal in both UK and EU human rights law that deal with an individual's privacy challenge against the media, fighting for their freedom of expression right either under Article 10 ECHR or under the common law journalistic defence of the public interest, such as we have seen in famous cases, *Douglas v Hello!* (2001),[17] *Naomi Campbell* (2004),[18] *Max Mosley* (2008)[19] and the v*on Hannover No 1* (2005)[20] and *2* (2012)[21] actions.

Looking to the Future

Now out of the European Union, the UK Government faces a choice as to whether it will respond to these challenges with a strategy based on values, or whether it will opt for a more nationalist approach, potentially jeopardising civil liberties, diplomacy and the economy in the process. While the likelihood is that the UK Government's digital policy will continue to follow the EU's in the short term, the government has the option to follow a more divergent agenda in future, which could undermine the right to privacy and freedom of information online.

The Online Safety Bill 2022–23 assigns functions to Ofcom in relation to online harms' regulation and sets out strict new guidelines governing removal of illegal content such as child sexual abuse, terrorist material and social media that promotes suicide, which sites must obey, or face being blocked in the UK. Regulator Ofcom would oversee and enforce compliance. The bill stalled due to the Covid pandemic and has progressed somewhat slowly through the UK Parliament due to prime ministerial changes from Boris Johnson to Liz Truss in 2022. However, should the new controversial law come into force it would apply to all companies that host user-generated content such as images, videos and comments, or allow UK users to talk with other people online through messaging, comments and forums. It would also apply to search engines because they play a significant role in enabling individuals to access harmful content online. The proposed legislation envisages safeguards for freedom of expression and pluralism online—protecting people's rights to participate in society and engage in robust debate.

The Digital Economy Act 2017 Part 3 Enforcement Bill, introduced in the HL by Baroness Howe of Idlicote in June 2021, seeks to enforce the remaining sections of Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 that deal with pornographic material on internet services. It would give Ofcom the power to require internet service providers to block access to pornographic material.

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[17] *Douglas v Hello! Ltd* [2001] QB 967; [2001] 2 WLR 992.

[18] *Campbell (Naomi) v Mirror Group Newspapers Ltd* [2004] 2 AC 457, [2004] UKHL 22.

[19] *Mosley (Max) v Newsgroup Newspapers Ltd* [2008] EWHC 1777 (QB).

[20] *von Hannover v Germany (No 1)* (2005) 40 EHRR 1 (Application no 59320/00), [2004] EMLR 21 (ECtHR).

[21] *von Hannover v Germany (No 2)* [2012] ECHR 228; (2012) (Application Numbers – 40,660/08, 60,641/08) Judgment of 7 February 2012; *Axel Springer v Germany* (2012) (Application No 39954/08) Judgment of 7 February 2012 (ECtHR (Grand Chamber) (ECtHR).

The EU Commission's Paper 'Shaping Europe's Digital Future' of February 2020 outlines the EU's digital future strategy and a commitment to invest in digital competences for all European member states, including: protecting its citizens from cyber threats, such as hacking, ransomware and identity theft and ensuring Artificial Intelligence is developed in ways that respect people's rights.

Conclusion and Questions

We conclude with the question, 'does the regulation of online services amount to a breach freedom of expression?' Freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR includes not only the inoffensive, but also the irritating, the contentious, the eccentric, the heretical, the unwelcome and the provocative, provided it does not tend to provoke violence. Should the big tech companies be able to self-regulate content on their platforms or has the time come for legislation by governments, such as the proposed UK statutory regulation?

The best deal the IT firms can strike with governments is to have clear and verifiable rules on how they publish and moderate content, helping users own, control and profit from their own data; as well as fair treatment of competitors that use their platforms. EU governments will be judged on how they deal with media plurality, freedom of expression, balancing the right to speak up online versus the spread of misinformation and hate speech on their platforms.

We are then left with the age-old question: can the internet be regulated at all? We are left with uncertainty in the global laws. Is it right that social network providers are self-regulating content on their platforms by blocking and deleting offensive posts and individuals' accounts which may well amount to online censorship?

Appendix 1: The Facebook Oversight Board Members (2021)

- Catalina Botero-Marino, a Colombian attorney who was the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States from 2008 to 2014. Presently Dean of the Universidad de los Andes Faculty of Law.
- Jamal Greene, a Columbia law professor whose scholarship focuses on constitutional rights adjudication and the structure of the legal and constitutional argument. Greene was a law clerk for former U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens.
- Michael McConnell, a constitutional law professor at Stanford Law School, was a U.S. federal circuit judge appointed by President George W. Bush, once a possible U.S. Supreme Court nominee. McConnell is an expert on religious freedom and is a Supreme Court advocate who has previously represented clients in First Amendment cases.

- Helle Thorning-Schmidt was the first woman prime minister of Denmark. Thorning-Schmidt is a Social Democrat who led a coalition government from 2011 to 2015 and later served as chief executive of the charity organisation, Save the Children International.
- Afia Asantewaa Asare-Kyei, a dual citizen of Ghana and South Africa, is a human rights advocate focusing on women's rights, media freedom and access to information issues across Africa at the Open Society Initiative for West Africa.
- Evelyn Aswad, a University of Oklahoma law professor, was a senior U.S. State Department lawyer. Aswad specialises in the application of international human rights standards to content moderation issues.
- Endy Bayuni, an Indonesian journalist who twice served as the editor-in-chief of the *Jakarta Post*, involved with media advocacy organisations.
- Katherine Chen, a former national communications regulator in Taiwan. Chen is a professor in public relations and statistics at Taiwan's National Chengchi University. Her research focuses on social media, mobile news and privacy.
- Nighat Dad, a Pakistani lawyer and internet activist who runs the Digital Rights Foundation, a non-profit organisation focused on cyber harassment, data protection and free speech online in Pakistan and South Asia.
- Suzanne Nossel, CEO at PEN America, a non-profit organisation. Nossel was previously Chief Operating Officer of Human Rights Watch, an executive director of Amnesty International USA. Nossel has also held roles in the administrations of former U.S. Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton.
- Tawakkol Karman, a Yemeni human rights activist and journalist who became the first Arab woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her nonviolent push for change during the Arab Spring.
- Maina Kiai, a Kenyan lawyer and human rights activist who is director of Human Rights Watch's Global Alliances and Partnerships Program. Kiai also served as the United Nations special rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association from 2011 to 2017.
- Sudhir Krishnaswamy, the vice chancellor of the National Law School of India University, a civil society activist and an expert on constitutional law in India.
- Ronaldo Lemos is a Brazilian academic and lawyer who co-created a national internet rights law in Brazil and co-founded a non-profit focused on technology and policy issues. Lemos teaches law at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.
- Julie Owono, a lawyer and the executive director of Internet Sans Frontières, a digital rights organisation based in France. Owono campaigns against internet censorship in Africa and around the world.
- Emi Palmor, a former director-general of the Israeli Ministry of Justice who led initiatives to address racial discrimination and advance access to justice via digital services and platforms.

- Alan Rusbridger, a British journalist who was the editor-in-chief of the *Guardian* newspaper. Rusbridger is principal of Lady Margaret Hall, an Oxford College.
- Andras Sajo, a Hungarian legal academic and former judge at the European Court of Human Rights. Sajo is an expert in comparative constitutionalism and was involved in the drafting of the Ukrainian, Georgian and South African constitutions.
- John Samples is a vice president at the Cato Institute, a U.S. libertarian think tank. Samples advocates against restrictions on online expression and writes on social media and speech regulation.
- Nicolas Suzor, an associate law professor at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia who studies the governance of social networks and the regulation of automated systems
- For current members see: https://www.oversightboard.com/meet-the-board/

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Fake News Deconstructed Teens and Civic Engagement: Can Tomorrow's Voters Spontaneously Become News Literate?

Katerina Chryssanthopoulou

Introduction

Civic engagement, power and information are closely connected. Teenagers care about what goes on in the world, they want to act to cure inequalities and injustice; but do they have the power to get engaged? With the exception of those adolescents who are able to participate in voluntary activities for their community, the main spaces where most can act are within their family or school environments—and online.

In the multiple online public spheres of racial, ethnic, religious, sexual and political diversity, people of all ages, backgrounds or orientations develop views and share information, contributing to public debates. Online advocacy is gaining ground, while during the pandemic we have seen whole social movements developing on social networks—as the Greek #MeToo in early 2021 (Chryssanthopoulou, 2021). Minors, though one out of three internet users, are not adequately represented as a social group therein, especially as regards issues of power: their rights and responsibilities, their needs and abilities or opportunities for public discourse (Livingstone, 2020). Thus, they constitute a marginalised group, turning for information to alternative media (McKee, 2005).

Teenagers (children in general) are under-represented in news—except in contexts of health or protection, as beneficiaries of online advice for parents.

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Although teens are ardent internet users they lag behind in the production of online public content. Moreover, mainstream news channels seem unattractive to youth for reasons of trust, language, aesthetics and credibility (Robb, 2017a, b; Madden et al., 2017) so they seek alternative sources of information.

In this chapter I attempt to examine online news consumption of adolescents and compare it to adults' relevant behaviours (drawing from a recent case study and my doctoral research on news literacy respectively). In order to record teenagers' habits a focus group was formed for the purposes of this chapter in Attica, Greece, in summer 2021, with 19 urban high school students aged 13–15 that was conducted by means of structured interviews guided by a set questionnaire. The aim was to provide a snapshot of those teens' online news consumption habits, their self-assessment of media literacy, their interest in social issues, their understanding of media roles and fake news and the tools they use to fact check the information they receive and/or circulate on social networks. I found that though they show low levels of trust in professional journalism and they prefer alternative news sources, they seem to believe they are adequately and correctly informed about the world through their social media feeds. Nevertheless, they would be willing to follow professional media especially edited for their age, for example, in the form of a teens-news-webpage, as the experimental original website with news for teenagers I presented them after the interview, inviting them to provide comments both on the particular project and on the idea of being informed about the news via such a dedicated source.[1]

Teens and Information

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reduced the social life of Greek teenagers, who had to stay at home for many months during consecutive lockdowns across two academic years; so, screens were their only window to the world and digital devices were their main communication and expression channel. Even before the pandemic though, social media were the established means via which they received information.

Despite easy access to information, a teenager can grow up in a vacuum of socially meaningful content, as regards how society is organised, or the ways to get civically involved (Liningstone, 2002). Fragmented media create alternative realities for the young internet users. How ready are they (the voters and decision makers of tomorrow) to discern genuine information from fake? Can they spontaneously become news literate or do they need to be educated on sorting truth from fiction?

Their social media feeds combine private and public posts and stories along with news based on the algorithm of each platform, the behaviour of fellow networkers and the views of opinion leaders and influencers. Though this is an

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[1] The experimental website (under construction) with news for teenagers that I have built can be accessed here https://katerinachr.wixsite.com/medialand-demo1/eidiseis

incidental way of getting the news, teenagers tend to believe that they are adequately informed about the world around them—or at least the people and issues they care about—and that they are able to differentiate truth from fiction.

Mihailidis (2009) has documented that civic engagement and MIL[2] are closely connected. Skills related to information behaviour are linked to civic and political participation, especially the selection and sharing of information in order to urge people to become aware of certain issues or to act. Today, though, youth consumes news in an "a la carte" model via incidental exposure on social networking sites, where they are particularly exposed to misinformation and unreliable content (Greek Safer Internet Center, 2019).

Within this environment, and echoing Barber's (1984) framework of participatory politics, teenagers have to understand the world and find ways to express their voice. Their digital civic engagement activity receives input from what Jenkins et al. (2006) call "transmedia navigation" where "transmedia judgment" is the set of abilities to make judgements and use in a meaningful way the information accessed across multiple media formats and produced by various authors (Eurobarometer, 2018; National Literacy Trust, 2018a, b; Ofcom, 2019). Fake news spreads quickly on social media due to irresponsible thinking or biased intentions; nevertheless, applications like Tik Tok, despite loads of fake content, remain the preferred media for teenagers.

On the other hand, research on motivated reasoning (Redlawsk, 2002; Marsh et al., 2016; Kahneman, 2011) suggests that social attitudes online can be influenced by emotional responses to information as well as ideology and beliefs, which can act as barriers when trying to accurately assess media and their content. Motivated reasoning has been linked to the formation of beliefs when encountering misinformation (Bago et al., 2020); the "belonging to a group" motive, especially, can lead teenagers to news consumption strategies that could strengthen discussions on socially insignificant issues. Network users seem to wish to belong to online communities and seem to be willing to adopt the views of their media fellows or peers and adopt stereotypical behaviours (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Studies emphasise the importance of the internet for young people and in particular the information sharing process when they want to express their identities, to engage in communities and to maintain social connections with peers (Livingstone, 2009; Singer et al., 2009). Things become more complex as engagement with news online takes place in a more complex way compared to traditional formats, due to embedded links and other functionalities.

One should consider, though, that most studies are based on self-assessment of the investigated skills. It has been argued that reporting bias can act as a serious distortion in the findings of such research (Middaugh, 2018); in other words, many people do not necessarily believe what they report or they follow certain streams of information only for fun or out of curiosity. According to

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[2] Media & Information Literacy.

Levy et al. (2020) assertion of belief may be inflated by insincere reporting, whether to express support for an issue or simply for fun; in other words, reporting is not a robust way to reach the "truth" of young internet users' convictions about truth.

Power Versus Meaning

Incidental news consumption may allow teenagers to avoid political or other important stories in favour of trivia; as social media offer the same structural and aesthetic shell to any content, categorisation is not self-evident. Also, it has been argued that when teens follow the news, they seem to be "attracted disproportionately to stories that have little or no public affairs content" (Patterson, 2007). Moreover, drawing systematically from "friends" can create "echo chambers" where individuals are exposed only to views that match their own (Schaeffer, 2019). On the other hand, other studies show that it is common on social networking sites to access new political ideas and differing opinions (Clark & Van Slyke, 2010).

According to Livingstone (2018) the general public's five great struggles with mis/dis-information today, which undermine a whole spectrum of social operations, from individual decision making to democratic governance, are

1. confusion in what to believe (due to rapid media change, superabundance of sources, lack of orientation, hyper-partisan views, native advertising, etc.) due to "information pollution" (Council of Europe, 2017);
2. cynicism (news readers lose trust, even in trustworthy sources, especially youth; information warfare and hate speech destabilise confidence and give rise to new forms of social antagonism);
3. fragmentation (due to lack of structure of online information, and due to parallel narratives online forming different worlds of "truth politics");
4. irresponsible behaviours (sources that lack ethical codes of responsibility, accountability and transparency, abuse of platforms and lack of means to moderate content and info-quality);
5. apathy (where citizens disengage from society and lose faith in institutions and democratic values and functions).

Digital Civic Engagement

The term refers to the set of interpersonal or group activities young people "perform" online (e.g., information, discussions, advocacy or mobilisation) (Cho et al., 2020): adopt and express views on private or public matters, construct personal, social and civic identities, attach meaning to social or political concepts, decide about matters of their communities, express themselves and amplify their voices, enter into advocacy activities and learn how to take part in public discourse (Buckingham,1999). Patterns and styles of digital engagement vary for different age groups as they become digital citizens, namely, as

they learn to use the internet in a safe and responsible manner for the benefit of themselves, their groups and their community, and become able to use technology in order to fulfil their civic duty (Mosseberger & McNeal, 2007).

In this context, it is important to know the landscapes, enablers and constraints of cyber communities and the impact on young people's digital civic engagement vis-a-vis the power relations in between young internet users and organisations that attract their attention. According to a UNICEF study (Cho et al., 2020, p. 8):

> Civic engagement by adolescents is particularly important because: 1) education in and exposure to civic issues at an early age is foundational to creating future engaged civic actors; and 2) a sense of sociopolitical empowerment is associated with young people's self-esteem and well-being.

Digital civic engagement relates to both traditional civic engagement and online practices:

> Relatively small acts of investigation (seeking out information), dialogue and feedback (commenting on media), circulation, and production of media become meaningful acts of civic participation when done in an online, networked setting that combines small acts over time and across people. (Middaugh, 2018 p. 35)

Apart from distorting information as such, "fake news" can have adverse consequences in civic and political life and people need ways to evaluate information and reason about its accuracy; this is especially urgent for younger internet users, who may not be able to contextualise online content. However, with regard to exposure to dis-/misinformation, being influenced by partisan actors may not be the most important concern for young people; a more serious problem is that they get accustomed to perceiving the environment of social media applications as their natural habitat, thus fostering certain types of thinking.

Motivational Reasoning and MIL Self-assessment

Part of my doctoral research (*Media and Information Literacy in Knowledge Societies: Information and Learning Through Modern Literacies*) focuses on the behaviour of adult online news consumers in relation to their self-assessment of their capacity to assess accuracy of information and to motivational reasoning patterns. My research (*n* = 1305 active graduate and post-graduate university students) aims to explore how information is perceived in the digital media landscape, how knowledge and beliefs are constructed and what kinds of skills are required to critically evaluate information. Part of the questionnaire examines whether awareness of and/or familiarisation with news literacy concepts affects how the news consumer becomes informed in relation to the behaviour of fellow networkers (e.g., likes, shares, comments, etc.) and whether motivational reasoning can be considered as a constituent of such behaviour.

Though the process of data analysis was still ongoing at the time this chapter was written, the first statistical analyses show a small correlation between news consumption habits, awareness of the media, information and news literacy concepts and dependence on the behaviour of trusted others; for example, adults who are familiar with MIL concepts are less affected by user comments when reading news on social media and can manage information more efficiently than those who are not so sure what news literacy is. This finding shows the importance of academic knowledge and learning: not only being aware of what we need to do when we encounter misinformation, but also knowing what the concepts mean, what kinds of skills we learn, why we need them and what are the purposes of employing critical and analytical thinking when accessing news online.

Another interesting finding is that although MIL is not included in the formal curriculum of Greek high school or university courses, those who have spontaneously somehow built a conceptual scaffolding of relevant academic knowledge do better in judging reliable from unreliable information.

CASE STUDY FOCUS GROUP

In order to understand the online information consumption habits of a less empowered group, Greek teenagers, a case study was conducted aiming to record how adolescents get the news, whether they fact check the information, which are their preferred media and how they relate with social and power issues through their online interaction, considering responsible, ethical and accountable behaviours online and critical thinking in general. Motivations behind their behaviours were also discussed.

A random focus group of 19 female and male youths aged 13–15 were recruited from a resort in Attica, Greece, and were interviewed during the school holiday period August–September 2021 on the topics of online news consumption, fake news and fact-checking strategies. None had taken any MIL courses or workshops. The objective was to learn about their habits in news consumption in relation to content reliability and whether and how they create or share content on social issues as a form of advocacy in their digital civic engagement practice in relation to the accuracy of such information. Empirical data were coded using thematic analysis matrices (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and qualitative criteria. This approach was deemed appropriate as the questions and discussion with the respondents were designed to examine specific themes from within the news literacy bibliography. Specifically, answers were analysed to see

(a) whether and how certain criteria (content accuracy, motivational reasoning, trustworthiness of news, personal interests, behaviour of fellow networkers) influenced users' judgment when choosing to read, evaluate and share news content (i. in general and ii. for advocacy reasons);

(b) what kind of strategies users applied in order to assess accuracy and credibility of online news content and what challenges they faced; and

(c) whether specific interventions (i.e., especially edited news content in dedicated media) could restore their trust in professional news sources.

The qualitative case study showed that interviewees are frequently exposed to news through social networks (incidentally or on purpose). News content is being accessed in variable ways and "being informed about the world" took on various definitions. While very few respondents had spontaneously started to establish systematic news consumption habits, nonetheless all seemed to consider that they are adequately informed about what is worthwhile. Opinions of trusted others rather than objective journalism seem to be the preferred source of information about issues of concern, especially when teens made choices about what to circulate for the purposes of raising awareness about a social issue. Most were self-assessed as media savvy; however, when asked how they will behave as voters in a few years from now, they seemed to turn to authorities to get information (mainly their parents, or secondarily mainstream TV news or newspapers). Google seemed to be the preferable tool for lateral reading, this being their spontaneous[3] main fact-checking strategy, when checking the accuracy of news sources.

In particular, the findings showed the following.

As regards their behaviour as news consumers, all participants reported that they try to be careful readers: they pay attention to the source of an article or a post or the link where they are redirected and whenever any news attracts their interest they try to fact check information. Four responded that they access the website of particular online newspapers to read the news. All reported that they get informed about what goes on in the world mainly through social media and none of them read paper editions of newspapers, no matter whether they have access to them at home. Social platforms were reported as their main news sources, with Tik Tok topping preferences (especially for girls), followed by Instagram and YouTube. Most said they prefer video over text "to learn the facts" (e.g., TV clips) and claimed that visual content "is easier to find online"; the few who reported that they prefer text said that "only this way you can learn details". Another girl said she had subscribed to a "certain website" (a news aggregator) that her teacher had suggested and browsed the content daily. None read print newspapers. Most would incidentally watch or just hear news on TV when their parents were watching; a girl said that "the noise of the news is disturbing me when I try to listen to music". Only one said that she intentionally watches the news on TV on a regular basis and three received notifications from online newspapers on their computers. However most said

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[3] The word "spontaneous" used in the chapter refers to the fact that no curricular teaching or guidance had been delivered to the participants regarding fact-checking methods.

that they would follow some important event when older family members happened to be watching the news on TV or the radio and search about it "on the internet". Overall, most teens found TV news boring, unappealing and irrelevant to their lives.

As has been shown in similar studies (Marchi, 2012) our focus group revealed that teens have their own definitions about what is news, what it means to be informed and how information is being accessed. All respondents reported that they regularly get news from their friends' posts, which serve as trusted news "filters". Many valued the ability to connect instantly to friends online and tap on ongoing conversations about news via reading/posting comments and/or content on social media content. A few said that they liked how online comments gave them the opportunity to read various opinions on issues or gain access to sources that they would otherwise miss. Three teens prided themselves on being open-minded and able to "hear the other side". In general, the crowd seemed a strong filter for credibility: "if many of my friends post it, it must be true".

With reference to the content that they prefer to read, personal interests were critical motives for teens in our sample; they tended to prefer opinionated content (from friends and/or influencers) rather than objective news sources. Experience and personal views were important criteria for most to choose what to believe from what they read (a girl responded that "even when I ensure accuracy of a piece of news that is contrary to my beliefs, I prefer to stick to my own views"). Reference to social issues was important for most teenagers when deciding whether news are worth reading; however, while all said that they care for social issues only three reported that they had followed the series of accusations of sexual harassments that flooded Greek newspapers in early 2021, while, only two of them said that they knew the term MeToo, when asked about its definition. On the other hand, however, most had read and many had shared posts about BLM—this shows a low degree of locality and relevance in the social media content they prefer to read and/or reproduce. Even on social issues, most tended to prefer opinionated content (from friends and/or influencers) rather than objective sources. A few said they would refer to a trusted newspaper to check whether an online controversial rumour was true.

All participants showed overconfidence in knowing how to differentiate truth from fiction in online information. In general, though, they showed very low trust in the news, whatever the source (TV, social platforms, online newspapers or friends); this mistrust affected credibility of all information horizontally.

All interviewees reported that they check content accuracy in the news they consume. In order to assess news content, they would employ strategies they drew from their own experience or from peers' habits; no participant had received any training whatsoever in such tasks at school or another formal context. So, they would verify online information by employing whatever ad hoc strategies seemed more appropriate to them, which varied a lot and included a

whole spectrum of different types of checks: from methods requiring scholastic effort, as for example explicit fact checking (reading multiple sources, searching for credibility indicators, cross checking against trusted sites or offline sources), to the use of naïve credibility indicators (as for example "looks professional" or "seems right" or "has facts"). Lateral reading was their main strategy to check accuracy and Google was the main fact-checking tool, as the main browser to search for evidence. All participants reported that factual accuracy and credibility were the main criteria to evaluate information and that knowing about the source or the author was one of the top strategies to check reliability; in practice, though, it seemed that many employed rather intuitive criteria such as personal knowledge or compatibility with personal views or social and emotional elements—in fact too many emotional elements in articles were reported as indicators of misinformation.

On the other hand, media ownership and bias were not spontaneously mentioned as a criterion by any respondent; however, when asked whether authors of online content presented information in an objective manner most said that all authors seek to benefit from online audiences (following motives of profit or self-promotion). Furthermore, recency of information was not mentioned as a criterion; and media power seemed not well understood.

As regards producing content or sharing misinformation they replied that they would never share content based on the appearance of newsworthy information if "they believed" that it was not accurate; in contrast to other studies (e.g. CHECK-M by Herrero-Diz et al., 2020) they would not share content that connected to their interests if they judged it as not true. No respondent had shared something false during the last 6 months (contrary to similar studies, e.g., the 2017 Common Sense Media survey where from those who had shared news in the last 6 months 31% had shared something false). When asked why they would create or share content related to social issues most answered "to inform others" (advocacy) or "because it is interesting" while none mentioned their own popularity as a motivation. Concerning fake news, several teenagers questioned their value because they believed they are short lived ("why create false content? Soon the truth will come out") especially in personal reporting (e.g., when uploading fake content to get more likes); a girl said, "what is the benefit of a person to lie? truth will eventually come out and then they will be ashamed".

When asked how they would learn about political parties and/or candidates when becoming first time voters when turning 17, half of the respondents said that they would extensively check the candidates' bios and deeds in all available means and ways while all said that they will rely on their parents to guide them. In general, all teenagers in this focus group reported that civic engagement is their intention when reading the news, but there are issues of power that they cannot resolve by themselves; for example, one girl (14) said that "we care about the world, there are so many problems out there, but the issue is that our parents have to get us to where the problems are, only this way we can act; otherwise, our only power is to inform others via online networks". All

respondents stated that they were interested in civic issues, democracy and advocacy, they read about such matters and some choose to act on them (by informing others); thus, our findings, although from a small sample, do not confirm the disengaged youth paradigm (Bennett, 2008).

Most respondents seem to be capable of efficient reasoning and all seemed to systematically employ specific strategies to fact check the stories they come across, no matter how effective in objective terms. They all seemed to be aware of how people are represented in the media and how stereotypes work, though most were not familiar with the concept of (good and bad) propaganda (Hobbs & McGee, 2014). Some mentioned that social media can influence our perceptions and most seemed to be aware of the ethical dimensions of sharing accurate information in a responsible manner.

Some seemed to use "unorthodox" sources to access specialised knowledge; for example, a girl reported she had understood complex economic concepts and managed to contextualise the financial crisis in Greece by reading Skroutz McDuck comics; this is an example of how multiple media formats have to be considered by researchers as youth's trusted information sources.

They all valued accuracy and truth in reporting, but journalism in general was not highly appreciated; three teens said that journalists are paid by the prime minister to convey specific positions. On the contrary, parents were reported as a safe shelter for information. Only one boy mentioned that news curated by professional journalists can be considered truthful or trustworthy. Most described "traditional" news forms as "boring", "difficult to follow" or "pursuing their own benefits". In contrast, they felt that postings by friends or accounts they follow on social media, or content on the Tik Tok landing page ("For You"), or YouTube videos and Google searches provided more trustworthy information (presented along with context and interpretations), and considered these as more authentic and useful news sources. Interestingly enough, when asked "how do you think Google returns all this information to your searches?" most answered that "some people publish it there", while very few seemed to be aware of the difference between a social media platform feed (private posts) and Google search result pages (publicly published content); in other words, many seemed to think that a search engine aggregator and a social media algorithm draw from similar sources and work in a similar manner. Only one out of all interviewees spontaneously mentioned the word "algorithm" while only three could mention an alternative search engine; they all seemed to believe that they can find all necessary true information on Google.

Comparing the teenagers' answers to the average in my PhD sample[4] we see several differences, for example:

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[4] Analysis of my research findings is still ongoing.

1–7 Likert question (self-assessment)	Adults' average	Adolescents' average
I believe that via my online activity I can have an impact on my community	3.1	7
I am always informed about current events	3.9	6
I feel that my smartphone, tablet or pc is part of myself	4.15	5.5
When my friends upload content on social media I press "Like" without reading it	0.8	1
When I am misinformed from the media, I also have responsibility	3.2	2
Reading the same news from different sources can help me avoid misinformation	2.9	6
When I read news on social media the source is an important criterion to decide whether to share it	3.8	6
When I read news on social media the person who posted it is an important criterion to decide whether to share it	4	3
It is important for me to have opinions on everything	3.4	7

Overall, source of information seems a stronger criterion for youth to trust news, rather than the person who uploads the content, contrary to adults, though other people are trusted sources more for adolescents than adults; at the same time, teens seemed to believe that media have greater share of responsibility than the readers as regards spread of misinformation and they cross-check all worthwhile information (no matter with which method). Adolescents need to have an opinion on everything, they think that they are adequately informed about all the issues that interest them and believe that via their online activity they can have an impact on their communities.

MEDIA LITERACY AGAINST DISINFORMATION: NEWS ENGAGEMENT—NEWS LITERACY

Most experts advocate media and news literacy education and developing critical thinking skills as the antidote to disinformation (McDougall et al., 2018; European Commission, 2018) and that fake news threats can be cured by appropriate education so that digital natives do not act as "digital naïves" (= not question reliability of the information they consume but be guided by emotion or rumour) (Schulten, 2015).

Informed decisions are essential for involvement in the community and Media Literacy has been linked to civic engagement and power interactions within society (Mihailidis, 2009). As regards youth civic engagement within their communities various studies assume that knowing how to detect false information leads to better decisions in terms of content and media consumption and production, sharing and commenting; and indicate strategies for assessing youth abilities to evaluate accuracy (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Hobbs, 2017; Martens & Hobbs, 2015). Middaugh (2018) considers complexity of online information and brain malleability of adolescents and proposes to expose

them to all kinds of real content, for them to employ critical reasoning or reflection (arguing that most studies place minors in front of information that is irrelevant to their interests or the issues that affect them). Critical thinking skills are considered by most as a valuable weapon against fake news; however, some researchers (Levy & Ross, 2020) wonder whether the capacity to distinguish fake news from real (analytical thinking) reduces fake news sharing practices. Some answer yes (e.g., Pennycook et al., 2020) but others fail to find an association (e.g., Osmundsen et al., 2021).

Civic media literacy is the ability to use information process skills with "civic intentionality" in the context of everyday participation and practices (search, evaluation and circulation of media) and civic intentions (issue advocacy, etc.) with focus on democratic principles (Mihailidis, 2018), but civic education that focuses merely on skills attainment seems to lead to lower interest in dialogue and participation (Mihailidis, 2009). Moreover, contextualisation plays its role along with interpretation of concepts and media functions; also important are the language and narrative artifacts employed.

Yet, according to Middaugh (2018), everyday media-use practices aiming at civic information and expression seem not to comply with such assumptions. First, for teenagers, who lack world knowledge and experience, it is not enough to detect (and discard) false information; what is more important is to decide how to compile "imperfect" information (e.g., first-hand experience (theirs or their peers'), opinions or fragments of facts) into their understanding of an issue and its context and meaning (McGrew et al., 2018). Second, humans do not interact with information in a linear process (access, fact check, circulate, etc.). Thirdly, in the case of social issues or empowerment, objectivity is not always the main criterion; rather, emotional, moral and social considerations weigh a lot in deciding whether stories represent experiences of the world (as we perceive it and as we want it to be). Moreover, Buckingham (2019) wonders whether critical skills can be instilled via education, due to the time and effort invested in validating information, especially by youth, who are accustomed to instant access to information. But, if traditional teaching methods cannot work, how could youth become spontaneously news literate?

Scaffolding: News for Adolescents

Findings show that news sources compliant with objectivity standards are unappealing to youth who dislike the aesthetics, structure of information presented and marketing model, while they find content either irrelevant or misrepresentative of adolescents and their concerns (Clark & Marchi, 2017; Common Sense Media, 2017a, b).

However, in the case of our focus group even those that stated disinterested in news seemed attracted to a specially compiled news site that elaborates on few important issues in simple yet comprehensive language offering contextualisation and interpretation of the issue's surrounding social, political and pragmatic environment but without providing views. Contrary to opinion leaders

in social media, such a website may bring attention to news that would have otherwise been disregarded, especially on issues of advocacy, social identity, civic engagement, politics, education, the pandemic, and so on, at the same time delivering context, interpretation and social perspective.

The experimental website with news for adolescents that was used for the focus group received fairly good critique: all participants said they would be interested to visit such a website on a regular basis in order to be informed of the current news. All said that language was attractive, content was relevant and interesting, and the presentation of the topics was comprehensive and gave them food for thought and a tool to search further for what would strike their interest. One boy mentioned the criterion of reliability of such a source, saying that we should ensure that the organisation behind such endeavour should be objective and widely acknowledged.[5] They all welcomed the possibility that such a website would provide links to courses, podcasts and training materials, too.

Conclusions and Implications for Research and Practice

All respondents in our focus group understood that not all media can be trusted and they avoid misinformation by examining the sources. They seemed aware of the ethics of sharing news in everyday practice. Moreover, they are interested in social issues and advocacy practices and wish to learn how to become empowered and engaged in society, not just as consumers of goods and services but as contributors of ideas; having purchasing power does not make a person socially active. In order to engage in an effective and ethical way, youth need to know how to get accurately informed as one of their fundamental rights, how to express their voice in the public sphere and how to assume responsibilities, so that they learn how expression of opinions and decision making can impact others (Tickle, 2018).

As media education is not included in school curricula, external scaffolding could provide the environment for teenagers to become empowered and develop the necessary critical skills to judge, reason and take informed decisions, disrupting the social media environments with well-structured interventions available online (McMane, 2007; OECD, 2018). The subject of misinformation and youth is usually analysed in tasks of assessing credibility and producing media (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Hobbs, 2010; Martens & Hobbs, 2015), but not so systematically discussed in relation to how teens circulate content with a civic engagement intention—this needs to be examined, too.

Strategies should also be considered. In our focus group lateral reading was the preferred one; thus, development of relevant skills could complement schoolwork (as in the example of "Civic Online Reasoning" teachings by SHEG, Stanford History Education Group, 2021). Skills related to search,

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[5] Important note: all participants knew that I had curated the website.

credibility analysis and circulating content for the purposes of issue advocacy could be developed, coupled with knowledge related to the social and emotional components of civic media (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Peer groups can be the basis for youth to learn how to extend their involvement into civic engagement behaviours. Moreover, as regards cognitive development during adolescence, it can be challenging for youth to balance social and emotional influences from online content while engaged in logical reasoning; thus, support and practice in balancing these elements may be needed (Middaugh, 2018).

Professional journalism has been reported that can contribute to educating younger ages in how to discern accurate information inside or outside the classroom (Wineburg, 2016a, b); however, there may be a gap in current approaches to teaching civic media literacy. Moreover, if parents are found to be a trusted source for information and guidance on issues teens cannot check, family news literacy education could also be considered.

So, it seems that the reasoning is there; the key is to put it into context and into action. Can adolescents—or people of all ages—intuitively become news literate? Is formal training needed or could scaffolding efforts suffice? Which could be the set of "content sharing ethics" that continuously evolves alongside technology? How can digital civic media literacy education include issues of teens' empowerment? And what about methodological threats: can lab experiments, for example, or self-assessment and self-reporting capture real-world behaviour? These questions remain for future research.

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Peace, Public Opinion and Disinformation in Colombia: Social Media and Its Role in the 2016 Plebiscite

Jesús Arroyave and Martha Romero-Moreno

COLOMBIA, THE WAR AND THE PEACE PROCESSES

The English saying goes that "the first casualty of war is the truth". More than half a century of internal conflict in Colombia has corroborated the truth of this saying. Partisan journalism, propaganda, manipulation of information by the main actors in the conflict, censorship and control of information by the official authorities, management of information that benefits the interests of the economic groups that own many media outlets and intimidation of journalists to prevent them from publishing information that affects some of the actors have been a constant feature of the media that report on the conflict. As a result, disinformation has substantially affected the fundamental right of citizens to be well informed and to make decisions that contribute to paths that will lead to peace.

A brief review of the country's recent history reminds us that from the political violence that polarised the country due to the power struggle of the two traditional parties (liberal and conservative) at the beginning of the twentieth century, we would move on to armed violence, with the emergence of different

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insurgent movements since the mid-twentieth century, initially linked to peasant groups excluded from political power. Other subversive movements would emerge later, with a more urban affiliation, made up of young university students interested in political and social change, inspired by other similar actions that took place in the continent. The exacerbated economic and social inequality, exclusion, lack of opportunity, and clientelism, and political corruption that obstructs social and economic progress have been circumstances that have fuelled the conflict. Since the middle of the last century, Colombia has become the Latin American country with the oldest guerrilla movement and one of the longest internal conflicts in the world.

From the 80s of the last century, the prosperous drug trafficking business with its enormous money management led to the emergence of powerful drug cartels, which intervened in a definitive way in the political, economic and social life of the country. Drug money soon became the fuel that financed different actors in the conflict, including the guerrillas and paramilitaries. Control of the areas where drugs were produced and circulated gave these groups the ability to receive large amounts of money, which in turn were used to finance the purchase of weapons and the recruitment of new members. The paramilitary groups outlawed armies financed by landowners and politicians from the conflict zones, tried to take justice into their own hands, often with the complicity of the army, which made common cause in fighting the same enemy: the guerrilla groups.

In this context, state officials, members of the illegal military, guerrillas, paramilitaries, members of the various drug cartels, different criminal groups, as well as journalists aligned with the economic interests of media owners have substantially affected press freedom and the citizen's right to the truth. The recent history of journalism is full of unprecedented attacks on the media with high explosives, murders of journalists, collective kidnappings, intimidations and threats, but also, the payment of bribes and the financing of journalistic programmes that orient their editorial positions to benefit the interests of these different actors (Arroyave & Barrios, 2012.) A national study conducted in the main capital cities of the country among 600 active journalists showed that 62% knew of cases in which a media outlet had changed its editorial stance for political favour or for receiving in exchange some bribe (Proyecto Antonio Nariño, 2016). Disinformation has been an all too common phenomenon in the Colombian media.

Against this backdrop, the internal conflict is ongoing and still claiming victims, many of them innocent. To date, more than 250,000 people have died and 8 million people have been internally displaced, making Colombia the country with the largest record of internal displacement in the world. Of the victims, 81.5% were civilians, who have no relation to the actors in the conflict. The search for peace has been a constant yearning for millions of Colombians who for several generations have suffered from the war many ways.

Throughout Colombia's recent history, several presidents have attempted to reach peace agreements with insurgent movements. Thus, in 1984, Belisario

Betancourt reached an agreement and amnesty with factions of the FARC-EP,[1] but it failed soon after due to the systematic extermination of more than 4000 former combatants belonging to the political party formed by demobilised combatants, called the Patriotic Union (UP).[2] Even the presidential candidate Jaime Pardo Leal was assassinated in 1987. Virgilio Barco, for his part, carried out a peace process that achieved the demobilisation of the 19 April Movement (M-19)[3] and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL)[4] in 1990. César Gaviria (1990–1994) and Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002) tried different peace agreements with the FARC-EP, but they never materialised. However, the new century would see a change in the approach to conflict management. The bets on peace processes ceased and a policy of an iron fist and frontal war against the armed groups came into effect.

In 2002 Álvaro Uribe Vélez came to power and with his Democratic Security policy inaugurated almost a decade of confrontation with the insurgent groups. The bet was on a military solution as the main way to put an end to the conflict. Although important blows were dealt and the morale of the guerrillas was undermined, many of the structural problems that gave rise to the emergence of these groups were not resolved. At the same time that major blows were struck, many excesses were denounced by the armed forces of the state, some of them having a disastrous effect on the innocent civilian population. The negotiation with the paramilitary groups in 2008 has been highly questioned as it was very favourable for these illegal groups that had committed multiple massacres against the civilian population.

In a country exposed to internal conflict for more than half a century, the iron fist policy that brought tangible results through sometimes spectacular military actions was very attractive to many sectors of society. Uribe took advantage of the situation to portray himself as the leader *(caudillo)* who could guarantee certain stability, even if only by military means. This caudillo image was framed in a populism that led a large sector of society to support a certain line of thought according to which "Without Uribe, the country was lost and the "facinorous", "murderers" and "criminals" of the "narco-terrorist groups" could take over the

[1] FARC-EP: Colombian guerrilla of Marxist ideology, created in 1964 as a peasant self-defence group with the objective of representing the rural population and constituting a government dedicated to the redistribution of welfare.

[2] Unión Patriótica UP: Under the government of Belisario Betancourt and within the framework of the first peace negotiations between FARC-EP and the national government, the Unión Patriótica UP was born in 1985 as a political movement with the intention of allowing the insurgency to legally engage in politics with guarantees and access to elected office. Between 1984 and 2002, a physical and systematic extermination began that left at least 4153 people murdered, kidnapped or disappeared, among them two presidential candidates, five sitting congressmen, 11 deputies, 109 councilmen, sitting mayors and thousands of militants.

[3] Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19): The M-19 entered the scene in 1973 and differentiated itself from other subversive experiences due to its rural character, democratising discourse, and because it defined itself as an anti-oligarchic, anti-imperialist and united movement with a political proposal.

[4] EPL Ejército Popular de Liberación Nacional: The EPL was formed in 1966, its ideology is Marxist-Leninist-Maoist linked to the Communist Party.

country again". With this language, any political agenda that the subversive groups had was unknown and thus their ideals of change were discredited.

In 2010, Juan Manuel Santos, a former star defence minister and close associate of now ex-president Álvaro Uribe, became president. The support of Uribe, who had capitalised on his radical stance against the guerrillas and his forceful coups, was fundamental to Santos' election. Once in power, however, he distanced himself from Uribe and governed autonomously. This was the political environment surrounding the peace agreement that began in 2012, two leaders who had shared strategic positions in the previous government clashed radically. Juan Manuel Santos, president and main leader of the peace process, was the victim of staunch opposition led by Álvaro Uribe Vélez, former president (2002–2010) and later senator, who saw the FARC-EP guerrillas as a group of criminals who only wanted to take power, ignoring any political character and social change. Under the premise that negotiating with the FARC-EP meant handing the country over to "the terrorists", he radically opposed the peace agreement.

La Havana Peace Agreement

The Santos government's bid for peace materialised in the signing of an agreement between the oldest guerrilla group on the continent, the FARC-EP and the government. The signing of the agreement was preceded by 4 years of negotiation, which began in 2012 in Havana, Cuba, between members of the FARC Secretariat and negotiating leaders appointed by President Santos. Once the negotiations were concluded, the agreements reached would be endorsed by the citizens through a plebiscite for elections to be held on October 2, 2016.

Peace as a journalistic topic has always been a complex and little-publicised topic (Hamelink, 2015). The negotiation of agreements is something secret, which has little disclosure and is usually made public once the process is over (Wolfsfeld, 1997). In the case of Colombia, Humberto de la Calle, the government negotiator, used the slogan that "nothing was agreed until everything was agreed". This secret element was exploited by sectors adverse to the process led by former President Álvaro Uribe to continually question both the negotiation process and the Agreement. Likewise, the complexity of the new media ecosystem was widely exploited to place all kinds of messages against the peace process on the public agenda, many of them lacking any real basis in truth.

Social Networks and Disinformation in Colombia

Although internet access and quality are limited in Colombia (Global Digital Overview, 2021), it is one of the countries where the average citizen spends the most hours surfing the web. In fact, according to data from WeAreSocial,[5] in its

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[5] https://branch.com.co/marketing-digital/estadisticas-de-la-situacion-digital-de-colombia-en-el-2020-2021/

Digital 2021 report, the world average is 6.43 h per day. Colombia surprises by spending an average of 9.1 h a day surfing the internet, which places the country in fourth place. Likewise, in Colombia there are 69.4 million cell phone subscribers, with a population of 50.8 million inhabitants (MINTIC, 2021).

The information that reaches the average citizen regarding conflict issues in Colombia has now become more dynamic and complex, due to the new ecosystem where traditional media compete with other media, including networks and digital media. The concept of media has evolved and is now more complex, fluid and dynamic than ever before. Traditional media, which used to centralise information and monopolise a certain power structure, have given way to a proliferation of technologies with broader, more fluid and dynamic structures, which demand low costs for their production and circulation and which have increased the quantity of information, but not its quality (Armitage & Vaccari, 2021).

From the initial concern of some social scientists about the low levels of political knowledge in the electorate, which could lead them to wrong decisions, a shift towards misinformation has become evident (Humprecht, 2020). Indeed, the circulation of information that is inaccurate, deliberately misleading and sometimes for manipulative purposes has become a common phenomenon most notably on social media (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In this regard, Tumber and Waisbord (2021) mention that "The digital revolution has upended old media orders, technologies, industries, access, distribution, and uses. New and sophisticated forms of disinformation flooded the global public sphere with falsehood at the same time that populist politics gained citizens' support worldwide" (p. 13). The proliferation of bots, trolls, troll farms, fake news, deep fakes, news feeds with their corresponding consequences such as filter bubbles, echo chambers, are certainly a recent phenomenon that has contributed to processes such as disinformation and misinformation.

Disinformation and misinformation refer to the sharing of incorrect, inaccurate or misleading content, but they are separated by intentionality (Armitage & Vaccari, 2021). Disinformation is the deliberate production and dissemination of false information for political, economic and other benefits (Tumber & Waisbord, 2021) or malicious deceives (Nielsen & Graves, 2017). For their part, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) posit that misinformation refers to the unintentional dissemination of incorrect information. These concepts are related to propaganda and are linked to the dissemination of information related to the exercise of power (Tumber & Waisbord, 2021). However, there is a difference between the two concepts. According to Tumber and Waisbord (2021), "Whereas disinformation emphasises deliberate deception through fabrications, propaganda may consist of disseminating selective ideas that are not necessarily demonstrably false" (p. 15). Some actions such as publicising half-truths, leaving out inconvenient facts, and inculcating dogmas are some of the examples highlighted as the typical propaganda activities of countries.

One circumstance that is important to mention is that the current media ecosystem allows disinformation and misinformation to reach millions of

people and spread very fluidly through social networks. Precisely, the possibility provided by today's social media to widely share information allows the two concepts to overlap and sometimes confuse each other (Montero-Liberona & Halpern, 2019). Research on the topic reports that in Latin America the rise of several right-wing presidents in countries such as Argentina (Manuel Macri), Chile (Sebastián Piñeira), as well as Bolivia's coup d'état in the last decade are closely related to disinformation campaigns directed through social networks (Ponce & Rincón, 2020; Sierra Caballero & Sola-Morales, 2020).

Indeed, social networks now play a decisive role in the political context in Latin America. The issue becomes more complicated when we take into account that in some countries populist forms of government have been gaining strength. As Tumber and Waisbord (2021) put it,

> Populism's claims to owning the truth lead to embracing disinformation and legitimising post-truth. It supports beliefs regardless of whether they are grounded in quality, factual, proven information. It perpetuates communities of belief that feed off and reinforce information dynamics that teem with falsehoods. It weaponises cognitive biases in support of disinformation and hate. (p. 21)

In the October 2, 2016, vote, social media played a definitive role in the rejection of the peace agreement negotiated in Havana. Although the news coverage in most of the country's media was in favour of the Yes campaign (64%) (Misión de Observación Electoral MOE, 2016) and most polls predicted that it would win easily (Parra & Rincón, 2020), the final results were different. The No campaign (50.2%) won over the Yes campaign (49.7%) by a tiny margin. As Tumber and Waisbord (2021) argue, the populism exercised by the Centro Democrático party in the NO campaign imposed disinformation and managed to create confusion and fear that was definitive for the rejection of the agreement.

Hence, it is of great interest to study how social media contributed to disinformation, enabling the NO to prevail in the plebiscite of October 2, 2016.

A Case Study: Colombia and the FARC-EP Peace Process

The case study analysed the digital conversation on Twitter, taking into account the characteristics of the discourse, the relationships derived from its users and the sentiment within that discourse. The study focused on sentiment analysis of the plebiscite called for the endorsement by the Colombian people of the *Final Agreement for a Stable and Lasting Peace* (hereinafter *Agreement*), signed between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP. Sentiment analysis, also known as opinion mining (Zhang & Liu, 2017), is one of the main techniques for studying large-scale textual data (big data), which recognises and evaluates the emotional value behind texts through their structure (Arcila-Calderón et al., 2017).

The timing of the study corresponded to the plebiscite campaign and the subsequent *fast track* or procedure before the Senate for the implementation of agreements. The observation window began on June 23, the closing date of the talks in Havana, until November 24, 2016, the date of the signing of the final[6] *Final Agreement* at the Teatro Colón in the capital of the country, Bogotá.

The phases of the research focused on:

1. Corpus development and data collection relating actors (accounts), keywords, texts (tweets), digital conversation in the observation window (computational linguistics with natural language processing and text mining).
2. Training and validation of the modelling (machine learning: Naive Bayes Multinomial and Naive Bayes Bernoulli).
3. Analysis of the messages determined from networks of influence and analysis of the discourse promoted.

For the collection of tweets we used the Twitter python library and direct connection to the Twitter API with an algorithm that allowed us to download information from two requests:

(a) Search tweets by the user
(b) Search tweets by keyword

For the first request, using the user timeline method, we took into account three actors of the social system and their basic metrics (Percastre-Mendizábal et al., 2017) which are:

- Political actors: Public institutions, civil servants and politicians.
- Media actors: Media, journalists and communicators.
- Citizen actors: Interest groups and citizens' collectives

For the second request, data was searched by keyword, applying the search tweets method. This download was limited to the search for tweets containing the word plebiscite, yielding the following data:

- Total tweets: 753,777
- Unique tweets: 210,189
- Total users: 201,062
- Active users: 82,618

[6] It is indicated that they are the final agreements because they were preceded by two signatures of previous documents, one in Havana on August 24, 2016, indicating the closure of the negotiations and another in Colombia in Cartagena on September 26, 2016.

### *Findings on the Frequency of Publications and Number of Tweets Issued*

By consolidating the two data requests (by the user and by keyword), we obtained a base of 761,017 tweets (including retweets). In the observation window, the highest frequency of tweets was concentrated during the days of the plebiscite vote, being October 2 (date of the plebiscite) the day with more publications in the temporality studied (Graph 5.1).

The user with the highest number of tweets, according to the criteria defined for the study, was @*AlvaroUribeVel* (Álvaro Uribe Vélez) with 1095 tweets, leader of the Democratic Center party, former president, former senator after becoming president and leader of the NO campaign (see Table 5.1).

The president at the time, Juan Manuel Santos*, leader of the peace process, appears in sixth place with 457 tweets. The accounts marked with an asterisk* promoted the signing of the Agreement (SI).

In the second request to collect tweets by keyword, the distribution of publications by user changed, highlighting in the first place the account @*ColombiaDerecha with* 2856 tweets (see Graph 5.2), which defended the NO and its presence strongly marked the digital conversation by the number of messages. The name of the account is "National Restoration" and the description of the profile reads: *The heart of the wise leads him to the right, and the heart of the foolish to the left, Eccles. 10:2,*[7] this text corresponds to a Bible verse from the book of Ecclesiastes, which indicates a religious inclination.

It was followed by the following accounts with averages between 1200 and 600 tweets like this:
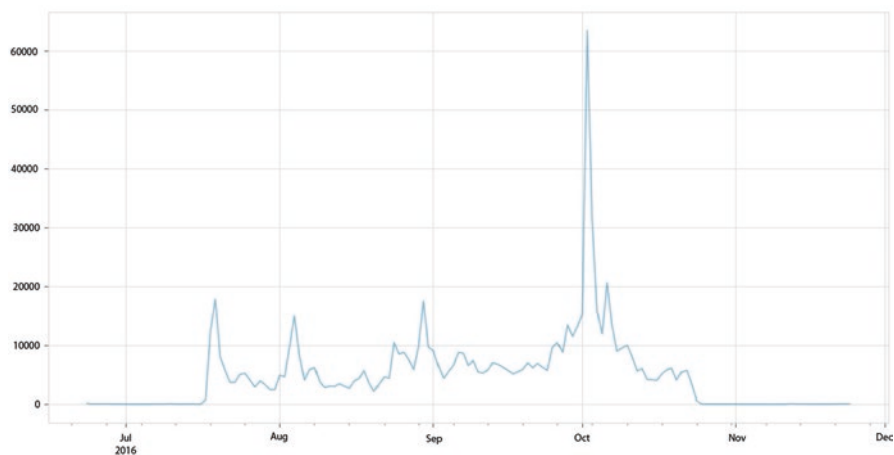
Graph 5.1   Frequency of publications

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[7] You can check the profile at https://twitter.com/colombiaderecha?lang=es

Table 5.1 Number of tweets observation window per user

User	# of tweets
AlvaroUribeVel	1095
CommisionerPeace	870
ClaudiaLopez	613
TeamPeaceGov*	495
mluciaramirez	463
JuanManSantos*	457
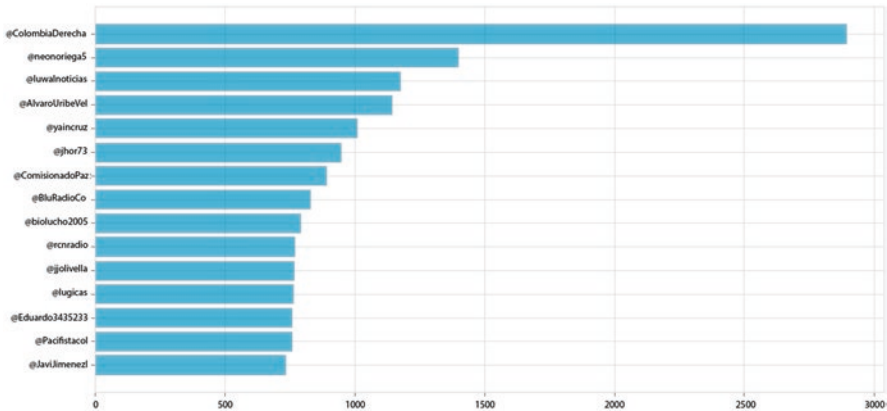
Graph 5.2 Frequency of users (only tweets without retweets)

@luwalnoticias (1235 tweets): Noticias Colombia Red de Noticias had mentions and responses from YES and NO online characters. When reviewing their mentions there was a disparity of topics and news. It was tracked and appears related or mentioned in dubious pages, spam and advertising. The account was suspended by Twitter.

@AlvaroUribeVel (1095 tweets)*:* Leader of the NO campaign.

@ComisionadoPaz (870 tweets) *@EquipoPazGob* (495*)*: Government Institutional Accounts. They supported peace Agreement.

@rcnradio (705 tweets*), @lafm (680* tweets*), @NoticiasRCN (580* tweets*)*: High audience national media. Belonging to the Ardila Lulle business group, who was mentioned in an interview by former senator and co-director of the NO Campaign Juan Carlos Vélez Uribe as the main contributor to the campaign.

@Pacifistacol (655 tweets*)*: The independent communication and journalism platform for the generation of peace: Human Rights—Conflict—Mobilisation—Culture—Gender—Biosphere—Truth.

@BlueRadioCo (680 tweets*), @elespectador (597* tweets*)*: National media in radio and press, company of Julio Mario Santo Domingo's Valórem group, which was demonstrating for the YES vote.

ClaudiaLopez (613 tweets*):* Politician and activist, Senator of the Republic for the Alianza Verde party at the time of the plebiscite, former Vice-Presidential candidate, current Mayor of Bogotá. The promoter of the YES vote.

Findings in Sentiment Analysis

In the AS of the total database of 761,017 tweets, we observe that since the middle of July the publications tended to be *Negative*. Additionally, the *NO campaign* registered a higher number of posts during August and September. Similarly, if we compare the number of publications classified as *Negative* and *Positive* according to the day of publication, we find that there is a greater frequency of *Negative* tweets (see Graph 5.4). Recall that above it was indicated that users who promoted the *NO* were very active in networks (frequencies), which could explain some causal relationship with the final results.

   A process of verification with graphs was also developed in which the relationships in the digital conversation can be seen. Among the relationships that emerge from the authors of the messages, the emphasis of the *negative* sentiment *(red)* is superimposed on the *positive*. In the image generated, the user @*AlvaroUribeVel* was in the centre. Although he was not the account that sent the most original tweets, he was the account that made the most connections with retweets and mentions. This demonstrates the weight he had in the networks to place the NO vote on the national agenda. The followers of Uribe and other right-wing groups positioned the issue (Graphs 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). Graph 5.4 also highlights the direct relationship between negative messages and the traditional media.
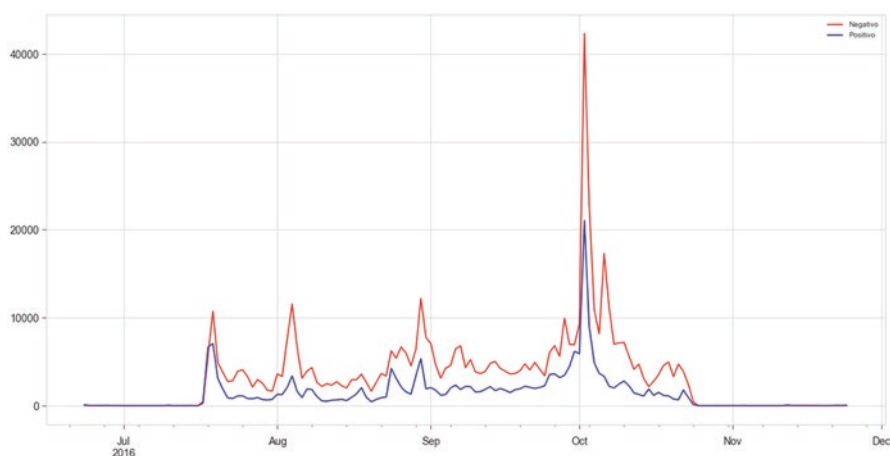
Graph 5.3   Average probability of belonging to a class by day of publication
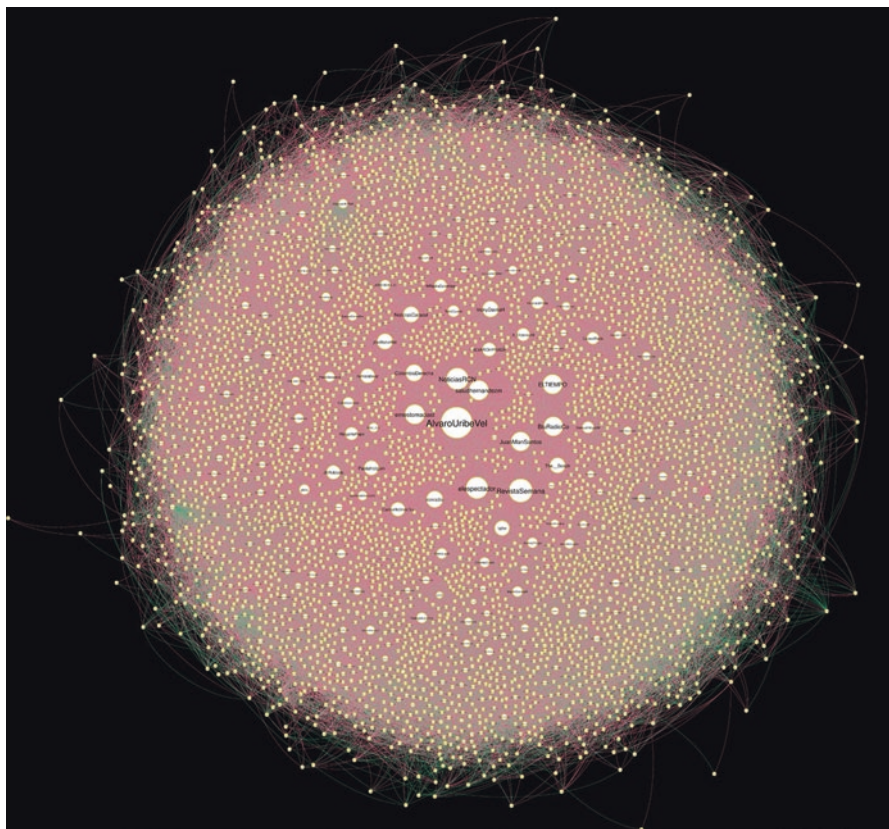
Graph 5.4 Networks and relationships between accounts

Findings of Message Analysis: Discourse, Emotions and Misinformation

This section highlights some key points of the findings. As will be seen, disinformation and polarisation were used by members of the *NO* campaign to curry favour with undecided voters of the plebiscite. The intrinsic characteristics of social networks were capitalised upon to disseminate false and negative messages to convince the sceptics of the Peace Agreement to vote against it.

1. The development of the campaigns supporting the *YES* and *NO* had leaders who stood as the validated voices to indicate what to vote for and why. By August 2016, former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, promoter of the NO, had a 56% approval rating among Colombians and the president at the time, Juan Manuel Santos, leader of the YES, had a 21% approval rating according to the polls.

2. During the 4 years of talks in Havana, Colombia cultivated an atmosphere of negativity in the public sphere. Especially in social media and networks, disinforming and polarising messages were viralised that disqualified the dialogues, did not promote a climate of reconciliation/hope and reinforced the FARC-EP as the nefarious adversaries to be defeated (Romero et al., 2017).

3. Evangelical churches openly took sides and promoted the NO vote. Miguel Arrázola (*@PMiguelArrazola*), leader of the Ríos de Vida church, was a pastor who participated at the invitation of Alvaro Uribe in an event held on September 26 (2016) in Cartagena, alternating the signing of the *peace agreement*. Pastor Arrázola said on stage that "they were handing the country over to the devil". After winning the *NO* on October 2, 2016, by a narrow margin (NO: 50.2%—YES: 49.7%), he said in a video on social networks: "We won, God is not mocked". The relationship of biblical messages and spiritual reflections related to the peace process generated disinformation and diverted the focus from the real information that was being submitted for endorsement.

4. Taking advantage of the characteristics of immediacy, agility, communicative and interactive function, instant reaction and mobilisation capacity of social networks (Seib, 2012), the promoters of the NO convinced the undecided to vote against in the plebiscite. Many of the messages of the NO campaign were not directly related to the text of the *Agreement*. For example, it was claimed that the agreement promoted gender ideology,[8] the destruction of the traditional family, impunity for ex-combatants regardless of their crimes, the alleged law passed by Congress that reduced the pensioners' allowance to finance the reintegration of the guerrillas, the manipulation of the voting cards so that the YES vote would win, the idea of having Rodrigo Londoño, alias Timochenko, leader of the FARC EP, as a presidential candidate and the promotion of Castro-Chavism as a new form of government, a tangible threat due to its proximity to Venezuela. All this avalanche of disinformation produced a negative sentiment towards the *Agreement*.

5. For its part, the YES campaign was based on advertising pieces (radio and TV) alluding to forgiveness and reconciliation. On June 13, 2016, the government launched a campaign called *Yes to peace*, which was criticised because neither the agreements nor the plebiscite had yet been legalised. The campaign was very generic and abstract because in Havana, Humberto de la Calle, the government negotiator, insisted that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed. Because of this the real campaign only started once the talks were closed on 24 August 2016 and had little time to promote it. The messages were heavy and unattractive. Little education was done regarding the importance of the agreements, promoting more the reading of the 367-page document[9] for a country that is not used to reading it.

[8] https://www.lasillavacia.com/historias/silla-nacional/el-papayazo-de-gina
[9] https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/sites/default/files/cartillaabcdelacuerdofinal2.pdf

Conclusion

This research evidences that the old forms of propaganda and manipulation of information that prevailed in the print and electronic media era have taken new forms in the digital era. Social network has become a channel for circulating valuable information on many issues and democratising information that was previously monopolised by certain media outlets. However, it has also become a tool to promote disinformation that benefits the particular interests of a group or ideology to the detriment of the common good.

The data analysed reveals that social networks played a leading role in promoting the NO vote in the plebiscite called by the government of President Juan Manuel Santos to endorse the Havana Agreements in the negotiations with the FARC-EP insurgent movement. Both the main leader of the NO, who was the former president and senator Álvaro Uribe, and the portal @Colombiaderecha set the agenda in social media by promoting the NO vote. The analysis of sentiment (AN) also revealed that in the months leading up to the vote, negative information against the *Agreement* predominated on social networks. Both former President Uribe and his followers were very active on social networks, re-tweeting many of the messages and thus positioning the issue on the national media agenda.

However, disinformation was a central element of the NO campaign. Three pieces of "fake news" aimed at producing fear in the electorate were fundamental to the triumph of the No campaign. The first was that "Castro-Chavism" would be installed as a form of government, alluding to the notion that Colombia would be the next Venezuela of South America, following the Cuban model. The second piece of fake news was that the agreement would lead to "gender ideology," a term used by the extreme right in Colombia to refer to the promotion of rights related to sexual diversity, favouring the LGBTI population to the detriment of the traditional family. Finally, the third item of fake news referred to "impunity," which alluded to the fact that members of the guerrillas would not pay for their crimes but would enter directly into the political arena (Parra & Rincón, 2020).

In an interview with the newspaper *La República*, Juan Carlos Vélez, manager of the "No" campaign, acknowledged that the strategy was not aimed at reason but emotion. When asked: "The Yes campaign was based on the hope for a new country, what was your message?" Velez replied, "Indignation. We were looking for people to go out and vote *verraca* [angry]" (Ramírez, 2016). The idea was to arouse feelings of hatred for the agreement, without analysing or debating its content, and even lying about the points of the agreement (Arroyave, 2021). Some of the issues alluded to by the NO campaign touched

on the family in its basic structure, provoking the mobilisation of many conservative groups that associated the NO with religious ideas. In a country as conservative and religious as Colombia, this disinformation strategy had a definitive impact on the final results.

The YES supporters relied on the favourable climate shown in the polls and did not anticipate or counteract situations that were happening in the country at the time due to the lack of contrasted information in the media and disinformation. Important issues such as the struggles of the Christian church over gender ideology; the visibility of the LGBTI communities; the transitional justice that was required for the implementation of the *Agreement*; the concessions that were negotiated and the political participation or reinsertion of a highly unpopular guerrilla were not addressed firmly, nor was the potential of social media and networks taken advantage of, leading to disastrous consequences on the day of the vote.

The truth was once again the first casualty and the NO won. President Juan Manuel Santos had to resort to another validation before the Senate to achieve the approval of the agreement, although the bad taste left with citizens was that he went over the will of the people. For journalist Martha Ruiz, the peace process with the FARC-EP is the most important step on the road to peace in Colombia in the last 150 years. However, a large part of the citizenry made the fundamental decision to reject this process led by the hand of disinformation.

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Radical Interventions: Archaeology, Forensics and Montage

Pablo Martínez-Zárate

POETICS OF INFORMATION: WEAVING MEANING IN A FRACTURED WORLD

We live in a world governed by data flows. Many of our actions end up feeding a server somewhere, even when we refer to remote communities, especially considering the expanding pervasiveness of mobile media technologies. Aspects related to almost every dimension of human life and our interaction with non-human realities are being converted (re-codified), transferred and intervened in ongoing surges of information that sustain, structure and document human communication.

"Information is information", wrote Norbert Wiener, "not matter nor energy" (Wiener in Conway & Siegelman, 2005, p. 171). In-formation, according to Hans Christian von Baeyer, is the *communication of relationships; the processes of detecting, imposing or communicating form(s)* (von Baeyer, 2003); I understand these processes as the meaning-making habitation of the world, the manipulation of material and symbolic *forms* to relate with this life that revolves inside and around us. Information is a vital force sustaining human interaction, a perpetual flow of encounters between human and non-human agencies; form-detecting, form-imposing, form-transferring practices and processes that weave the network (of networks) we call world. The relationship of in-formation as a process to data and knowledge, two concepts often used to define the place of information in our societies, is multi-fold. We can say that data flows (digital or in any other medium) are the primal matter

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of information processes. Knowledge, on the other hand, are those crystallisations of particular architectures of information (relationships between forms and structures of form), inevitably subject to a determinate place and time in history.

These in-formation processes depend on infrastructural conditions that define and also help us redefine the patterns themselves or even the way we conceptualise, design and implement these operations. Artificial intelligence, biometrics, data science and quantum computing, among other technological innovations, are reshaping the way we can approach information as media makers. When involved in critical journalistic and artistic practices that aim to investigate violence, oppression, marginalisation, injustice and other critical conditions happening both in human and in non-human realities, a close scrutiny of technological programmes is a necessary step in articulating mechanisms for dismantling misinformation. This critical approach to technological appropriation seems even more urgent after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The latest advances in data manipulation, such as the algorithms used for *deep fake* technology, have altered the way we can approach the idea of misinformation. Our body is now subject to multiplication, not only through images and sounds, but also data pertaining to our economic activity, our social and professional conversations, our health records:

> The early years of the twenty-first century have marked an exponential increase in the correlation between being visible and being documented. More than ever before, information is generated from bodies through a multitude of capture devices that proliferate globally. (…) Such a digital regime profoundly inverts the political promise of visibility and representation as means toward democracy and equality. Any exposure of bodies is now usurped as a potential pathway to control and governance, and thus, undoes a documentation as a purely liberatory project. Biometric technologies stand alone in their promise to deliver a perfected global template for documenting bodies today. (Blas, 2016, p. 82)

From highly complex medical images to selfies of our morning run, from bank records to geo-localised activity, streaming preferences and our internet search history, from vaccination certificates to visa numbers and high school grades, our life flows beyond flesh and breath feeding the vast ocean of the human archive. Our dependence on digital technology makes our individual and collective actions subject not only to strict surveillance and even obscene invasiveness, but also to the alteration of those records with the use of artificial intelligence or similar technologies.

Furthermore, if in-formation is an ongoing process (a process of processes), then misinformation can manifest in different moments of its occurrence, with several levels of complexity. When our objective is the design and implementation of strategies for dismantling misinformation, as it is in this text, then it seems important to begin with the recognition of the ways data sources and their correlations are being manipulated in relation to traceable, historically

defined trajectories. Secondly, we need to recognise the effects suffered in individual and collective contexts, and certainly, the limitations to act within those contexts, considering available resources.

I like to think of misinformation as a chain of manipulation of the relationships between chunks of data about the world. These manipulations occur in different moments of the communication process, responding to different origins, motivations and sociocultural conditions. They can happen for several reasons, such as the express will of deviating attention or satisfying a personal interest, or the lack of access to resources (technological, economic, cultural), which translates in conditions such as illiteracy, misunderstanding, miscommunication, fear or ignorance. A useful approach to the investigation of these chains of alterations is understanding social and political phenomena as complex processes. Let's take the case of The Atlas Group:

> We are not concerned with facts if facts are considered to be self-evident objects always already present in the world. Furthermore, we hold that this common-sense definition of facts, this theoretical primacy of facts, must be challenged. Facts have to be treated as processes. One of the questions we find ourselves asking is: How do we approach facts not in their crude facticity but through the complicated mediation by which facts acquire their immediacy? (The Atlas Group, 2003, p. 179)

The Atlas Group is a project by Lebanese artist Walid Raad, undertaken between 1989 and 2004, that investigates the Civil War in Lebanon. It consists of a vast archive of records, produced using different techniques and methodologies, some of them in a ludic tension with fiction: "The Atlas Group produces and collects objects and stories that should not be examined through the conventional and deductive binary of fiction and non-fiction" (Raad, 2013, p. 195). This implies that manipulation (of historical records in the shape of images, texts, sounds) can also be used as a strategy to visibilise oppression, violence or injustice.

Examples in The Atlas Group's corpus of work include a series of photographs of buildings damaged by the war, where bullet holes are covered with colour circles to build a localised index of the impacts of the war industry, their colour indicating the calibre and country of production of the ammunition used in combat. Similarly, another series portrays a collection of catalogue-style images of car models used as bombs, with notes indicating the model, brand and colour of each vehicle used as an explosive between 1975 and 1991. The body of works that comprise this long-term, collaborative project involves drawings, texts, photographs, notebooks, videos, both produced by Raad or donated to The Atlas Group project by other artists and activists. This array of inscriptions reveals existing relationships that, even when some of them part from simple and somehow obvious associations (such as a car model or the calibre of a bullet), when presented as a set of implications, it offers alternative understandings of this long-lasting conflict as an open, ongoing process of

communication. Raad invites us to engage with an interpretation of historical processes such as the Lebanese Civil War, not as "a settled chronology of events, dates, personalities, massacres, invasions, but rather we also want to consider it as an abstraction constituted by various discourses and, more importantly, by various modes of assimilating the data of the world" (The Atlas Group, 2003, p. 179).

Walid Raad's ideas coincide with Ariella Azoulay's *potential history*, which she describes as "an effort to create new conditions both for the appearance of things as to our own appearance as narrators, as those who can, in any given moment, intervene the order of things that the constitutive violence has created as its natural order" (Azoulay, 2014, p. 58). History speaks to us in multiple ways and by activating the archive, the multifaceted relationship with its documents and their architectures (operating and possible), we can inaugurate a space for narrating not only alternative versions of the past, but also potential trajectories for the future. "Potential history insists in restoring, in the order of things, the polyphony of civil relationships and ways of cohabiting that existed in a determinate moment in history (…)", it is a "new model for the writing of history" (Azoulay, 2014, p. 59).

During the last couple of years, I've been working around the concept of *poetics of information* as a methodological moment, together with *documentary art* and *eccentric pedagogy,* of what I've called a *practical critique of communication* (see Martínez-Zárate, 2021). This is part of an effort to build a theoretical and methodological framework from which to implement critical artistic research designs in media art practices, inspired by an experimental and critical appropriation of different media technologies.

Here I will focus on the poetics of information and documentary art, since they are intimately related with efforts such as Azoulay and Raad's, that look for strategies that are related to information processes and misinformation chains, with its multiple social and political consequences. When I speak of a poetics of information, I refer to the design and implementation of strategies for the creation of information patterns (associative models for interpreting the world) that can sustain critical readings of socio-political phenomena. Documentary art pertains to the transformation, through technique and discourse, of those alternative information architectures we've imagined in the poetics of information, now into specific media projects. For the purpose of this text, I put an emphasis on the poetical to imply both an aesthetical and a political approach to information and misinformation, that resonates with Azoulay's alternative ways of narrating our history. The poetics of information, in my proposal, is unavoidably linked to a documentary art that operationalises those information architectures and converts them into concrete media manifestations. Both moments, poetics of information and documentary art, subsist in and through the archive. The work with the archive can be a powerful way of manipulating the conditions of documents and their correlations, a practice that according to Azoulay has civic and political implications: "intervention, imagination and transmission are practices through which researchers and

artists exercise their right to (and of) the archive" (Azoulay, 2014, p. 17). I've worked with film, photography, interactive and immersive media, text and performance, that sustain a transmedia practice from which to draw different methodological insights.

Methodological Insights for Dismantling Misinformation: (An)archaeology, Forensic Imagination and Expanded Montage

In this section I will delve into some methodological inspirations that sustain both the poetics of information and the documentary art practice in the context of a practical critique of communication.[1] Each of these inspirations comes from different disciplinary fields. My intention is to build a hybrid methodological toolkit from which to design critical media art projects.

(An)archaeology

I understand the archive as a critical event, which supposes that archives are not sites for depositing the past, meaning documents and inscriptions of historical events. On the contrary, I maintain that archives are, or at least can be, a site where historical narratives can be revised repeatedly.[2]

If we say that the work with the archive is archaeological in its nature, then it is worth noting that archaeo-derives from the Latinised form of Greek *arkhae-*, which means ancient, primitive, primeval, being its root *arkhē*, or beginning. The study of beginnings is not necessarily a nostalgic enterprise. On the contrary, as many authors suggest, the relationship with "original content" places the archive as a site of normativity, where norms, order and revolution

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[1] In this article I will not expand on the practical critique of communication. Briefly, it can be described as an effort to connect theory and practice in the field of media arts. Apart from poetics of information and documentary art, the third moment is what I've called eccentric pedagogy, which implies research both on our own practice and on its communicability in different educational contexts (see Martínez-Zárate, 2021).

[2] The concept of archive as a critical event spans from the idea of potential history, quoted in the previous section from Ariella Azoulay, and supposes that the intervention of the archive is a powerful front for reopening historical narratives and defying monopolistic or univocal versions of historical events. This idea is also articulated from Badiou's philosophy on the event and the recognition of the eventual site as a territory of multiplicity (see Badiou, 2012), which implies that if archives are eventual sites, it is because through intervening both the documents that they host and the architectures that structure them, we can actually introduce alternative versions of historical events. When speaking about archival work, it is important to state that it does not only include research with established archives, public or private, physical or digital, outside our own media projects. As media makers, our production is unavoidably linked with the archive, notwithstanding the genre, medium or circulation, when producing new images, sounds, texts and so on; we are also feeding the vast archive of human history, as well as configuring our own archive and a body of work. This double engagement with the archive (internal and external) has aesthetic and political effects.

are always emerging both directly or indirectly. In this line of thought, "archives (…) are unstable, open to re-interpretation, re-ordering, re-enouncing" (Giannachi, 2016, p. 29). This perpetual tension between order and transformation suggests that our research processes are forced to look back on the methodologies used for registering, consulting and appropriating documents. The archive is a furtive site for reimagining ourselves, both in retrospective and in prospective terms:

> How quickly and through what methods societies feel they need to archive themselves, and hence capture the changes that occur around them, and what they do to generate archives that are capable of remaining in a state of unrest, that are capable of changing, is therefore not only a symptom of how societies wish to conceive of and transmit the memory of their "present" over time but also an indicator of how societies deal with their own histories and the possibility of change. (Giannachi, 2016, pp. 29–30)

When involved in creative research practices directed to confront misinformation processes, this understanding of the archive is a first instance of identification and intervention of deviations, manipulations, loss of data, censorship, technological alterations or other practices that occur in information processes.

The archive as a critical event could be understood, therefore, as an invitation to intervene its architectures and powers as a site of possibility, an effort that is consonant with Siegfried Zielinsky's idea of anarchaeology, a method that seeks to inaugurate new possibilities inside the horizons of media history, considering especially those technologies that constitute "the world of media and the art that is produced with and through them" (Zielinsky, 2006, p. 30). Anarchaeology, in Zielinsky's terms, is a method that resists the impetus of control, governance and order conveyed by the powers of the archive, which often are directed to control and suppress alternative versions of history.

> A history that entails envisioning, listening, and the art of combining by using technical devices, which privileges a sense of their multifarious possibilities over their realities in the form of products, cannot be written with avant-gardist pretensions or with a mindset of leading the way. Such a history must reserve the option to gallop off at a tangent, to be wildly enthusiastic, and, at the same time, to criticize what needs to be criticized. This method describes a pattern of searching, and delights in any gifts of true surprises. (Zielinsky, 2006, p. 27)

Zielinsky's method resonates with Azoulay's pretension of a new model for the writing of history, and the practical critique of communication responds to the same impulse by a combination of methodological strategies that include, among others, the idea of critical archaeology as the basis of combinatory work (poetics of information) and technological appropriation with expressive ends (documentary art).

When thinking of the archive and archaeological practices from the perspective of a media maker, it is important to recognise that parallel to the technical

aspects, discursive decisions will affect the character of those realities we are working with, the associations that we weave and hence the world models that we are putting forward. In Judith Butler's terms,

> How do the norms that govern which lives will be regarded as human enter into the frames through which discourse and visual representation proceed, and how do these in turn delimit or orchestrate our ethical responsiveness to suffering? (…) the way these norms enter into frames and into larger circuits of communicability are vigorously contestable precisely because the effective regulation of affect, outrage and ethical response is at stake. (Butler, 2009, p. 136)

This reflection points to the core of my proposal of the archive as a critical event. If documents in public and private, formal and informal archives are vehicles of world views, where some identities and realities are privileged above others, then creative media practice is a powerful weapon for confronting the archive not only as a cumulus of documents, but as a world-system that conveys ideals, axioms and valorisations of the reality it is portraying. The field of war photography is enlightening since it works with critical, extreme realities that always suppose a conflict of representation where political, economic, ethical and ideological forces are at stake. Contexts where, also, there are many bodies and souls in pain. War photography, as any other media practice, concerns "not only what it shows, but also how it shows what it shows. The 'how' not only organizes the image, but works to organize our perception and thinking as well" (Butler, 2009, p. 135).

In sum, misinformation can be confronted through a strategy of intervening the archive, understood as the horizon of mediation of a specific historical event, where intervention can happen in different levels of action, such as the materiality of the medium, the information patterns governing these messages, or by playing with the frame of representation of our world. In order to extend this proposal of anarchaeological practice, I've collected some ideas on what Anne Huffschmid calls forensic imagination as a complementary strategy for critical media design.

Forensic Imagination

Images, writes Anne Huffschmid, "actively participate in the creation of its meaning, independent from the possibly good intentions of artists or journalists that circulate these images" (Huffschmid, 2020, p. 24). When our objective is designing strategies to contest misinformation occurring at different stages of information processes, then we need to acknowledge that images (and sounds and texts and any other media form) have a communicative potential that surpasses our capacity, as their creators, to control every aspect of their interactions with the world.

In this line of thought, even beyond intentions that can be misleading, violent or obscuring, media documents can offer traces of manipulation from

which to reconstruct alternative versions of events. Conversely, the manipulation of the material conditions of a document, its meaning or the relationships it holds with other documents in its surroundings, is a useful strategy to address ineffable realities. What Anne Huffschmid calls forensic imagination can complement the archaeological approach described above.

Forensic action can be poetic in nature, not only political, since forensic action intends to reconstruct not only facts and events, but more determinant, bodies and identities. For Huffschmid, images can even be understood as a "contact zone with unimaginable realities" (Huffschmid, 2020, p. 23), which echoes Butler's ideas on how the framing of the image is crucial for understanding the perpetual tension between visible and invisible realities. In its traditional understanding, forensics offers keys to trace misinformation occurring in different moments or points of contact of the process of communication of relationships.

> Forensic action of all kinds aims, very roughly speaking at the production and construction of *evidence*, be it for strictly legal setting, to be presented before a judge or in a trial, or in broader context: it is about evidencing the fact and events that have not been evident (tangible, seeable, sayable) before (…) it is about materializing and revealing deliberately invisibilized double crime against people's basic human rights (to life, for instance) and also against evidence itself. (Huffschmid, 2020, p. 12)

Critical media making can be understood through the forensic lens if we acknowledge that our work can amplify the limits of representation in a specific historical process. Forensic reconstruction should be "about signifying—assigning meaning and sense to apparently senseless violence but also to seemingly mere scientific or technical procedures" (Huffschmid, 2020, p. 36). This idea is crucial since it suggests that forensic action can transcend ministerial objectives, introducing the possibility of what I like to call poetic justice following Martha Nussbaum (1992), with the strong belief that through alternative representations of violent and oppressive phenomena, we can not only subvert these violent acts and their resonances, but imagine alternative frames for referring to those realities. Forensic imagination suggests, therefore, a restless quest for new traces, as if it sought to recompose, through the same fragmentary nature, the horizons of possibility.

> Accordingly, forensic sciences and practices hold *narrative potential*, I argue, by seeking to reconnect material and shattered traces of bodies, objects and landscapes in order to reconstruct significant stories of human beings, of politics, of violation and memory. These are stories that do not aspire to any totality but rather assume their fragility and highly fragmentary nature—there is so much that might never be known, so many bodies that will remain nameless, so many perpetrators that will never be sanctioned. And yet, forensic narratives may contribute to the expansion of the field of the *knowable* and, therefore, the *imaginable*. (Huffschmid, 2020, p. 12)

Forensic action is of great support when thinking of alternative information architectures (as it is the objective of the poetics of information), as well as alternative modes of narrating these events (the purpose of documentary art). Contrary to most official stories of history that intend to be rigid, hermetic, monolithic accounts of events, these strategies are fragmentary and even contradictory.

Against misinformation, we need to develop "research strategies and narratives that are able to subvert this excessive opacity or opaque excess by disconnecting and also reconnecting procedures: on the one hand, dismantling established (visual) discourses on violence, and on the other, associating the dissociated. We may call this, tentatively, work on forensic imagination" (Huffschmid, 2020, p. 40). The poetics of information and documentary art are two ways of reconnecting the bits of information that constitute reality into other world models, rendering forensic imagination a great ally in its archaeological quests.

Anne Huffschmid's approach coincides with the ideas of Forensic Architecture, led by Eyal Weizmann, who affirms that it is "important to make critiques simultaneously personal and systemic, which means to add an investigative-journalistic dimension to theoretical work" (Weizman, 2016, p. 119). The theoretical-practical bridge is what motivates the practical critique of communication, since I recognise that the field of media is almost impossible to understand isolated from communicative practices. Intervention through critical media strategies can help us locate, visibilise and subvert misinformation.

According to Weizman,

(…) seeing is a kind of construction that is also conceptual and culturally conditioned, hence the indispensability of artistic sensibility (…) it is only through aesthetics that we can both perceive and present. Our understanding of aesthetics is both archaic and contemporary; it refers to material perception, not only to human perception. Material aesthetics doesn't refer to the human sensorium but to the capacity of all material things to sense, to register their proximity to other things and to their environment. (Weizman, 2016, p. 122)

Forensic imagination, then, could be understood as a sensorial investigation that traces material and symbolic resonances in specific events marked by violence, oppression and exploitation. Similarly, both the poetics of information and its artistic translations have material and discursive implications that impact the way we perceive, register, narrate and share our versions of reality.

Extended Montage

I find that both archaeological work and forensic imagination are strongly related with the concept of montage, as understood in film practice and theory. Montage does not refer exclusively to the moment of editing a film, but to the

whole construction of a film event. Montage, in film, comes from theatre, and in theatre, from architecture. In a world where digital media technologies are evolving at a precipitous pace, montage has extended its field of praxis through the integration of interactive and immersive solutions. When I speak of extended montage, I refer to this integrated vision of media as a powerful tool for reshaping the way we represent our history and ourselves.

Dziga Vertov's understanding of montage as the reorganisation of the world evokes efforts such as Weizman's, Huffschmid's and Azoulay's, which I like to describe as constellations of ideas and manifestations that confront us with alternative versions of conflictive realities, or better yet, paths and strategies to revisit history endlessly, in a never-ending quest to understand our present and future. Each of them in its own interest and style deploys theoretical inquiries linked with practical implementations. The idea of expanded montage implies not only the convergence of media technologies, but also of disciplinary questions and even reflections on our practice.

The practical critique of communication understands montage as a sort of war machine that can interfere with the programmes produced by state machinery (in Deleuze and Guattari's sense). Montage operates transversally from the poetical to the technical to the pedagogical moments of this proposal as a way of understanding media production as a research process with critical potential to intervene in the current state of affairs (both regarding current or past events, meaning that we need to inquire insistently in the shifting state of the archives that govern our presence and permanence in the world).

Montage, like forensics and archaeology, is concerned with what remains buried, invisible, censored. "Contradictions, mistakes, and lacunae", affirms Eyal Weizman, "record something important—often the very effect of violence or the presence of trauma and thus the ultimate truth of the event" (Weizman, 2016, p. 129). Similarly, writing about montage, Alexander Kluge suggests that:

> to omit, to obscure, to cut, to confront two improbabilities that together result in a fragment of life, the negative to immobilize what's vital with the resources of direct denomination, taking total advantage of indirect description: all that belongs to the formal world of montage, be it in film, music or writing. (Kluge, 2014, p. 40)

When we think about the tensions that montage deploys with what's there for us to grasp of reality (as images, sounds, texts) and its potential technological and narrative assemblages and iterations, we are unavoidably entering a conflict with the idea of misinformation. It is quite paradoxical that through the manipulation of inscriptions and relationships, we can draw visibility upon censorship, oppression, violence or manipulation. Therefore, imagination and invention play an important role in discovering these alternative architectures of meaning that have the power, if not to restore violence and the affections produced by conflict, to offer other ways of narrating historical processes that does more justice to oppressed visions of life.

The Monopoly of Memory and the Body Is an Archive: Archaeology and Embodiment

1968 was a crucial year for Mexican modern history, especially because of the events that marked the student movement in the country. Crude and violent repression passed cynically justified by the organisation of the Olympic Games, inaugurated in Mexico City only 10 days after the infamous October 2 of that year, when what's known as the Tlatelolco Square massacre was perpetrated by state forces at a student assembly. The 1968 student movement in Mexico has been told once and again in film, art, journalism and literature, and still, its revision can offer insightful glances to such a complex and critical process in the country's history.

In 2017, Universidad Iberoamericana's Francisco Xavier Clavigero Library received a donation of over 800 boxes containing a photographic archive of the national newspaper *El Heraldo de México*. Documents inside included hundreds of thousands of photographs, annotated copies, negatives, reproductions of the published photographs and other materials spanning from 1965 to 2003. With the 50th anniversary of the student movement and the Olympic Games coming in 2018, the Library's team set to the chore of identifying, classifying and digitising the images pertaining to these two events. When we learned about the archive, we approached the Library and proposed a project from the Laboratorio Iberoamericano de Documental (IberoDocsLab), that I run at Universidad Iberoamericana Mexico City.

The film parted from the conceptual premise of the monopoly of memory applied to the 1968 student movement. Over 1300 documents were given to us in digital form, and we started our reclassifying of materials. In this film and also in other projects done in the lab and in my own studio, working with archival footage or with groups of documents produced by myself, I've come to identify the relocation (and reclassification) of documents as the first moment of intervention of the archive. It is then when new architectures emerge.

When we received these documents, classified in 15 folios, we started tracing a thematic association between sets of images and grouping them in new sets. Beyond tracing dates and names, the essay focuses on the politics of memory, the processes of intermediation that defines the material and symbolic identity of the images. A rich element of this archive are the annotations made in photographs, both to reframe over the images and to describe on their back, which we exploited for the narrative with the aid of reframing, movement along the images and long musical sequences that break the dual voice-over that offers questions on the material and symbolic memory of those images (Image 6.1).

It must be said that this film drew from two other projects related to Tlatelolco, a historical site known for condensing pre-Hispanic, colonial and modern architecture in the Three Culture Square, the same place where the 1968 killings took place. The first of these antecedents, done in collaboration with the co-writer of *The Monopoly of Memory*, constituted of a series of

Image 6.1   Stills from the monopoly of memory

workshops done between 2009 and 2012 in a school of arts that belongs to Mexico's National University, in a campus located at Tlatelolco (*Unidad de Vinculación Artística*—UVA, *Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco*—CCUT). The second, a transmedia essay called *Dissections Over Planes. Essay(s) on Tlatelolco*, that includes a web documentary, a book, a live cinema performance, a VR installation, and which has iterated and is now part of the Xaltilloli, the new museum inside the same cultural complex of the CCUT. I will speak of Dissections Over Planes with little more detail at the end of this section, yet this last iteration is worth noticing, since it is a surface with a touch screen and scale models of buildings pertaining to these three architectural eras, posed just in front of a window facing the archaeological ruins of Tlatelolco, the colonial church and college and the modern buildings of the Tlatelolco-Nonoalco residential complex.

Just above the gallery where this installation is located, in another museum of the CCUT dedicated to civic movements, a complementary piece using the same photographs was commissioned to the lab, for which I selected only 61 images and invited a butoh dance collective to play an improvisation game with them. The piece is called *The Body is an Archive. A game for 10 cameras*, and consisted in putting the selected photographs inside a box, one by one, then members of the dance collective approached the container and took an image out, showed it to a camera destined for that purpose, after to the rest of the members, who reacted with an improvisation based on what the image showed. The ten cameras included digital film, super 8 and 16 mm, and also stills in 35 and 120 mm, all in black and white, composing a large mosaic evoking the aesthetics of the time (inspired in videoart from the 1960s). This piece was designed for a 360° screen using six projectors, yet an application of this same

Image 6.2 The body is an archive

work is available online as a 360° video (https://vimeo.com/470175237). In contrast to *The Monopoly of Memory*, where the narrators' script guides the intervention of the photographic documents, *The Body is an Archive* proposes the embodiment as a way of inhabiting memory, which reveals other possibilities of archaeological work (Image 6.2).

Based on the same archive and done simultaneously in 2018 for the 50th anniversary of the 1968 student movement, both artworks operate as a convergent device that offers different appropriations of the material memory of this event. *Dissections Over Planes,* which started in 2016 and was launched in March 2019, expands the exploration of the event as a fragment of Tlatelolco's history, being Tlatelolco a historical site that has played a protagonist role during different moments of Mexican History, not only in 1968.[3] For *Dissections Over Planes*, materiality was an aspect that defined the exploration. And the materiality of these modernist ideals that have unavoidably vanished, washing away the aspect of the buildings, was translated to technical experimentation with photochemical materials, using altered developers and other darkroom processes, that then became one of the main visual elements in the different versions of this transmedia work. Using super 8, archival documents, 360°

[3] Since pre-Hispanic times, being the dissident-sister city of Tenochtitlan, the last site of resistance against the Spaniards, the home of the first university of the continent (in the modern sense of the word), a railway hub connecting the city with the country, and the site of what once was the largest modernist housing project in Latin America, where in its iconic plaza civilian blood flowed that night of October 2, 1968, and which in 1985 saw many of its colossal structures crumble during the earthquake that shook Mexico City on September 19.
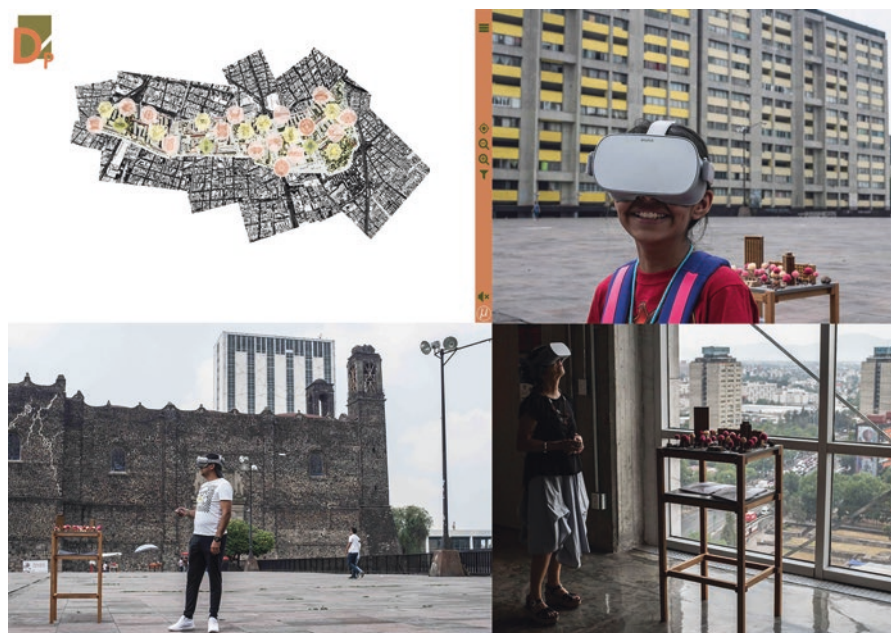
Image 6.3   Dissections over planes

video capture, to compose immersive VR essays travelling from site to site in a mobile installation, with the intention of detonating, in specific sites of Tlatelolco (the plaza, the metro station, the cultural complex, etc.), a double embodiment of Tlatelolco's memory forces (Image 6.3).[4]

FORENSIC LANDSCAPES: FORENSICS AND AESTHETICS

Latin America has a history of state violence where enforced disappearances are a common practice. Forensic Landscapes builds on Huffschmid's long-term research which explored the forms that forensic action takes in Argentina, Guatemala and Mexico.[5] Documenting the work of forensic scientists and

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[4] These three projects were all done from IberoDocsLab presenting each one a different production scheme. *The Monopoly of Memory* was produced entirely from the university, with the support of the *Francisco Xavier Clavigero Library* and the *Research and Postgraduate Division* through a summer research grant. The Body is an Archive was a commission done directly to me as an artist, which I decided to produce from the lab as an inter-institutional co-production between two universities (UNAM and Ibero). *Dissections Over Planes*, on the contrary, started as a personal project done from my studio, that scaled with the support of a Mexico City's transmedia narrative grant and the infrastructure provided by Universidad Iberoamericana's *Communications Department*, where I'm located as Associate Professor.

[5] Done mainly from her position as a collaborator at the Institute for Latin American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin.

family members that end up performing forensic work in the absence of mechanisms for the administration of justice, she gathered a vast corpus of materials with the intention of creating an interactive narrative in the quest of offering alternative readings of such dire realities.

This is where I come in. When she invited me to be a part of this journey, I immediately suggested that we do this project from the lab, generating a binational co-production between Universidad Iberoamericana and Freie Universität Berlin. Universidad Iberoamericana has a long history of research and community projects with Human Rights crises in Latin America, so the collaboration came quite naturally. Enforced disappearances and activism of family members have been subject of film and art in the region for quite a while, yet very few examples existed that focused on the forensic implications of these dire situations. This was the first innovative aspect of Huffschmid's project; the challenge was to transform such a vision into an interactive, web-based narrative architecture.

The process was forensic in its own particular way. Apart from extended conversations both in person and through email, in Mexico City and in Berlin, the first material trace of this architecture has the form of research notes that I did as artistic director, for the first of them, dated June 12, 2019, I selected key stills from Anne's video footage and transcoded them into a chromatic reading of the documents (see Image 6.4). What remained were the chromatic

Image 6.4   Research notes for forensic landscapes

intensities of forensic materialities and how they transformed depending on their interaction with different surfaces (the land, belongings, clothing, bones and other traces found and analysed in search of questions). These first notes record the creative impulse behind this project. From there, the note format was established as a delivery format between the art team and Huffschmid to advance towards the final form of the web documentary. Questions regarding aesthetics, interactivity and technology were documented in these notes, with iterations of what we named our "mother scene"—the forensic laboratory. Throughout what was authentically a research journey, we discovered alternative paths that confirmed how a critical approach to methodology and techniques, in tandem to conceptual or discursive direction, allowed us to overcome technological and aesthetic limitations and surpass our own individual and collective capacities through transdisciplinary collaboration.

The final solution, publicly available at https://forensiclandscapes.com/ is a website based on web VR technology. The architecture consists of eight immersive scenes, each responding to a topic, in the shape of interactive landscapes that combine illustrations, stills and digital collage, with two levels of content that need to be discovered by the cybernauts—primary narrative units include over 20 short video essays mixing testimonies, field recordings and archival footage, and the secondary narrative units are the bio cards that present the short profiles of the people interviewed by Huffschmid and her team (see Image 6.5). Writing on both *Forensic Landscapes* and a film project on the same theme but only focusing on the Mexican case (Persistence, 2020), Anne Huffschmid reflects that "one of the most interesting lessons of the narrative process was learning that understanding, might be triggered by elements that are not necessarily textual" (Huffschmid, 2020, p. 40). The goal of producing a space for knowledge and closeness with the realities portrayed in Forensic Landscapes was tackled by inviting visitors to embark themselves on a compelling journey, where each interactive element in the landscape is carefully designed depending on the different levels of interaction and the topics explored in each scene. This aesthetic turn to forensics gave the project a narrative texture that reveals hidden possibilities for relating with these terrible realities. Forensics and Archaeology, as methodological terrains from which to produce critical art, confirm to be powerful domains for intervening misinformation chains and visibilising crucial work done in spite of state dysfunctionality.

History-Telling as the Reimagination of the Horizons of Possibility

In Spanish we do not have two terms for distinguishing story and history, *historia* carries both meanings, and so in English we can talk about history-telling as opposed to story-telling. By history-telling I do not refer to traditional narration of events. Through different methodological and theoretical tools as the

Image 6.5 Web captures from forensiclandscapes.com

ones drafted in this text, history-telling shifts the focus from grand tales of names and conquests to a myriad of minuscule narratives that intertwine and sustain the passing of history and ourselves with it.[6]

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[6] The work done at IberoDocsLab is also grounded in this proposal, since its inception was part of the same research process, especially considering the third moment of the practical critique of communication, being the chapter dedicated to what I've named, after Deleuze and Guattari's nomad science, a centrifuge or eccentric pedagogy. Several works, as the ones quoted in this text, have been done with the same critical spirit and an express questioning of the ways information, and more precisely memory processes, operate both at a political and at an intimate level, both with ethical and with aesthetical implications.

As stated at the beginning, misinformation responds to complex processes and chains of relations. Therefore, dismounting misinformation seems to be a never-ending process that morphs along as we travel between sites of imagination and enunciation, resonating with the historical complicities we're performing at the time of our research. Strategies such as the ones outlined above confirm to us that it is not only worth opening the historical tales for critical and renovation purposes, but also because they have the power to create community around production cycles related with research projects, where academics, media makers, students and collaborators compromise in a professional and intellectual exchange, all equally responsible for maintaining the quality of the artistic research and procuring a safe space for our development as individuals, as a team, and also for the best interest of the projects' objectives. We strongly believe, as Mistry states, that production and practice of knowledge are intrinsically latticed. By performing material and symbolic interventions we can intervene in the programmes of meaning that promote misinformation.

> Production of knowledge and the practice of knowledge are not exclusive of each other but inextricably linked, entwined, latticed and in a discursive, dialectic relationship enabled through the mentality of artistic research—a mentality that invites practitioners to reconceive pedagogic strategies and methodologies which revitalises the possibilities for, in this case, film as a language and not simply or rather singularly as a vehicle for storytelling. (Mistry, 2017, p. 45)

This renovation of language explains the presence of montage as a research force that amalgamates all the methodological paths in concrete manifestations. Montage is a way of exercising power, of intervening the relationships between things that belong, in one sense or the other, to the technological circus we humans call The World (this beautiful, chaotic and suffering world of worlds we live in).

At the end of the day, if the fight against misinformation seems endless, then we can locate our quest for the production of knowledge in posing questions and opening alternatives for being together. The painter Gerhard Richter affirmed that art is the highest form of hope, since art essentially designs multiple models for perceiving and, ultimately, habitating the world. This idea coincides with the world-creating potency of art as defended by writer Ursula K. LeGuin. The practical critique of communication intends to do just that, from the perspective of historical narratives and their labyrinths. Under such conflictive and divided political and cultural scenarios as the ones we are living 2 years into a global pandemic, with untethered advancements in digital technology, an aesthetic approach to misinformation may offer complementary paths for building the worlds we wish to inhabit.

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'Fake News', Conspiracy, Propaganda (Diagnosis)

Part II Introduction: Julian McDougall

'Fake News' is a contested term and always configured according to the discourse which speaks it. Its significance is less academic, as many scholars resist its false binary, or at least use the term to deconstruct its precepts, but more for its continuing prominence in the rhetoric of populist politicians and in public discourse. Liz Corbin, Deputy Media Director and Head of News, European Broadcasting Union, in a Westminster Forum on the subject convened on the day of us submitting this manuscript, described fake news as *a lazy term but one which most people understand* and therein justified its continued use.

What we mean by 'conspiracy theory' is the subject of more consensus, usually. We observe it increasing as levels of public trust in 'experts' and their motives reduce, and this is clearly a feature of these populist rhetorics, or at least a tolerated by-product. Propaganda is a less divisive category than 'fake news', but whilst some use the term to describe overt, strategic information campaigns by powerful actors such as governments or those seeking to be powerful, such as campaigning groups, others see all persuasive media and information as propaganda, and will include professional journalism in this.

In this part, we present a range of perspectives from productively contrasting contexts and using eclectic modes of presentation. Phil Barber sets out the challenges for liberal academics presented by a situation whereby "calls to reject mainstream narratives and a mistrust of mainstream media are now characterised by right-wing or 'alt-right' voices" and goes further to theorise "a new epistemology that mistrusts anything validated by established epistemological frameworks." Barber's Chap. 7 is a transcript of a kind of academic method acting in which he seeks to understand, through digital ethnography and practice-based artist research, the 'alt-right', Q-Anon and the storming of Capitol Hill as a performative spectacle. In Chap. 8, Adrian Quinn offers a specific and geographically situated case study on the reporting of student finance in England to show that mainstream media can be both a source of and a correction to fake news about a divisive social issue. Quinn reflects on the

influence of Noam Chomsky in academic thinking about 'fake news' and the trust Chomsky placed in the "Cartesian common sense of ordinary people" and his "faith in their capacity to see through the deceits in which they are ensnared." Key to the challenging intervention Quinn makes in this space is his focus on *intent* and his chapter also feeds forward to our final part to question the notion of media literacy as a remedy. In Chap. 9, Masato Kajimoto explores the specific challenges presented by misinformation in Hong Kong. Describing how, during the 2019 protests in the city, "an overwhelming amount of misleading and fallacious content about the political upheaval began inundating the public information space," Kajimato provides a fascinating case study on how 'fake news' was used by all sides of the political spectrum—from government officials to the police to supporters of the movement to radical activists— to describe the claims of their opponents, and then traces the historical development of fact-checking amid political upheavals in Hong Kong and discusses the impacts and implications of this approach on the media itself and in education. Renee Hobbs and Igor Kanižaj's Chap. 10 navigates the blurry distinctions between Disinformation, Misinformation, and Propaganda and examines coronavirus propaganda, identifying the range of forms and persuasive appeals used and reflecting on opportunities to advance educational competencies through the use of their *Mind over Media* platform. Using content analysis of a sample of 88 coronavirus propaganda artifacts available on the platform, Hobbs and Igor Kanižaj identify how contemporary propaganda appeals to audience needs and values, activates emotions, attacks opponents, and simplifies ideas and information and how crowdsourced online educational content on propaganda can be "relevant to the zeitgeist of the times."

SAVE ME WHITE JESUS! Conspiracy and the Spectre of a Folkloric, Alt-right Masculine Ideal

Phil Barber

Invisible King of the Misinformed

Iranian cleric, Shahab Moradi, said Iran would struggle to hit back against the US by striking a parallel figure to Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani because the US has only 'fictional' heroes.

"Think about it" he said in a live interview on Iran's IRIB Ofogh TV channel. "Are we supposed to take out Spiderman and SpongeBob?"

The incoherent legend of an appropriate, aspirational, all-conquering, white masculinity is perpetually born and reborn in the west, leading an 'alt-right' movement yet also forever chasing its meandering development, all whilst never really existing at all. A ghostly presence, sensed but not seen, pieced together via memes and chat rooms and backyard-brawl videos and marches and speeches and Championship Fights and Super Bowls and WWE and Rock and Roll and Captain America and President Trump and the army and Mark Wahlberg and Connor McGregor and Rambo and the Proud Boys and commercials and the gym and *real jobs* and westerns and prison documentaries and Die Hard and Facebook karate tutorials and Clint Eastwood. The spectre of an idealised, performative, ambient masculinity, capable of scaling the 'natural order' to sit atop a paleo-conservative hierarchy (itself set within an increasingly complex and fiercely defended fantasia) haunts the browsing history of

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the west. He's gone before his essence can be totally captured but his myth continually shapeshifts and builds. As a god he is a work in progress; his adherents cosplaying their personal interpretations, an act which doubles as both praise, in his image, but also as a claim to actually *be him*, themselves, if just for a moment. Camo gear, biceps, flak jackets and flags. Baseball caps, beards, bravery and nationalism. The Capitol Hill raid of January 2021 was as much protest as it was a mass audition; individual contestants making their claim to represent and embody the spectre of uber-masculine spectacle. A father. A son. A holy ghost.

Images of the event reveal crowds of predominantly white men; angry, purposeful, violent, amused and then bemused. He's in there somewhere. He's everywhere. UFC. Presidential Election. Arm wrestling. The World Series. National Anthem. Touchdown. Championship ring. Born to lead. Protein Shakes. Owning the Libs. Overtake. Alpha male. Assault Rifles. Hunting knives. Feel alive. Gasoline. Keep 'em keen. American Dream. Bicep curls. T-level test. Hair on your chest. Chest press. National press. Scarface. Save face. Face to face. Take your place. Civic duty. Civil Liberty. Civil Unrest. Civil War. Capitol Hill. King of the Hill. King of The Spectacle. King of the misinformed.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

Blood, Sweat and No Tears

Once the preserve of 'the left' and more specifically a type of left-wing intellectualism, calls to reject mainstream narratives and a mistrust of mainstream media are now characterised by right-wing or 'alt-right' voices. In this incarnation of mainstream rejection, 'knowledge' itself is found on a list of things not to be trusted. Science, academia, politicians, intellectuals, mainstream media and those that endorse or subscribe to them (the 'elites', as they are broadly referred to) all fall foul of a new epistemology that mistrusts anything validated by established epistemological frameworks. Exponents of this new set of rules and values are validated and authenticated by their non-association with previously validated sources; a commentator's lack of connections, qualifications, endorsements or employment by institutions deemed valid by established epistemology actually constitutes their authenticity and trustworthiness as judged by this new framework. It is their lack of official endorsement, qualification or verification (amongst other key, significant factors including race and class) that often affirms their authenticity. Their ideas, theories and calls to action (frequently rejections of mainstream news coverage, rejections of anti-racism movements, rejections of accepted medical or environmental science, all underpinned by a strong belief in an overarching conspiratorial threat) are shared online, sometimes through recorded video messages. These are commonly direct pieces to camera with a recurrent set of values that visually communicate

their authenticity—that is, their lack of connection to the perceived 'mainstream' or any of its associated values. Other material, from mobile phone footage of protest events or performative gestures, to memes, fashion, social commentary and humour, make up a swirling body of visceral, visual output. Amongst this material, patterns emerge; masculinity, whiteness, class and anti-intellectualism are common denominators in what is a radical, new (yet sometimes strangely familiar), demonstrably dangerous and incredibly potent form of media communication.

A key aspect of this emergent threat has been identifiably white and male. From the Capitol Hill riot in the USA on 6 January 2021 (to avenge and restore a president they deemed to have been unfairly and illegally removed from power in a fake election), to the booing of the 'taking the knee' protests by football fans in England six months later (on the grounds of resisting a global Marxist conspiratorial threat carried via coded messages in the gestures of Premier League footballers), back to the emergence of the alt-right 'Feels Good Man' Pepe meme some five years before, a kind of 'alt-right', white masculinity is a consistent, vocal and visible presence.

Pepe, the alt-right mascot and omni-present meta-narrator of post-ironic political discourse, was first appropriated from Matt Furie's comic book work in memes posted on men's workout forums.[1] This is not insignificant. 'Feels good man' emerged as a kind of affirmation for men dedicating their time to the weights room whilst forgoing opportunities to socialise with others on nights out or at parties. The decision to focus on one's own physical form, an individual pursuit of muscle growth or 'gains', was often justified by the individual (and in turn validated by other forum members) by the sharing of the 'feels good man' meme. Ground zero for Pepe the meme, the image would go on to mutate rapidly, becoming the problematic, visceral and loaded post pop culture character we recognise today.

Workout forums are one of the rare corners of the internet where men can be found to encourage and support each other. In a culture which pits men against each other (and everyone else) and champions individual success (competition winners, Last Man Standing, MVP, Forbes rich list etc.), the workout forum may be a surrogate for the sort of community that men might actually want or need.[2] Competition exists, of course, and each forum thread is invariably interrupted by criticism, take-downs and cruel humour. But the 'noob' will likely find advice, reassurance and encouragement, even when sharing candid and vulnerable self-shot images of what they perceive to be their own underdeveloped physiques. There is an awareness and agreement amongst the group that achieving a larger, more muscular physique is difficult, culturally significant and *absolutely necessary*.

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[1] BBC (2020). *BBC Four – Storyville, Pepe the Frog: Feels Good Man*. [online] BBC. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000nwrq

[2] Perry, G. (2017). *The descent of man*. London: Penguin Books (p. 27).

A muscular, broad physique remains a potent visual communication of masculine competence, threat and supremacy. Achieving a silhouette that communicates a capacity for devastating physical violence sustains a hallowed position culturally, appearing everywhere from Hollywood, advertising and sport, to politics, protest, folklore and sex. From UFC champions and A-list action heroes to hirsute Daddies and stern Dom's, muscle signifies power, strength, control, virility, desirability, hierarchy and raw capability. Brute strength still has great currency in the popular consciousness—it is considered no-nonsense, anti-intellectual,[3] earthy, animal and natural. It is the antidote to discourse and complexity. It is a sitting prime minister communicating his competence not through political action but by a photograph of him doing press-ups on the carpet of a Downing Street office.[4] It's the term 'a man's man'. It's Bruce Willis. It's the strong but silent type. It's what women want when they don't want a long-term partner.[5] It's the subject of lust. It's animal magnetism. The subject of envy. It is real in a world of fakes. It is manual labour. Blood, sweat and no tears. It is Alpha. It's the silhouette of the hero. It is the visual, physical expression of high testosterone levels. It is a male beauty standard. It is a masculine competency standard.

As such, a bigger physique is sought after amongst men and much time, money and effort go into achieving and sustaining 'gains'. Indeed, many men believe that much rides on achieving this aim; the ability to attract a partner or multiple partners, amongst them, but also respect, awe and fear amongst other men. This is physicality as currency. The language of 'Alpha' and 'Beta' males is rife in these spaces. This is an opportunity to climb the gigantic pyramid scheme that is the western white masculine supremacy complex.[6] An opportunity to graduate from being a beta male to achieving status as an alpha male. The solidarity men share in this aim, expressed on forums and in gyms, functions like both a supportive mentor and a toxic enabler in one potent cocktail. A network of commentary around health and fitness, positive mindsets and target setting is cut through with testosterone injections, aggression, misogyny and predatory sexual rhetoric. Healthy eating seems to bleed indiscriminately into calorie counting and eating disorders. Pride in one's appearance overlaps with obsession and body dysmorphia. Challenging workouts hard to separate from brutal self-flagellation; vomit inducing, injury causing, tendon tearing routines, relentless, exhausting and damaging. A huge, lucrative industry

[3] Hofstadter, R. (2020). *RICHARD HOFSTADTER: anti-intellectualism in American life, the paranoid style in American… politics, uncollected essays 1956–1965*. S.L.: Library of America.

[4] The Independent. (2020). *Boris Johnson sparks public horror after posing doing press-ups on newspaper front page*. [online] Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/boris-johnson-press-ups-mail-sunday-putin-coronavirus-a9589691.html [Accessed 8 July 2021].

[5] Stower, R.E., Lee, A.J., McIntosh, T.L., Sidari, M.J., Sherlock, J.M. and Dixson, B.J.W. (2019). Mating Strategies and the Masculinity Paradox: How Relationship Context, Relationship Status, and Sociosexuality Shape Women's Preferences for Facial Masculinity and Beardedness. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49(3), pp. 809–820.

[6] Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

normalises this desire and the ever twisting and intensifying spectacle culturally incentivises men to chase this ideal. There's much to gain from the gains.

And yet, crucially, this muscular physique is, for most who chase or even attain it, benign. It is a gesture, an echo of a functional and purposeful physique built for and from engagement in manual labour, war and the need to defend oneself and one's family and property, physically, at any moment (though the actual prevalence of this physique in real history is questionable). The chase to attain this physique represents both a raging against and a perfect metaphor for these men's perceived loss of utility to a society that has abandoned much of the physical labour that drove the industrial revolution, for instance, and with it the pride attached to driving an economy and feeding a family through the honest and wholesome physicality of a working day. This idea too, of course, is part of the rich folklore of masculinity, where history and mythology are whisked into both nostalgia for a past that may not have really existed and resentment at a present that may itself be mis-represented through a web of algorithms, demi-gods and discourse, purposefully or otherwise. Twenty-first century men, building muscular frames to sit at a desk and watch professional fights and digital wars being fought, from iPhones and laptops. Even real wars happen in abstract now for much of the privileged west, on screens, fought by drones and computers, or glimpsed on television news and Twitter as clips and handheld footage. Wrapped in this very contemporary performance of masculinity are recognisable themes and theories; this is Marx's fetishisation of commodity[7] as applied to masculine, working-class physicality; it is Foucault's biopower twisted through a post-industrial digital lens, men rendered 'docile bodies'; it is pure spectacle;[8] it might be metamodernism; it might be necropopulism;[9] it might be something totally new.

> For people who are appalled by the increasing popularity of the alt-right, understanding the nature of their attraction is of vital importance, and a theorization of the metamodern sensibility is a useful tool for doing so. It seems clear that a significant motivational factor for the alt-right, beyond their ultra-nationalist political doctrine, is that they don't find a home for their sense of interiority in the mainstream left *or* the conventional right. (Dember, 2020)[10]

The synthesis of a new understanding of these shifting and evolving aspects of contemporary white masculinity with a new understanding of alt-right aesthetics, conspiracy, performance, protest and gesture and how they manifest in the online space will form a valuable contribution to knowledge in this field.

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[7] Todd, J. (2015). *The poor fetish: commodifying working class culture*. [online] ROAR Magazine. Available at: https://roarmag.org/essays/london-middle-class-culture-poverty/

[8] Debord, G. (1977). *Society of the spectacle*. London: Rebel Press.

[9] Bratich, J. (2021). "Give me liberty or give me Covid!": Anti-lockdown protests as necropopulist downsurgency. *Cultural Studies*, 35(2–3), pp. 257–265.

[10] Dember, Greg. (2020). *What Is Metamodernism and Why Does It Matter?* [online] Available at: https://thesideview.co/journal/what-is-metamodernism-and-why-does-it-matter/

The relationship of conspiracy and misinformation to the alt-right and in turn to white masculinity has not been specifically identified, understood and discussed. It is in the synthesis of these areas of research, along with a creative/performative interrogation and response, that represents new knowledge.

These worlds clashed most potently and visually on 6 January 2021, when Qanon adherents, Trump supporters and people broadly identified as the 'alt-right' rioted at Capitol Hill.[11] Mostly men, and overwhelmingly white, the group stormed Capitol Hill, breaking inside government buildings in a historically unprecedented event that caused injury and fatalities. This event sustains discussion many months later and, despite hours of footage, confession and evidence, where to appropriately attribute blame and find motive remains contested in the minds of the American electorate (the division endures, multiple, conflicting 'truths' are proposed depending on the news channel reporting the incident). Images reveal violence, theatricality, protest, humour, irony, gesture, vitriol and death. There is a sense of dispossession.[12] But of what have these people been dispossessed? Is 'it' (the thing of which they have been dispossessed) real, tangible, describable? And how do these protests, performances, gestures, violent acts and images communicate these ideas? The images were scattered, in real time, across the internet; bystanders and participants filmed and photographed the event on mobile phones and cameras creating a digital timeline followed by millions online globally.[13] The footage reached me instantaneously, thousands of miles away, in my living room in Nottinghamshire, England, my phone rhythmically lighting the lounge from approximately 10 pm onwards, with every new Twitter notification. The imagery cascaded down social media timelines, accompanied with commentary and commentary on the commentary,[14] a live feed of violence and real time narration. Conspiracy, political discourse, misinformation, outrage, delight, excitement, horror and ambivalence,[15] all in an endless waterfall of communication. Consistent themes recurring; conspiracy, misinformation, violence and white men. What, exactly, is going on?

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[11] Khavin, D., Willis, H., Hill, E., Reneau, N., Jordan, D., Engelbrecht, C., Triebert, C., Cooper, S., Browne, M. and Botti, D. (n.d.). Video: Day of Rage: An In-Depth Look at How a Mob Stormed the Capitol. *The New York Times*. [online] Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/politics/100000007606996/capitol-riot-trump-supporters.html

[12] Butler, J. and Athanasiou, A. (2013). *Dispossession: the performative in the political*. Malden, MA: Polity.

[13] King, G. (2005). *The Spectacle of the real: from Hollywood to "reality" TV and beyond*. Bristol, UK; Portland, Or: Intellect.

[14] Nagle, A. (2017). *Kill all normies: the online culture wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the alt-right and Trump*. Winchester, UK; Washington, USA: Zero Books.

[15] Phillips, W. and Milner, R.M. (2017). *The ambivalent Internet: mischief, oddity, and antagonism online*. Cambridge, UK Polity Press.

Bring Back Manly Muppets

Conor McGregor prowls back and forth in front of his widescreen TV. I'm watching him on my iPhone. He's posted a video of himself to his Instagram account. He's watching his big screen telly intently. Topless, muscular and flexed, hunched, broad and bristling with rage he paces on the carpet, fixated on the screen. On it is footage of a man he'd like to fight. Also topless, muscled and pacing, the man is being filmed in the moments before he fights another man, professionally, in a UFC televised event. McGregor stands inches from the surface of the screen, at home, arms outstretched, a stand-off with the pixels. "Come on!" He shouts. The man on the video cannot see or hear him. These events aren't really even happening at the same time.

Further down the feed, another video displays a man brutally assaulting a rubbery, dummy torso and head. The lifeless mould of a male face, chest and midriff vibrates and flexes as the man pounds it with a flurry of punches, apparently in his own garage. He shouts with each contact, a staccato, machine gun fire of grunts through gritted teeth. Exhausted, landing one last uncontested right hook to the indifferent, unconscious training aid, the man turns to the camera and meets the gaze of the audience. "Come on!" he shouts.

Another scroll down the timeline reveals a man in a gym on a running machine. The machine is set to walking pace. He stalks slowly on the machine, slightly crouched, as if creeping through a space full of threat, but going nowhere. He holds up a dumbbell as if it were an assault rifle, staring down the imaginary barrel of the imaginary gun, maintaining his low stance, pacing forward like a member of a swat team in a movie, stuck in the same place, fixated on himself in the mirror in front of the machine. Some women on the running machines next to him gesture at each other to leave. "Come on" says a subtle head nod and a worried glance to each other.

Candace Owens posts a Twitter status. She is concerned that children's television, in this particular case, The Muppets, is pushing a 'trans agenda' on its viewers. "This is sick and perverted" she writes. "Bring back manly muppets, anyone?" she asks. More scrolling reveals that Piers Morgan is angry about rumours that a woman will be cast as the new James Bond. "James Bond is the last real man!" types former newspaper editor, television presenter and social commentator, Piers. "But James Bond isn't real" counters ex footballer, TV personality and gameshow host, Gary Lineker.

A final flick of the thumb down the timeline reveals a video of The Booing Man. The booing man is a potent emblem of England, of masculinity and conservatism in 2021. Appearing to be in his 40s or 50s, the man is white, bald and wears a red replica England football shirt and dark shorts. He stands in front of his wall mounted television, hung above a faux fireplace, with his back to the screen. Stood up and shot from below (presumably by a partner, friend or child on the sofa in front of him) he stands straight, hands clasped behind his back like a soldier stood in 'parade rest'. With the television behind him showing football players taking the knee before a game, he boos loudly, a deep booming

boo, a number of times. He continues until he checks over his shoulder to see that the kneeling has stopped and the game has started. This is his duty. This is bravery. This is honour-bound service, for Queen and country. On Sunday 13 June 2021, England played Croatia in their opening group game of Euro 2020: a football tournament delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but not renamed because of the amount of merchandise and branded material already produced with the original date on it. England's players 'took the knee' before the game, a gesture in support of anti-racism and an emergent practice beyond American sport in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd over a year earlier in the USA. The Black Lives Matter movement reverberated across the western world and the gesture of taking the knee before a game was adopted and became a fixture of the 20–21 English Premier League season. The England national team also adopted the gesture as a pre-kick-off statement and did so before their opening group game against Croatia. A large number of boos erupted from the crowd, challenged by some clapping and cheering shortly afterwards. This had happened before, during two matches in the week before the start of the tournament, where each time the team took the knee they were met by boos from their own fans. The video animating my iPhone screen depicts a man watching the game in his own home, recording his own booing of the pre-match gesture, as the game plays on his television behind him. It is shot in portrait, on a mobile phone and lasts 13 s. It was shared on Twitter and gathered over 1.3 million views (at the time of writing). The man boos from his lounge, proud, chest puffed and hands clasped, drowning out the noise of his own TV. It is a warm day in June, the fireplace behind him is switched on, presumably for ambience, the fake flames dance, the wallpaper is printed in such a way to look like stone brick work from a distance, the replica shirt designed to look like the players kit, the booing a gesture from home to an audience of one, or millions, depending on how you prefer to think about it. Convinced that the 'taking the knee' gesture is part of a Marxist plot to bring down capitalism, facilitated by young, woke, millionaire footballers, the comments below the video are a cacophony of conspiracy, misinformation and confusion. He boos 'the Marxist plot', he boos 'wokeness', he boos the loss of 'real men' in football. He boos the lack of manly muppets. He boos.

The Spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, *mediated by images*.[16]

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[16] Debord, Guy, and Ken Knabb. 2000. Society of the spectacle. London: Rebel Press.

Fake News: Problems with—and Alternatives to—the Media Literacy Project

Adrian Quinn

The pioneering media scholars of the 1970s and 1980s, many of whom came from sociology, were largely concerned with distortion in the news and the effect that distortion surely had upon the social world. That generation's scholarship showed that there were real social consequences to distorted media reporting that went beyond the cosmetic, or just the presentational. But scholars with those concerns stopped short of saying that the news was *fake*. This chapter discusses the well-meaning, but sometimes misguided efforts of media educators to offer up media literacy as the principal remedy to the current crisis of fake news. Many observers object to the term fake news and encourage us to desist from using it. Claire Wardle (2018) is an important voice on the crisis of mis- and disinformation, but she dislikes the term 'fake news' and jokes there should be a swear jar handed to those who use it. However, the phrase seems here to stay and therefore this essay persists in using it as a critical term. I will offer a case study to show that mainstream media can be both a source of—and a correction to—fake news about a divisive social issue. Key to my discussion of fake news will be the element of *intent*. For strategic reasons of their own, both the Left and the Right in England have indulged in a distorting discourse around student finance. Both have become invested in the falsehood that undergraduate students pay fees to attend university. As an alternative to standard media literacy, which has failed to take on this falsehood, I want to propose a literacy that is rooted in a critical understanding of state funding and of the considerable resources that funding can make available.

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The appeal of the media literacy project is that it offers a hopeful vision of what education and knowledge can accomplish. It is in sympathy with Noam Chomsky's view that, ultimately, his writings amount to a course in intellectual self-defence. Chomsky trusts in what he calls the Cartesian common sense of ordinary people and has faith in their capacity to see through the deceits in which they are ensnared. Among the recent and yearly additions to the literature on media literacy are *Civic Media Literacies: Re-Imagining Human Connection in an Age of Digital Abundance* (Mihailidis, 2019); *Everyday Media Literacy: An Analog Guide for Your Digital Life* (Christian, 2020); *Understanding Digital Literacies: A Practical Introduction* (Jones & Hafner, 2021); *Let's Agree to Disagree: A Critical Thinking Guide to Communication, Conflict Management, and Critical Media Literacy* (Higdon & Huff, 2022) and *Paradoxes of Media and Information Literacy: The Crisis of Information* (Haider & Sundin, 2022).[1] Peer-reviewed journals in media and communications, many of which focus on pedagogy, have also published worthwhile material, often based on experimental data and classroom exercises, on how criticality can combat falsehood (Bonnet & Rosenbaum, 2020; Craft et al., 2016; Duran et al., 2008; Fleming, 2014; Fowler-Watt & McDougall, 2019; Hameleers, 2022; Jones-Jang et al., 2021; Lee, 2018; Maksl et al., 2017; Potter & Thai, 2020; Sourbati, 2009; Tully et al., 2020; Vraga & Tully, 2021; Vraga et al., 2022a, b; Wallis & Buckingham, 2013).

Among the difficulties with the media literacy project however (at least as it is typically discussed) is the heavy and possibly disproportionate pressure that is placed upon it. At its best, media literacy offers citizens the chance to informationally 'skill up' at a time when the media—their proprietors, their regulators and their workers—seem to be failing us. At its worst, the media literacy project places a sentimental construction on a gritty social problem that is, objectively, far larger than the calls to bolster media literacy may indicate. David Buckingham for one is sceptical of the current emphasis on media literacy. In his *Media Education Manifesto*, he says:

> In the age of social media, fake news and data-driven capitalism, the need for critical understanding is more urgent than ever. Half-baked ideas about 'media literacy' will lead us nowhere: we need a comprehensive and coherent educational approach. We all need to think critically about how media work, how they represent the world, and how they are produced and used. (2018: np)

A Literacy of Another Kind

To the surprise of some, Chomsky insists that his Propaganda Model is a selective criticism of the media and even a defence of journalism, inasmuch as the model makes transparent the filters through which news passes. For all their dissatisfaction with elite reporters, Chomsky and his late collaborator Edward

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[1] These four texts are from the same publisher.

Herman regarded them as indispensable. This is in part because mainstream media have traditionally been able to commit resources (typically but not always gained from selling advertising) that are largely unavailable to others. The issue of resources is one that I want to focus on and to contrast with the current emphasis on media literacy.

In *Flat Earth News* (2008) the investigative journalist Nick Davies raised the alarm about the coming of an age of information chaos. Foreshadowing the term 'fake news,' Davies observed a depletion of skills, resources and accountability in newsrooms and at the turn of the century he began running crash courses in investigative journalism to help restore the skills of reporting.[2] Understanding these three things and the relationship between them is crucial to our understanding of how journalism functions. An economic literacy that stresses the matter of how to fund public service journalism, the traditional bulwark against publicly communicated falsehoods would look very different to the media literacy project that educators and our publishers typically and sincerely promote. This alternative form of literacy *is* normative, but it is not utopian. It accepts that there has always been a discomforting appetite for fake news and that public interest journalism will always struggle to compete with celebrity-oriented stories and downmarket news values.

When it was financially strongest, the *New York Times* featured 60% advertisements and 40% news, meaning the majority of the product was advertising. Concurrent with the calls for improved media literacy, we have seen the decline in the funding model for mainstream reporting—a possibly existential decline discussion of which tends to be eclipsed (at least among some educators) by a focus on making citizens more adept in their use of media texts. When Rupert Murdoch acquired *The Times* and *Sunday Times* in 1981 he undertook to maintain them as separate titles with separate editorial staffs.[3] By January 2019, Murdoch was asking the UK government for permission to begin sharing resources between the two titles, including journalists, to help ease cost pressures (BBC News, 18 January 2019). Speaking on the *Media Show* in 2016, David Dinsmore, Chief Operating Officer of the Murdoch-owned News UK, talked about journalism's broken business model. Dinsmore called for a 'fair deal' for news brands whose content the social media giants (he named Google and Facebook) monetise and exploit (BBC Radio 4, 14 December 2016). He did not have the time to fully unpack how that fair deal might be achieved, but in endorsing a Deloitte report on the economic contribution of the UK news media industry, Dinsmore affirmed that:

> Urgent action must be taken to ensure that news media publishers' ability to fund the original agenda-setting news and information our readers want us to produce is not fatally undermined by third parties who gain so much from our investment while contributing very little. (News Media Association, 2016)

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[2] The author is a graduate of one such course, held in Brighton in March 2000.
[3] These two titles have never been profitable, but have afforded political influence.

By 2018, *The Guardian* reported figures from the advertising company GroupM which showed that when Facebook was launched in 2004, the UK regional newspaper advertising market was worth £2.7 billion. Its predicted value by the end of 2019 fell to £700 million (Sweney, 2018).

Throughout the 2010s, stakeholders proposed discrete measures to at least stem the funding crisis. In 2012, David Leigh at *The Guardian* proposed a £2 levy on broadband that could, in his words, 'save our newspapers.' Contributors to the widely read *Journalism Studies* and *British Journalism Review* expressed unease at the funding that public interest journalism might receive from trusts and charitable foundations (Browne, 2010; Harkin, 2021; Scott et al., 2019) while others have explored the notion of entrepreneurial journalism as an alternative way forward (Briggs, 2011; Marsden, 2017; Rafter, 2019; Singer, 2016; Singer & Broersma, 2020). As is widely known, *The Guardian* has long enjoyed the support of the Scott Trust, whose other investments have allowed the paper to publish at a loss. In 2012, *The Guardian's* Luke Harding predicted that with yearly losses of between 40 and 50 million pounds, the paper would close within five years and yet his then editor, Alan Rusbridger, said that it was 'folly' for his rival paper, *The Times*, to put its content behind a pay wall in an attempt to create a revenue stream (Channel 4 News, 26 March 2010). *The Guardian* did not close. However, under the editorship of Rusbridger's successor, Katherine Viner, the paper did sell its printing presses, cut staff and dump its costly Berliner format in favour of an industry standard tabloid that could be produced on the presses of its slightly less cash-strapped rival papers. All of this was done not with a view to moving the paper into profitability, but 'as part of a three-year plan to break even' (Sweney, 2017). In October 2019, the Barclay brothers announced that they were in the early stages of selling *The Telegraph* for an anticipated £200 million, less than one third of the £665 million they paid to acquire the title in 2004, after its profits fell by 94% in 2018 (BBC News, 26 October 2019). A few months earlier, the paper's previous owner, Conrad Black, whose newspaper group was once the third largest in the Anglosphere, was asked if he would ever consider owning a newspaper again. 'I don't think it's a good business,' he replied. 'When I first got into it, it was a good business with a high profit margin. And the news, by definition, is interesting. But it became a very difficult business and the fragmentation of the media makes it extremely competitive' (BBC, 2019).

David Leigh (quoted above) made a plea to save our newspapers. One could go further and say that the most immediate way to combat fake news is to save not only newspapers, but save journalism. That public interest journalism is under threat is undeniable and unless a way can be found to pay for journalism, then all the other questions that rightly preoccupy media educators (ethics, regulation, representation and so on) become academic. Amol Rajan, the BBC's media editor, is clear that Google and Facebook are 'the richest companies in history' (BBC News, 15 December 2020). The crossbench peer Baroness Kidron brings a similar sense of proportion to the debate. Speaking in the House of Lords on the subject of free speech and big tech, she described

as 'eye-wateringly well resourced' the online world in which news brands are now trying to compete (BBC Parliament, 13 December 2021). Given their resources, how then should these tech companies be compelled to, in Dinsmore's words, come to a 'fair deal' with the news brands? In the summer of 2019, then leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, proposed something concrete. Speaking at Edinburgh Television Festival, Corbyn endorsed a tech tax to fund public interest journalism specifically. Such a tax could, he said, be levied on tech giants including Facebook, Google and Amazon. Meeting in London in June 2017, the G7 agreed on a measure of tax reform, including reform to the taxes levied on big tech. A plan to dedicate some of that revenue, which would be considerable, to public interest journalism could have direct implications for democracy. In November 2018, an urgent question was asked in the Westminster Parliament about Johnston Press, after news broke that it had gone into administration with debts of £220 million. The publisher of 200 local and regional titles, including the *Scotsman*, the *i* and the *Yorkshire Post*, Johnston Press pointed the finger directly at the impact that Facebook and Google were having on its advertising revenue (BBC News, 17 November 2018). Speaking in the Commons that day, the then Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Tom Watson, said that the crisis in the press is a matter of civic duty. Watson is co-author of *Dial M for Murdoch: News Corporation and the Corruption of Britain* (Watson & Hickman, 2012) and a leading critic of the Murdoch press. Yet, Watson is also aware of the democratic deficit that is created by a failing press and the threat of its replacement by big tech. Watson spoke of tech oligopolies dominating digital ad revenues; of their avoiding fair taxes and their sneering at the parliaments that try to hold them to account. 'Even Rupert Murdoch showed greater respect for our democratic institutions than Mark Zuckerberg,' he said (*Monday in Parliament*, BBC Parliament, 20 November 2018).

Case Study: University Tuition Fees in England

Following an independent review by Lord Browne on higher education funding and student finance, a coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats announced in 2010 that tuition fees for undergraduate students in England would rise threefold, from £3000 to £9000. Demonstrations followed and in London the Rolls Royce taking Prince Charles and his wife Camilla to a Royal Variety performance was set upon by protestors. Tuition fees had in fact been introduced in 1998 by the previous Labour government under Tony Blair, with a student loan company put in place to administer those fees. By the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, fees had risen to a yearly £9250. The most outspoken critic of the dominant discourse on tuition fees is Martin Lewis, founder of MoneySavingExpert.com and co-presenter of ITV's *Martin Lewis Money Show Live*. In an outburst on *Question Time*, Martin Lewis once called tuition fees a 'political football' and a 'red herring' and he accused the opposition business minister sitting next to him of deliberately mis-educating a

whole generation of young people, especially those from under-privileged backgrounds, by affirming that graduates face leaving university with £57,000 of debt (BBC 1, 3 May 2018). 'It is an abomination, you should all hold your heads in shame,' he said in anger. Lewis, a journalism graduate, has waged a battle against fake news on multiple fronts, not least the unauthorised use of his face in scam advertisements. Speaking not long after the reported fees hike, Lewis explained, 'While it's called a loan, it actually has many of the same characteristics as a tax. And it's perhaps nearer that than to a traditional debt. And that means to really understand it, you have to think about it in a totally different way' (*The Martin Lewis Money Show*, 24 May 2013). At the time of writing, 9% of a working graduate's salary is deducted once they earn above £25,775. Only the portion above that threshold is deducted, though that threshold can always be lowered. Described as an architect of the student loans system, Nicholas Barr from the London School of Economics told the BBC: 'the public don't understand that it's not a debt like credit card debt. It's a payroll deduction alongside income tax and national insurance contributions and should be seen as no more scary than a payroll deduction' (BBC News 18 February 2018).

In September 2021, the BBC's lunchtime current affairs programme *Politics Live* debated whether undergraduate students at British universities should have their tuition fees reimbursed due to the diminished experience of learning in the restricted environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. Homemade signs made by students confined to their halls in Manchester read '9k for what?' and '9k for this?' A contributor to the programme agreed that students should be compensated, saying:

> Students are getting a raw deal at the moment. They're paying huge fees, they're getting themselves in big debt over the course of their lifetime and they aren't getting the quality teaching they deserve. I think there should be some sort of compensation for them because of that. (9 September 2021)

This is as typical an assertion about the cost of higher education as one is likely to see reported in the news. Mainstream news has alternately been both the source and the remedy to misinformation on student finance. In February 2021, the BBC's education editor asked 'Coronavirus: Should university students get a refund?' The story read:

> It's been a tough year for students. Almost all lectures and other teaching have moved online and the university experience, for many, has shrunk to staring at a laptop in their bedroom. Hardship funds and partial rent rebates have helped some financially. But many students still feel the £9,250 yearly tuition fee in England is too much for what they've experienced in the pandemic. (BBC News, 17 February 2021)

Two questions need to be asked here: (1) what is the source of this distorted discourse on university tuition and (2) has the news been guilty of reporting that discourse uncritically? In an appearance on *Politics Live*, Martin Lewis helpfully narrated the true history of the student loan system:

> When this was first set up, Tony Blair's government was scared of calling this what it is. It's called a graduate contribution system in other countries. Effectively, it's a form of limited graduate tax. But as Labour government, Tony Blair didn't want to introduce a new tax, so we've misnamed it. (BBC2, 14 May 2019)

In the 1990s, discussions of distortion among media academics, especially those in political communications, gave way to discussions of *spin* (Franklin, 1994; Palmer, 2000). Martin Lewis's account of how a tax came to be communicated as fee speaks to the element of *intent*—intent on the part of the government that established this distortion and the successive governments which have sustained and nurtured it. 'You KNOW it doesn't work like that,' shouted Martin Lewis on *Question Time* when an opposition minister spoke of graduates facing £57,000 of debt (BBC 1, 3 May 2018). Speaking to *Today* a few months later, Lord Adonis, once the Labour Party's education minister, also repeated the dubious claim that student fees had 'trebled,' under the Tory/Liberal Democrat government that succeeded Labour in 2010. Paul Johnson from the Institute for Fiscal Studies appeared to correct Adonis on air. 'It's effectively a graduate tax for most people,' Johnson said.

> The way it's been sold and packaged makes it look like people are graduating with a huge amount of debt, but you really shouldn't think about it like that. You're actually graduating with a higher tax rate than if you were not a graduate. […] Strange accounting rules are driving this. Because this is packaged as a *loan*, even though the government is spending [almost] £20 billion on supporting universities, none of that counts against government borrowing. Whereas, if you called this a graduate *tax*, then it would *all* count against the deficit, upfront. Something the government needs to balance is: We need to make this *look* like and *feel* like and *sound* like a loan system because, if we don't, that makes our finances look worse. (16 August 2018)

Here it is necessary to state the elementary truth that educators do not levy taxes, the state does. Uncomfortably though, educators too have a case to answer since the disguised presentation as a fee, of something that is really a tax, happened on our watch and we did little to explode it. Just as journalists often fail to report on big stories that are right under their noses,[4] educators have largely failed to instruct on tuition fees. This speaks to an educational deficit existing alongside the funding deficits that I explored earlier. There is some evidence that tuition fees are an extension of an already existing democratic deficit affecting young adult voices. Speaking on the *Andrew Marr Show*,

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[4] See Tambini (2010) and Starkman (2014) on the reporting of the 2008 financial crash.

Stephen Bush from the left of centre *New Statesman* magazine said that 'the difficulty with tuition fees is that it's a clever way the treasury found of raising income tax on a group of people who didn't vote' (BBC1, 9 July 2017). I indicated a moment ago that while universities are providing the service that is higher education, only the state can tax. At the end of 2018, the Office for National Statistics ruled that students loans were public spending (BBC News, 17 December 2018). This was significant ruling as it challenged the narrative that student debt was private debt paid by fees rather than public spending to be funded by a tax. The former narrative had previously been reinforced by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which estimated the average student debt at upwards of £50,000 (BBC News, 18 February 2018). Contradictorily, the IFS also predicted that three quarters of students would never fully repay what they owe, suggesting a largely phantom debt.

In September 2020, an 11 year old girl named Erin appeared on Martin Lewis's *Money Show Live* and asked Lewis if she could get a part-time job because she was worried about paying for her university tuition fees. After giving Erin some fatherly advice, Lewis then proceeded to break the fourth wall and make an angry appeal that was reported in other media:

> One of the things that really upsets me is hearing from young children saying that they can't afford to go to university. And the politicians we have in this country! You can have your political arguments. But you save your didactic! You keep your anger down and you think what you do to our young people. Because by having that argument and that debate, you disenfranchise a load of kids. You're making them scared of the wrong things. It's not always easy and it's not always simple, but let's not scare them off for the wrong reason. An 11 year old saying that upsets me. (*The Martin Lewis Money Show Live*, ITV1, 10 September 2020)

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen is one of the most prolific scholars in media studies. In 2005, she and two co-authors asked the question: *Citizens or Consumers? What the Media Tell us about Political Participation* (Lewis et al., 2005). Educators are right to be concerned about the corrosive effect that the discourse on fees is having on relations between ourselves and young people. Alongside opportunistic politicians and sections of the commentariat, evidence shows that the 9k figure has trickled down and is being weaponised by students in a range of unanticipated contexts, from well-being, to freedom of speech, to lawful industrial action. In 2018, *You and Yours* featured a segment on the mental health of students at university. A contributor to the programme spoke of her suffering. 'I couldn't get out of bed for days at a time. Constant dull headaches, mild psychosis, panic attacks. I'm paying £9000 a year, I have the right to expect to be taken care of,' she said (BBC Radio 4, 14 March 2018). Few in a welfare state would disagree that a student in mental distress has the right to be cared for. However, linking that suffering to the 9k figure is troubling. Similarly, in 2017, *Newsnight* featured a segment on freedom of speech on university

campuses in England. An exchange between *Newsnight's* Katie Razzall and a student from University College London went:

Katie Razzall: University is about learning new ideas, free thinking and exploring. And it's becoming, some people say, more about how some students *feel*. People say that's not what university should be about.

> UCL Student: I would have to completely disagree with them because I pay £9.25k a year. I've paid not only for my education, but for an experience. A social setting that is comfortable for myself, not only for the one beside me, but everyone. It should be inclusive. (*Newsnight*, BBC2, 17 October 2017)

Here again, few educators would disagree that university should be inclusive. However, citing the 9.25k figure in the context of a discussion on academic freedom and freedom of speech is chilling. Students are perhaps the least blameworthy group in this confusion. Martin Lewis characterises student loan statements they receive as dangerous and misleading and in a provocative moment he encouraged students to tear them up. The above are just illustrative vignettes, as an exhaustive audit of the reporting of student finance is beyond the scope of this essay. However, these examples and others that I have not cited give some sense of how tuition fees have been weaponised.

Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to give some sense of what the media literacy project is up against. I offered a test case in the form of falsehood on tuition fees—a falsehood in which, to a point, government, educators and the news media are complicit. In bad faith, successive governments have promoted media literacy on one hand, while fostering financial illiteracy on the other. Educators have, by and large, failed to explode this 'fake' discourse. I conclude here that there has been a convoluted and sometimes falsified public discussion on student finance. A distorted discourse that speaks of fees, loans and debt should be replaced by one that speaks of public spending, taxation and the public interest. There are two broad positions on taxation. One, usually attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, says that taxation is the price we pay for civilisation. The other says that taxation is theft. The future of higher education, like the future of journalism, requires us to reconcile our attitude to taxation and to promote true criticality about how questions of taxation are communicated to publics. I began by asserting that media education must go further than offering citizens better tools for navigating media *texts*. If fake news is to be realistically countered, a sense of proportion is also required. That sense will be most usefully found in a critical discussion of the *resources* possessed by tech giants versus the resources available to nation states and to their public service media. Along with healthcare and transport, education is a large and just draw on any country's public resources. The news media must arrive at a literate representation of those resources. Much of the media literacy project is naturally concerned

with the young. But there is a pernicious conundrum in the fact that young adults in England seem to be the least literate in the area that concerns them most: how their university studies are paid for.

James Curran and Jean Seaton's *Power Without Responsibility*, currently in its eighth edition (2018), would appear on any journalism educator's list of top five must-read books. Speaking at the turn of the century, Curran did not express optimism for what lay ahead. 'There is not a lot of dialogue between Media Studies and industry,' he said. 'A massive public investment has been made in media education with it having a minimal influence on the actual practice of journalism' (interview, 29 January 1999). Fast forward 20 years and the testimony of Curran's co-author is even darker. An exasperated Jean Seaton told the makers of the film *Propaganda: The Art of Selling Lies*:

> A lot of confusion has been sown by a lot of the ways in which intellectuals have talked about truth. 'There is no such thing as the truth.' That's what undergraduates write in essays. Undergraduates—who've never *tried* to find out what the truth is—say in this Olympian way, 'there are many truths.' There's been a philosophical and sociological undermining of the fact that trying to establish reality is a very fierce discipline. (2019)

Educators, Curran and Seaton among them, know that genuine media literary is hard earned and often must wade through what is merely suspicion or, worse, cynicism. The media literacy project is by no means futile, quite the opposite. However, educators must be critical of our own recent emphases and not self-congratulatory about a project that was already underway before it was given its current, rather self-conscious label. This involves asking whether media literacy can compete with the increase of falsehoods that will inevitably follow from the collapse of under resourced public interest journalism. This will also require a reality check on the relative influence of media education and a sober reassessment of the media literacy agenda, what it has accomplished and where it has fallen short.

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Fact-Checking in Hong Kong: An Emerging Form of Journalism and Media Education Amid Political Turmoil

Masato Kajimoto

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of misinformation is not a new phenomenon in Hong Kong. During the months-long political gridlock and social unrest called Umbrella Movement in 2014, unsubstantiated internet rumours, misleading political rhetoric, grossly exaggerated news stories, manipulated audio-visual materials, conspiracy theories, and other types of groundless claims were already part of the media diet for many people in the city (Chan & Lee, 2018; Kruger 2017, 2019).

But while heavy usage of social media among the demonstrators for organising various political actions demanding universal suffrage gained plenty of interest from academics and journalists alike (Agur & Frisch, 2019; Chu, 2018; Lee, 2016; Lee et al., 2015), at the time the possible influence of misinformation seems to have been largely ignored, as illustrated by the relative scarcity of scholarly works and news articles on this topic vis-à-vis the impact of social media.

Even after the phrases like "fake news" and "post-truth" gained worldwide attention in 2016 following the Brexit and the US presidential election, the social phenomena observed elsewhere were seemingly not an immediate

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concern for most people in Hong Kong, even though the society is distinctly polarised and its media landscape is known to be demonstrably partisan.

A dramatic change took place in 2019, however, spurred by a series of large-scale, city-wide street protests against the government's plan to amend the Fugitive Ordinance. Fearing that the proposal would pave the way for the authorities in Hong Kong to extradite suspects to mainland China, a group of protesters opposing the Extradition Law Amendment Bill (ELAB) took such drastic measures as storming into the Legislative Council building, occupying the Chek Lap Kok International Airport, and sporadically blocking arterial roads all over the city.

Meantime, an overwhelming amount of misleading and fallacious content about the political upheaval began inundating the public information space, muddling the lines between news reports and unfounded hearsay. The word "fake news" entered everyday conversations. All sides of the political spectrum—from government officials to the police to supporters of the movement to radical activists—openly pointed the finger at "lies and deceits" coming from the opposing camp (Banjo & Lung, 2019; Chan & Blundy, 2019; Lew, 2019; Yeung, 2019).

Since then, calling something "fake" has become a way to attack unfavourable news coverage and opposing viewpoints. Although the anti-ELAB movement was essentially quelled with the establishment of the National Security Law (NSL) in mid-2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the conversations surrounding the issues related to misinformation have only intensified.

On numerous occasions, the city's top officials have publicly floated the idea of proposing legislation to curb "fake news" in the near future along with the draconian security law. In contrast, news organisations and journalists raised concerns about how such laws can be abused by the authorities to suppress press freedom (Lau, 2021), which, many media professionals say, has been eroding since the enactment of the NSL, according to various surveys (Foreign Correspondents' Club Hong Kong, 2021; Hong Kong Journalists Association, 2021).

The abundance of inaccurate health information related to COVID-19 also contributed to the increasing awareness among the public of the need to combat misinformation. What the World Health Organization (WHO) called "infodemic" has led to confusion, instigated panic buying, and further politicised the responses to the medical emergency, as the anti-China sentiment affected people's behaviours towards the pandemic that first emerged in Wuhan in late 2019.

Globally, the phenomenon was seen as detrimental to alleviating the outbreak but quelling questionable rumours and dubious claims about the disease turned out to be an uphill battle (Brennen et al., 2020), to which fact-checking is often considered one of the key strategies to mitigate the negative impact (Calleja et al., 2021). Indeed, the number of fact-checking organisations and initiatives has been steadily growing worldwide, according to annual reports by the Duke Reporters' Lab that has been monitoring the global development of

this field since 2016 (Stencel, 2019; Stencel & Luther, 2020). Even in countries where press freedom is limited and journalistic activities are somewhat hamstrung, fact-checking operations have been booming (Oliver, 2021).

The rapid expansion of this emerging form of journalism is particularly conspicuous in Asia (Kajimoto, 2021) and Hong Kong is not an exception.

The Rapid Development of Fact-Checking Journalism in Hong Kong

Traditionally, "fact-checking" refers to the newsroom's process to ensure the accuracy of information before the stories are printed or broadcast. Investigating the validity of popular social media posts and other claims after they spread widely in society was not something working journalists in Hong Kong often engaged even during the Umbrella Movement in 2014. In fact, a few dedicated fact-checking initiatives at the time were mainly on Facebook, and they were all launched by volunteer users.

The Facebook page Kauyim Media was founded by no more than five anonymous users in the same year and became hugely popular.[1] Another Facebook page called Live: Verified Updates was established by a group of journalism students at the University of Hong Kong as a one-off project during the protest movement.[2] The former later became the most recognised fact-checking project with 178,000 followers in the city of seven million people, and the latter gained more than 100,000 followers within a day when it went up. Other efforts to counter the unsubstantiated rumours such as Occupy Central Myth Killer[3] page on the social media platform were also community driven.

As discussed earlier, in 2019, the landscape of fact-checking journalism transformed while the "fake news" issues took centre stage of political debates during the street protests and public health communication during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. A flurry of new initiatives was launched in Hong Kong one after another by news media outlets, working journalists, nonprofit organisations, academic institutions, and concerned citizen groups.

The development of this field in Hong Kong can be said to have followed the international trend. Graves and Mantzarlis (2020) observed that many fact-checkers around the world are from outside the traditional news media industry. Non-governmental organisations and academic institutions, as well as civil society organisations promoting specific causes such as environmental protection and political accountability, play significant roles (Graves, 2018).

In Hong Kong, a household name for investigative journalism FactWire began its dedicated fact-checking operation in April 2020 and continued until it ceased operation in June 2022.[4] Prior to the launch, the online media's

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[1] https://www.facebook.com/kauyim
[2] https://www.facebook.com/hkverified/
[3] https://www.facebook.com/OccupyCentralMythKiller/
[4] https://www.factwire.org/crb-category/factcheck/

investigation into one of the most contentious conspiracy narratives to this day about the brutal clashes between the police and the protesters inside the Prince Edward metro train station on August 31, 2019,[5] gained attention from the public and the news media industry, winning an honourable mention in the Excellence in Investigative Reporting category at the 2020 Society of Publishers in Asia Award.[6]

A non-profit outlet Factcheck Lab was established in June 2020 with the initial funding from a charitable organisation, Cultural and Media Education Foundation.[7] Although it was founded as an independent media entity, its editorial model was a collaboration of professional journalists from other organisations. In their daily fact-checking operation, a full-time editor-in-chief worked with volunteer reporters from Stand News, Citizen News, and InMedia—all online news outlets with a sizable audience in Hong Kong.[8] Until the end of 2021, when the former two news outlets ceased operations due to the fear of further crackdowns on the news media (Ng & Pang, 2021), Factcheck Lab's articles had been cross-posted on those three websites, increasing the visibility across different audience demographics in the city. In mid-2022 it started a membership model through which donating readers get access to some exclusive content.

The international news wire Agence France-Presse (AFP) also has a dedicated team focusing on Hong Kong and distributes its fact-checking stories to their clients while also publishing them on its website. A university-based Annie Lab was founded in October 2019.[9] This fact-checking outlet is tied to a few undergraduate and graduate courses at the University of Hong Kong. Journalism students drive their daily newsroom operation under the supervision of three faculty members. Another fact-checking project housed in an academic institution is HKBU FactCheck Service at Hong Kong Baptist University.[10]

Internationally, the collegial nature of fact-checking practitioners is what makes this type of journalism somewhat different from other areas of the news business where competitions are keen and fierce. A nationwide collaboration to exchange information and share data among news organisations, NPOs, and academic institutions, especially during critical elections, was formed in many countries worldwide, including Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines in the Asia-Pacific region (Chua et al., 2018).

Hong Kong has not seen such a large-scale alliance, but cross-posting the stories and cross-linking to one another's articles are common practices that

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[5] FactWire published a series of investigative stories on this incident. See, for example, https://www.factwire.org/investigation/prince-edward-8-31-chronology-of-a-chaotic-scene/

[6] https://2020.sopawards.com/the-sopa-awards/awards-finalists/

[7] https://www.factchecklab.org/

[8] The author interviewed one of the founding members of Factcheck Lab on November 2, 2021, to learn about their operation for this chapter.

[9] Disclosure: The author of this chapter is the founder of Annie Lab.

[10] https://comd.hkbu.edu.hk/factcheckservice/

can be easily observed. Besides Factcheck Lab and its three partner media outlets, some of Annie Lab's works are also cross-posted by Citizen News and cross-linked by AFP, for example. AFP also occasionally links to fact-checking posts on the Kauyim Facebook page.

Such cooperation is not limited to geographical locations. Because Hong Kong and Taiwan both use Traditional Chinese characters in writing, unlike mainland China where Simplified Chinese is used, misinformation naturally travels between the two regions. Fact-checking outlets in Hong Kong and their counterparts in Taiwan, such as Taiwan Factcheck Center and MyGoPen, sometimes work together or cross-link their stories.

Annie Lab is one of the founding members of the Coronavirus Facts Alliance, a worldwide collaborative partnership led by the International Fact-checking Network (IFCN) at Poynter Institute involving more than 100 factcheckers in five continents to unite, share, and translate each other's work and datasets surrounding COVID-19 infodemic.[11]

The fast expansion and international recognition of the ex post facto verification initiatives in Hong Kong are arguably a testament to the public's demand for such efforts. But it has also seen some unintended consequences. While some regard fact-checking as countermeasures to harmful or toxic misinformation, others see that the very idea of checking facts has been marred by partisan views and thinking, just like the word "fake news" has been tinged with a political undertone.

On top of the six factcheckers mentioned above, there are indeed other demonstrably partisan or not-independent fact-checking initiatives in Hong Kong that are making the field more entangled in the ongoing political turmoil in the highly polarised society.

Politicisation of Fact-Checking

"Who should be considered factcheckers" is a question that comes up often. When a media outlet labels some statements by public officials as "false" or "misleading," their supporters cast doubt on the authenticity of the verification process and the evidence used in the reports, accusing the factchecker as biased and unqualified for the task.

The world's leading authority of the criteria is the IFCN mentioned above. In 2016 it set out to define universal guidelines for factcheckers and in the following year introduced the Code of Principles annual certification programme, which has now become the international standard. Social media platforms like Facebook only work with the organisations certified as a signatory of the Code of Principles for their Third-Party Fact-Checking (3PFC) programmes.

In the IFCN's assessment process, the applicants are first evaluated for their "commitment to non-partisanship and fairness" every year. The principle in this category reads:

[11] https://www.poynter.org/coronavirusfactsalliance/

Signatory organisations fact-check claims using the same standard for every fact check. They do not concentrate their fact-checking on any one side. They follow the same process for every fact check and let the evidence dictate the conclusions. Signatories do not advocate or take policy positions on the issues they fact-check. (International Fact-Checking Network, 2016)

The signatory status indicates that the factcheckers have been appraised by independent assessors appointed by IFCN, who are often media and communication academics and vetted by the international organisation. As of this writing, in Hong Kong, AFP, Annie Lab, and Factcheck Lab have been certified as signatory outlets. HKBU FactCheck Service also publicly declares that it strives for the recognised global standards in their daily verification practice.

However, not all fact-checking efforts aspire to be politically neutral. Feng et al. (2021), for example, analysed the posts of two fact-checking Facebook pages in Hong Kong, Kauyim Media and TrueNews,[12] during the anti-ELAB movement between June 2019 and March 2020. The researchers concluded that both pages exhibited partisan biases in one way or another.

Perhaps it is safe to say the Facebook page TrueNews, which Feng et al. (2021) describe as "seemingly part of the pro-government forces' attempt to establish their own online outposts," is demonstrably partisan to most news audience, but Kauyim Media, possibly the most popular factchecker with the longest history, was also found to be having political inclinations in the study.

Whether or not such a tendency can be observed under different circumstances on different topics is unknown, but it does raise questions about the non-partisanship of the fact-checking landscape as a whole. It is not only some anonymous user groups and online media that declare to be "fact-checking" information. In Hong Kong, stakeholders with direct connections to the potential misinformation often use the term as well.

Authorities probing claims about themselves could not be, by definition, independent. Of course, public figures looking into the factualness of information concerning themselves could still conduct authentic investigations, but in reality, they often tend to be one-sided.

Law enforcement has been particularly active in adopting the style of professional fact-checking in their public communication efforts. The Police Department now appears to deliberately use the word "fact" and add hashtags like "#factcheck" in their Facebook posts when addressing rumours and allegations against the Force.

In October 2020, for example, when a person who looked like a black-clad protester was spotted and filmed inside a closed, restricted area of the Sheung Shui train station, the video widely circulated online with the allegation that police officers, who had the authority to be inside, were disguised as demonstrators to break the facilities and blame the movement. The police later issued a "#factcheck" statement admitting that the person in the video was indeed an

[12] https://www.facebook.com/BrakeFactChecker/

undercover officer in plain clothes but denied that the intention was to inflict any damage.

While the statement has indeed verified the authenticity of the first part of the allegation that the person in the video belongs to the police, the second part of the allegation about the motivation behind such operations is not a fact-checkable claim journalistically because intentions cannot be proved or disproved with tangible evidence in this case. However, it is evident in this episode that the Police Department was calling the entire allegation false, implying that "facts" are on their side.

In early 2021 the department issued a special edition of the police magazine titled "Know the Facts: Rumours and lies can never be right," featuring a series of "fact-checking" stories like the above with a style akin to that of journalistic debunking.[13] Some articles appear to be genuine investigations of unsubstantiated claims and misleading photos and videos, but others seem to be insinuating their "rightfulness" and not so much about fact-checking. Naturally, all conclusions are in favour of the police force.

In a similar fashion, state-controlled media like Xinhua News Agency in mainland China use the phrase "fact check" even when the purpose of the news reports seems to be to refute unfavourable allegations against authorities, including the Hong Kong government, that are simply opinions, or interpretations of some statements, that are, by international standard, not fact-checkable (Xinhua News Agency, 2019).

Calling unfriendly media content and opposing viewpoints "fake" is a phenomenon observed across the world regardless of one's political stance, however. The situation is the same in Hong Kong as some pro-democracy news audiences also often attack editorially conservative, government-friendly news organisations as producing "fake news." For instance, some pro-movement activists who supported the re-election of then US President Donald Trump in 2020 for his tough stance against China targeted the media in Hong Kong and accused their fact-checking stories on the misinformation and conspiracy theories surrounding the election, claiming Trump has actually won (Chau, 2020).

Nonetheless, more often than not, it is the authorities that blame the misinformation for undesired public reactions. The top officials of the Hong Kong government, including then Chief Executive Carrie Lam, Chief Secretary John Lee, and Secretary for Security Chris Tang, have repeatedly accused the media of spreading "fake news" and perpetuating anti-police, anti-government sentiments at almost every opportunity they can discuss the topic publicly. They consistently say misinformation has incited the youths and instigated violence during the 2019 protests, also suggesting that an establishment of "fake news laws" is imminent (Creery, 2019; Kwan, 2021b; Liang, 2021).

The flipside of the ongoing finger-pointing over "fake news" is fact-checking. Both ends of the political spectrum have a tendency to assert they have

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[13] The English version of the magazine can be viewed and downloaded here: https://www.police.gov.hk/offbeat_ebook/1179_sp_edition/eng/

"fact-checked" the content unfavourable to their position and regard it as "fake" or propaganda. As both "fake news" and "fact-checking" entered the everyday lexicon, sometimes the verification practice is also perceived as an effort to disseminate one-sided narratives. This worrying trend undermines the fundamental premise of fact-checking.

Impact (or the Lack Thereof) of Misinformation and Fact-Checking

Despite all the commotions over the influence of misinformation, however, the overall trend in public opinions about the ways in which Hong Kong should be governed under the One Country, Two Systems has not changed much since 2014 or even earlier. A series of opinion polls over the years by Public Opinion Research Institute (HKPORI—formerly known as HKUPOP)[14] and the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey at the Chinese University of Hong Kong[15] indicate that while misinformation might have widened the range of the political spectrum and made reconciliation harder, people's political inclinations remain by and large unaffected.

Historically, the percentages of Hong Kongers who identify themselves leaning towards more democratic governance (e.g. universal suffrage) have always been in the majority (60–70%, including the moderate), no matter what the topics were in each survey. For example, right after the NSL was implemented in 2020, which essentially put an end to any form of overt public advocacy for fully democratic Hong Kong, an opinion poll by PORI shows that the majority still supported the democratic aspiration (Reuters, 2020).

Even a year after the enactment of the law, the conjoint experiments by Kobayashi et al. (2021) suggest that the public supports for the democratic demands made during the anti-ELAB movement have stayed consistent. The research points out that the law might have suppressed the collective actions, but people's political preferences have not been affected even though more than 50 civil society and non-profit organisations closed their operations in the city due to the NSL (Kwan, 2021a).

When it comes to politics, a massive volume of misinformation that spread during such social campaigns as the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the year-long street protests in 2019, and even the de facto criminalisation of political dissent, has not seemed to have swayed or impacted people's political ideology and preferences to the extent that the government has implied, assuming from the results of those public opinion studies.

The influence of "fake news" on people's political attitudes and behaviours, especially during elections, is a well-researched area. Studies in cognitive psychology and confirmation bias suggest that misinformation is likely to

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[14] The Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong (HKUPOP) was closed in June 2019. Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (PORI) is an independent organisation and is no longer associated with the university.

[15] https://ccpos.com.cuhk.edu.hk/

embellish one's beliefs (Chatfield, 2019; Steinmetz, 2018). Scholars argue that the "fake news" phenomena are the symptoms of societal divisions, confusions, or fear; it is not causing the problems but exacerbating them. But there is no established consensus as to whether correction of misinformation would alleviate the severity of those symptoms.

Globally, studies looking into the impact of fact-checking have somewhat mixed findings and conclusions (Full Fact, Africa Check & Chequeado, 2019; Lazer et al., 2018). In the real world, the accuracy of information could be a secondary concern when one shares it. Familiarity, snap reactions, incidental emotions, lack of relevant knowledge, and other factors all play a role in organic spreads of misinformation, even though one could identify falsehood when asked to evaluate the information before sharing it (Pennycook et al., 2020; Pennycook & Rand, 2021).

The efficacy of fact-checking as an intervention strategy could also be mitigated by people's desire to keep their beliefs and trust the sources of inaccurate information even after learning about its incorrectness (Swire-Thompson et al., 2019). Surmising from the consistent political leanings among the population in Hong Kong, regardless of frequent exposures to misinformation and increasing availability of fact-checking stories, the influence of fact-checking in the middle of political upheaval might be limited.

The fact-finding mission of various initiatives is a fundamental function of what journalism should serve to the community (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). In this sense, fact-checking is highly effective as it attempts to set the records straight for the future and make accurate information available to the public. In the debunking process, the repeat producers and disseminators of false narratives and made-up facts are often exposed by factcheckers, too, which undoubtedly benefits the discerning news audience.

But considering Hong Kongers' proclivity to holding onto their standpoints in the current political context, it is unlikely that fact-checking contributes to reformation or reconfiguration of political ideals in the city, which could be dispiriting for factcheckers and the supporters of the practice.

Fact-Checking as Part of Educational Intervention

The benefit of having fact-checking organisations in the community has another dimension besides the day-to-day debunking of pernicious misinformation. Some educational materials in media and information literacy now integrate basic fact-checking skills and techniques as their essential core of the curricula, and many factcheckers around the world are involved in the development of such programmes (Mantas, 2020; UNESCO, 2018).

From the Civic Online Reasoning[16] curriculum at Stanford University in the United States to the media literacy projects in various countries in Africa (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021), fact-checking is an integral part of

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[16] https://cor.stanford.edu/

educational interventions aiming at combating the issues surrounding "fake news." From India to Thailand to the Philippines, running misinformation awareness campaigns, working with educators to incorporate fact-checking into media literacy programmes, and offering teacher training are common activities among the fact-checking outlets in Asia (Kajimoto, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, two organisations in Hong Kong are based in universities. At the University of Hong Kong, the author of this chapter and two other faculty staff run the daily fact-checking newsroom, Annie Lab, and teach four related courses—three target journalism major students and one is open for all undergraduate students at the university. The pedagogical objectives of such courses are not so much as training future journalists as engaging future generations of the news audience who has analytical skills, critical mindsets, and logical reasoning ability.

The capacity to analyse information and evaluate its authenticity in a practical manner by employing journalistic skills and online verification tools is believed to help students identify falsehoods. The professional environment is designed to help them learn how to demonstrate why the information is erroneous to the public effectively. It is a model explored by other academic institutions as well. FactRakers at the University of the Philippines-Diliman[17] and Japan's Wasegg at Waseda University,[18] for example, are also affiliated with professional fact-checking outlets. Australia's RMIT-ABC Fact Check[19] is indeed a joint project between RMIT University and the country's public broadcaster ABC (Kajimoto, 2021).

Although, as of this writing, Annie Lab is the only factchecker that employs students on a daily basis, HKBU FactCheck Service is located at Hong Kong Baptist University, and Factcheck Lab offers workshops for students including younger secondary school students. It appears that factcheckers in Hong Kong also share the values of teaching fact-checking as an educational intervention strategy to address misinformation-related problems in society. It is a long-term solution that countries like Finland have been widely seen as building successful models (Mackintosh, 2019; Salomaa & Palsa, 2019).

But at the same time, the political climate after the enactment of NSL in June 2020 is posing new challenges to such efforts. Factcheck Lab, for instance, had been coordinating with district councils across the city to liaise with public secondary schools to organise fact-checking workshops for students. In the only fully democratic election in Hong Kong in 2019, pro-democracy candidates took control of 17 out of 18 district councils, and those councillors were the ones who were inclined to facilitate such educational endeavours.

But within a year, most pro-democracy district councillors had either resigned or got disqualified with the introduction of the mandatory oaths of loyalty (Cheng, 2021), which practically ended the collaboration between schools and Factcheck Lab, according to a person involved in the project.[20]

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[17] https://www.factrakers.org/
[18] https://wasegg.com/
[19] https://www.abc.net.au/news/factcheck/
[20] Due to the political sensitivity of the topic, the author decided to withhold the person's name here.

In Hong Kong secondary schools, media education has historically been integrated into the Liberal Studies subject (Cheung, 2009; Lee et al., 2016) in which fact-checking training materials could also be seamlessly added if teachers so desire, but in 2021 the Education Bureau renamed the curriculum as "Citizenship and Social Development" with a strong focus on patriotism, national development, and lawfulness, reflecting on the 2019 protests involving many school-age demonstrators (Chan, 2021; Chan & Magramo, 2021; Cheung, 2021).

Pro-establishment lawmakers and government heavyweights have been blaming the "liberal media" and "biased" Liberal Studies curriculum designed to nurture critical thinking skills for the school-age protesters' political attitudes. It is unlikely that the revamped programme aiming to build an understanding of "national security and development" sits well with the kind of verification methods to scrutinise political statements and official records that factcheckers can offer to teach.

Fact-checking can still be taught in schools but, given the trajectory of sweeping educational changes in this area, the teaching and learning materials would most likely be limited to investigation of user-generated social media posts vis-à-vis public figures' speech. Self-censorship by teachers and factcheckers involved in developing such curricula is also a genuine concern, given that the same Education Bureau has the authority to monitor and supervise schools. How much the new policy would affect the tertiary institutions, on the other hand, remains to be seen at this point.

Discussion

In many ways, the development of fact-checking journalism in recent years in Hong Kong has trailed the paths observed in other Asian countries. It is now a recognised professional practice that not only journalists but also community groups, NPOs, and academic institutions engage regularly. The field is growing steadily, and therefore, not all factcheckers adhere to the same standards or share the same goals, although the majority declares to follow the internationally accepted Code of Principles guidelines set by the IFCN.

In politics, "fact-checking" could be noticeably partisan, especially when interest groups and authorities use the term. Unlike many countries in the region, such as India, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, Hong Kong currently does not have governmentally run fact-checking operations (Kajimoto, 2021), although the Police Department has been actively promoting "facts" in their public communication efforts.

While the government has consistently blamed the news media of spreading "fake news," it has not targeted or named fact-checking outlets thus far, unlike the Philippines, where the administration repeatedly expressed its opposition to IFCN signatory organisations in the country like Rappler and VeraFiles and announced that it was considering establishing its own fact-checking agency (Merez, 2020).

Nonetheless, the underlying notion in the government's "fake news" accusations seems to be that some local media and the international media publish or broadcast "wrong" information and therefore, when it happens, the media coverage needs to be regulated and "corrected." It makes a big contrast to Taiwan's approach to fact-checking (Huang, 2020; Phillips & Kerr, 2020). While Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen publicly touts fact-checking as essential to "safeguard democratic values,"[21] Hong Kong authorities appear to regard fact-checking as a way to manage the unfavourable narratives.

The politicisation and possible misappropriation of "fact-checking" could undermine the credibility of this emerging form of journalism. It is not an even playing field. Most fact-checking originations in Hong Kong are small entities while the government and related authorities have unmatched resources. Harmful misinformation is certainly detrimental to the well-being of society. However, ex post facto verification of information, particularly political statements, could be a delicate affair in the Special Administration of China, which is not simply about validating claims and detecting manipulated images.

Accordingly, the misinformation and fact-checking landscape will perhaps be more crowded and further intertwined with the ongoing societal divisions, intensifying the polarisation. If the experiences in other Asian countries are anything to go by, there could be concerted attacks and coordinated online harassment targeting factcheckers as well in the future. It is unfortunate because, fundamentally, fact-checking is an effort to mitigate the impact and influence of misleading or false claims by having public conversations based on facts and accurate information.

Although the impact of fact-checking on people's immediate behaviours appears to be limiting, there could be a long-term benefit for factcheckers to work with educators to help bring up the future generation of news audiences with fact-checking skills. Although there is no concrete evidence that educational interventions always work in intended ways (Kajimoto & Fleming, 2019; Lazer et al., 2018), the incorporation of fact-checking in media literacy curricula is a relatively new approach.

The ongoing collaboration among the practitioners, educators, and researchers in Hong Kong could shed light on the pedagogical efficacy if it is allowed to continue, which as discussed earlier may become challenging or face unintended repercussions under the current circumstances encompassing the transforming structure of One Country, Two systems—all the more reason why academic scrutiny of this area should go on.

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[21] Her keynote speech at an online conference organised by the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats in December 2020 can be watched here: https://www.facebook.com/asianliberals/videos/472501180411824

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Confronting Coronavirus Propaganda

Renee Hobbs and Igor Kanižaj

Propaganda and disinformation are on the rise, and their global reach and consequences have touched on nearly every region of the world. Digital platforms are struggling to moderate the significant increases in harmful propaganda: in 2021, Facebook identified and removed nearly ten million social media posts with terrorist propaganda, the highest number of removals since 2017 (Facebook, 2021). Yet, even with robust content moderation, most people around the world have encountered a variety of types of disinformation and propaganda through social media (O'Connor & Weatherall, 2019b).

The impact of propaganda and disinformation has been powered by actions of different stakeholders in our societies, exacerbated by the continuing rise in social media, reaching 3.6 billion global users in 2020, an increase of 200 million since 2019 (Statista, 2021). Thanks to social media, disinformation has become a profitable industry, with both governments and private companies increasingly using it to influence public opinion. There has been a dramatic rise in governments' use of social media to spread computational propaganda and disinformation about politics, increasing from 28 countries in 2017 to 81 in

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2020 (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Countries are now using private firms to manage manipulation campaigns, and a number of firms offer services like spreading conspiracies that sow discord and promoting false narratives on social media (Fisher, 2021).

In the United States and other nations, the coronavirus health crisis intensified political polarization and hyperpartisanship as politicians first debated whether or not the virus was a major health threat and then debated whether vaccinations should be required by state and federal workers (Deane et al., 2021). All around the world, during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, people encountered a variety of different types of persuasive media messages. Some were clearly beneficial. Propaganda in the form of public service announcements (PSA) encouraged people to stay home, sanitize their hands, wear masks, and get the vaccine. These messages were found on social networks, but also in mainstream media as well. But people also encountered messages, shared by family and friends, that warned them that the coronavirus was a hoax, that the virus was man-made in a Chinese laboratory, and that the number of deaths was exaggerated. Hucksters peddled hydroxychloroquine and others warned about the link between COVID and 5G mobile phone towers (Molter & DiResta, 2020; Tagliabue et al, 2020). Exposure to these types of disinformation has been recognized as a public health hazard by exploiting public anxiety, stoking fears, and leading people to worry about infertility, rushed science, or adverse reactions to medicines. Harmful propaganda and disinformation also targeted those most at risk, including pregnant women, minorities, parents, and low-wage workers (Ranney & Friedhoff, 2021).

In this chapter, we examine the use of coronavirus propaganda as a means to advance media literacy education as teachers and learners critically analyze the many forms of propaganda that now circulate in culture through social media. We first review the literature to examine the position of propaganda in relation to disinformation in the context of audience studies and education. Then we identify the key features of the Mind Over Media program and describe some of the ways it has been used by educators and teacher educators around the world. Then, content analysis is used to examine a sample of coronavirus propaganda from the Mind Over Media platform, identifying the range of forms and persuasive appeals used and reflecting on opportunities to advance media literacy competencies through the use of the platform. We will show how crowdsourced content for media literacy education offers an efficient and timely way for learners and teachers to critically analyze contemporary propaganda from around the world.

Blurry Distinctions Between Disinformation, Misinformation, and Propaganda

Online influence campaigns are a form of twenty-first-century propaganda. In the early 2000s, terrorist organizations began using the Internet to recruit, spread ideas, and share knowledge. By 2007, there were 4800 terrorism websites where radicalized individuals could recruit new members and influence individuals to take action. The weaponization of the Internet expanded beyond terrorist groups to around 2012, when Russia began using social media to promote disinformation to sway public opinion (Rob & Shapiro, 2021).

After the rise of the so-called fake news crisis in 2016, many scholars and policymakers sought to differentiate between disinformation (content purposefully shaped to mislead, usually for political or economic purposes) and misinformation (false or misleading material that is shared without deceitful purpose). The concept of disinformation was useful in identifying bad actors like Russia that actively intervened in Ukraine, the U.S., and other nations in an effort to destabilize society and sow discord (Timberg et al., 2017). The term misinformation is helpful because it clarifies how mainstream media content may carry false and inaccurate content not as a strategic and intentional effort, but due merely to its dependence on official sources, its profit-based business model, the biases of reporters themselves, and human error (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). The distinction between these concepts is contingent on judgments of authorial intent, but neither authors or audiences can be fully conscious of their intentions (Ogden & Richards, 1925). A belief that the author's intent is knowable also underplays the contribution that readers make in their active interpretation of a text (Barthes, 1967).

Media literacy scholars and educators generally apply the theoretical concept of the active audience as articulated in Hall's (1980) formulation of the encoding/decoding model, which distinguishes between preferred, alternative, negotiated, or oppositional readings. Audiences may read and interpret texts in many different ways, depending on their own purposes and the contexts in which they are operating. Media literacy educators generally aim to introduce this concept to children as early as elementary school (Share, 2009). But with social media, the concept of audience activity becomes very complex, because groups of people who do not normally interact may engage in reading and writing practices that are understood or interpreted in very different ways (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). When a user encounters a media message and shares it with peers on social media, the perceived trustworthiness of the sharer makes the message seem more acceptable, even as the original source is obscured. As O'Connor and Weatherall (2019b) note, the structure of digital platforms may create opportunities for propagandists because the viral spread of misinformation obscures the role of bad actors in its creation.

Because social media enables users to share messages that influence each other in a non-hierarchical way, online influence campaigns can take a wide variety of forms, with different kinds of intentionality on the part of the people

who share content. For this reason, scholars have suggested that it might be better to group the concepts of disinformation and misinformation under the broad umbrella heading of propaganda (O'Connor & Weatherall, 2019a). The term propaganda implies an intent to influence the attitudes and behaviors of a large group or population. Most experts acknowledge that propaganda appears in a variety of forms and may be beneficial or harmful, full of lies or completely truthful. Propaganda is at its most effective when it taps into the hopes, fears, and dreams of those who encounter it (Luckert et al., 2009). Today, the spread of propaganda continues on social media platforms because it is profitable: platforms have been algorithmically optimized for engagement, leading users to be exposed to divisive and emotional content (Zuboff, 2019).

How Educators Teach About Online Propaganda

Governments have long engaged in public influence campaigns in matters of public health throughout the twentieth century, when hygienic propaganda was created to spread health advice in schools, homes, and factories through the press, public lectures, radio, and film on topics including healthy eating and avoiding sexually transmitted diseases (Agostoni, 2006). Although propaganda education has a long history stretching back to the 1930s, some educators have been reluctant to address propaganda and the persuasive genres (Hobbs and McGee, 2014). Recently, the online spread of propaganda by governments has posed particular challenges for teachers. One survey found that 86% of American teachers had not addressed Trump's claims about voter fraud with students. Many teachers do not see disinformation and propaganda as directly related to their instructional goals. Some believe that their students are too young to understand it. But a number of teachers fear potential community backlash: one in five teachers said that addressing the topic could lead to complaints from parents, and others fear being accused of indoctrinating students, aware that, from a legal point of view, they are agents of the state (Schwartz, 2020).

Because media literacy education is an instructional strategy that may build cognitive defenses to resist the lures of propaganda, some educators have begun to teach about propaganda as part of media literacy education (Hobbs, 2020a). The coronavirus pandemic also brought digital and media literacy competencies to center stage during the period of "remote emergency instruction," when schools were closed and educators pivoted to online learning. Digital literacy is broadly associated with access, evaluation, curation, and the production of information in digital environments, emphasizing the interplay of users, devices, and content. During the coronavirus pandemic, it enlarged its scope to include helping students learn how to (1) evaluate the accuracy, perspective, and validity of online sources; (2) locate and develop spaces online for respectful interaction with people who have different beliefs and experiences; (3) balance screen time with other activities and social interaction; and (4) use technology to engage, participate, and be a force for good in the community (Buchholz et al., 2020).

Perhaps, because most national education systems are somewhat reluctant to address propaganda genres in the context of elementary and secondary education, a wide variety of pedagogical projects have emerged from non-government entities to address the unmet needs of educators and their students. Some of these initiatives are broadly applicable to a variety of propaganda genres, while others focus more narrowly on a particular topic, including the coronavirus pandemic. Mind Over Media is an open crowdsourced digital platform and educational resource where anyone can upload and share examples of contemporary propaganda. With more than 3500 examples of propaganda as of 2021, the platform offers users a variety of ways to interact with examples, including searching, sorting, and rating activities. In a typical 28-day period in October 2021, there were more than 16,000 pageviews from users in 77 countries including the United States, the Philippines, Japan, Poland, Belgium, and many others. Users access the lesson plans that help students learn how to critically analyze persuasive media messages in a wide variety of forms. Mind Over Media is designed to support media literacy educators working with adolescent learners who seek to explore the nature of propaganda and persuasion, which are forms of expression and communication that have generally received little attention in secondary education (Hobbs, 2020a).

Developed in 2014 before the rise of so-called fake news became a global phenomenon, the Mind Over Media platform is rooted in the active audience theory (Livingstone, 1998), where propaganda analysis is conceptualized as a fundamentally social process of interpretation. At the college level, faculty have used the platform as a means to promote global virtual exchange. In one project, the platform helped to facilitate cross-national dialogue among German and American undergraduate students. Students reviewed and discussed examples of propaganda, gaining sensitivity to the role of cultural context in the interpretation process. Rather than conceptualize propaganda education as an ideologically benign set of context-free skills, Mind Over Media foregrounds the importance of cultural specificity as a means to unpack the complex discursive context of propaganda as digital political communication (Hobbs et al., 2018). It can also be used to explore the role of algorithmic curation in shaping people's differential levels of exposure to contemporary propaganda (Hobbs, 2020b). For some educators, the platform helps them make the journey "from transmission education to empowerment education" (Hobbs et al., 2019, 1), where hands-on projects and activities increase the perceived relevance and value of classroom learning.

Media literacy educators who are embedded in professional learning communities benefit from increasing their own capacity for lifelong learning, which is understood as a complex blend of motivation, skill, positive learning, organizational conditions and culture, and infrastructure of support (Stoll et al., 2006). As professional learning communities in media literacy have advanced with support of the European Union and other funding agencies, they give individuals, groups, whole school communities, and school systems the power to get involved in and sustain learning over time. From 2016 to 2019, Mind

Over Media EU was translated and customized for use in Polish, Dutch, Romanian, French, Croatian, Finnish, and Swedish classrooms, supported by grants from the Evens Foundation and the European Commission. In the next section, we describe some interactive educational features of the online propaganda gallery, a crowdsourced collection of media content that features contemporary propaganda from around the world.

Platform and Artifact Features

Mind Over Media is different in comparison to other crowdsourcing projects because of the ways in which users interact with the media artifacts on the digital platform. They are able to view all examples in this workspace and upload new artifacts. They also have the opportunity to evaluate propaganda artifacts, and they can make comments and offer opinions about the comments of others. A set of nine lesson plans also accompanies the digital platform to enable educators to provide classroom instruction that supports student learning. Two key features of the platform are described below.

Users Review Propaganda Artifacts and Evaluate Harms and Benefits When a user clicks on an artifact from the gallery, they are then invited to rate a specific example on a five-point scale labeled "Beneficial/Harmful." This action helps users begin to recognize how they inevitably make judgments about propaganda messages as part of the process of interpreting them. After they make their evaluation, they are then able to view the judgments made by other users. They see what proportion of users rated the artifact on the five-point scale. Consider the example of propaganda, titled "Covid Russian Roulette," shown in Fig. 10.1. The meme, in colors of black and gray, shows a person in front of a blank TV screen, with only the silhouette of the back of his head visible. Underneath the hashtag, #thisisnotarussianroulette, it reads: "Your Choice: 3, 4, or 5 shots is your chance to survive." In smaller print, it reads: "The more you have the bigger your chance to stay alive." This propaganda is likely referring to the booster vaccines that became widely available in late 2021. The viewer experiences a surprise and a shift in the meaning of the message when reading that more "shots" increase your chance of survival, because this is not the case with the deadly game of Russian Roulette. The interactive experience comes from first seeing the propaganda and then being invited to rate it on a 5-point scale with "beneficial" at one end and "harmful" at the other. After the user makes an evaluation, the screen displays the results of all users, helping viewers notice that all Mind Over Media users did not interpret the meme in the same way. For example, in Fig. 10.2, we see that 90% of users perceived this propaganda as beneficial, while 10% perceived it to be harmful.

Users may notice that others' judgment was similar to their own, or they may notice differences. This interactive component underlines a key media literacy concept that people interpret media messages based on their prior life experiences. The interactive feature may also increase engagement, metacognition, and intellectual curiosity as users get an opportunity to reflect on how
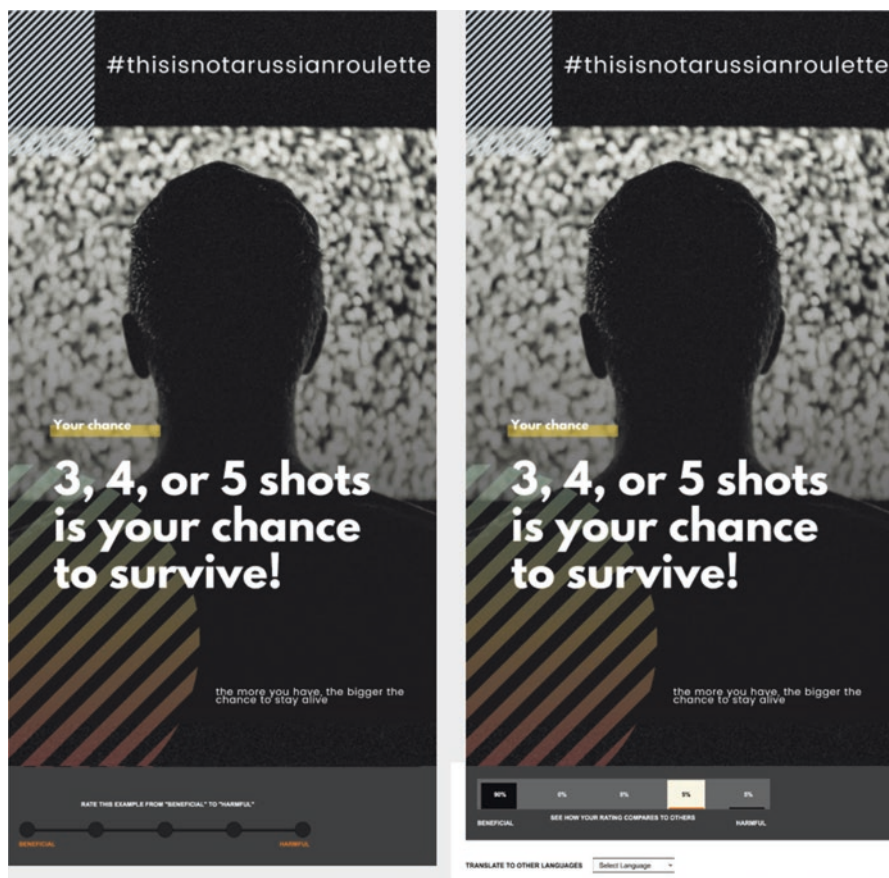
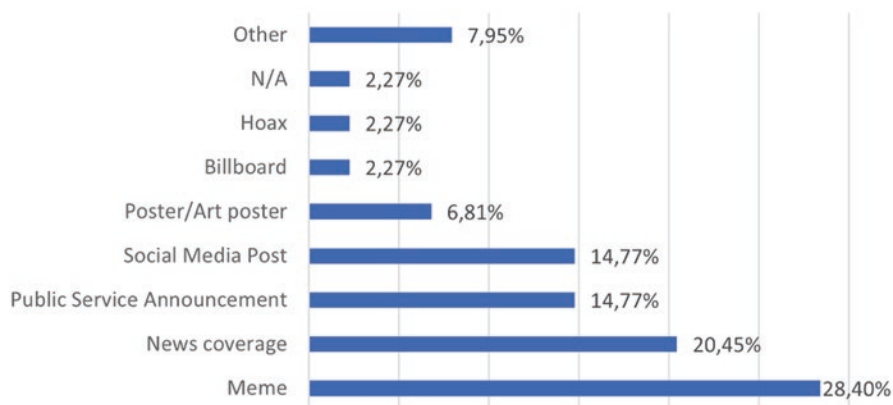**Fig. 10.1** An example of Mind Over Media interactive features

Fig. 10.2 Genres of pandemic propaganda on the Mind Over Media platform ($N = 88$)

their personal experience is influencing their evaluation and why the interpretation of others may be different from their own. This interactive feature can be easily used in the context of a classroom discussion to motivate dialogue and discussion. Finally, users can also choose to "Share Your Interpretation" and leave a text comment about the propaganda artifact. After administrator review, these comments are published underneath each artifact. A "Like/Dislike" option also enables users to indicate an opinion on comments that have been previously published.

Users Upload Propaganda Artifacts When users upload content to the multimedia open-source platform, they are invited to review and accept the submission guidelines, which state that the purpose of this site is to help people identify propaganda, recognize techniques being used to influence public opinion and behavior, and consider when propaganda may be dangerous. The platform offers examples of propaganda which represent a variety of perspectives, address multiple issues, and which illustrate the four propaganda techniques discussed in the site. Review and approval of submissions is a manual process. Users are also encouraged to enter email and to name the country they come from but this information is hidden from public view. When submissions have been published and are available for viewing, users receive a confirmation email.

A user who uploaded an artifact is invited to provide a title and a source. Users choose to share a Twitter, Facebook/YouTube URL, a screenshot from a computer, or a photo depicting a propaganda artifact in situ. Users must also add background information that is relevant for understanding the broader content of the artifact, and they must explain why they think the artifact is a form of propaganda. Finally, the most valuable information gathered is the user's evaluation of the dominant propaganda technique used. Users review the propaganda techniques and choose to categorize their artifact using one of the following categories: (1) activate emotion, (2) respond to audience needs, (3) simplify ideas, or (4) attack opponents. Each of these techniques is described in more detail on the website. To better understand how the Mind Over Media platform has evolved over time to meet the needs of students and teachers, we conducted a content analysis of the coronavirus propaganda found on the digital platform to answer these preliminary research questions:

RQ 1: What genres of coronavirus propaganda are found on the platform?
RQ 2: What persuasive techniques are most and least common in coronavirus propaganda?

Research Methods and Findings

Content analysis is a systematic, replicable technique for making inferences by systematically identifying specified characteristics of a large number of messages in any form, enabling researchers to sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion (Stemler, 2000). We used content analysis

on the complete corpus of propaganda artifacts on the Mind Over Media platform as of November 22, 2021, to identify and categorize how coronavirus is depicted. A total of 3853 artifacts have been uploaded since 2007. The website administrator has removed 1511 artifacts for reasons including bad links, no information provided, not contemporary (propaganda artifacts preceding the year 2000). A total of 2342 artifacts are available on the website and used by the users. Within these items, we searched for specific examples on the following keywords: covid, mask, corona (not vaccine—since this results in anti-vaxx propaganda that predates covid), finding a total of 88 artifacts that were marked, identified, and extracted to a new database for the content analysis. Among the coronavirus artifacts we examined, most of the uploaded examples on the platform come from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube videos, Instagram, private and public posters, and other types of illustrations. The artifacts were coded by two coders by using a coding sheet. The unit of analysis was one artifact. Key findings are presented briefly below.

Coronavirus Propaganda Encompasses a Wide Variety of Forms As Fig. 10.2 shows, memes were the most frequently uploaded types of coronavirus propaganda, representing 28.40% of the sample, while one in five artifacts (20.45%) took the form of a news story. Public service announcements and social media posts each represented nearly 15% of the sample. About 20% of the sample included genres infrequently represented, including posters, billboards, hoaxes, and other content that was difficult to classify by genre.

   We then analyzed the artifacts using the four techniques of propaganda explained in the educational content provided on the platform. As Fig. 10.3 shows, 40.90% of the artifacts were identified as responding to audience needs, while 29.54% activated strong emotion. Only 15.90% of the coronavirus artifacts attack opponents, while 13.36% simplified ideas. Because users who uploaded were responsible for identifying a primary propaganda technique, this action requires a certain level of media literacy competency in evaluating the persuasive appeals present in the media message. In reporting the findings below, we identify some exemplar artifacts to help readers visualize the nature of the different types of propaganda artifacts that address the coronavirus pandemic in the Mind Over Media database.

Coronavirus Propaganda Is Targeted to Address the Fears, Hopes, and Dreams of Specific Target Audiences An exemplar artifact in this category is a social media post with the title "Big Bird got vaccinated." Big Bird and Elmo are relatable to users of all ages, primarily through their exposure to the children's educational program *Sesame Street* and the entertainment-oriented *Muppet Show* film series. The source of this propaganda was National Public Radio, in a story with the headline. "Big Bird Ruffled some Conservatives' Feathers this Weekend by Announcing that he had been Vaccinated Against COVID-19."
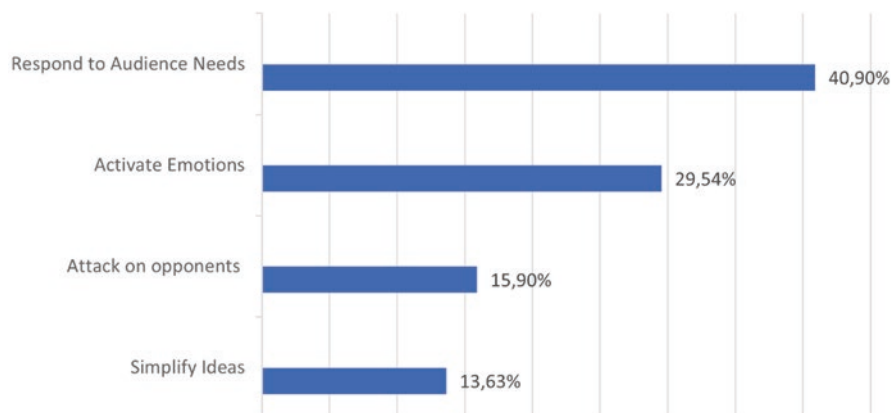
Fig. 10.3 Propaganda techniques used in pandemic propaganda ($N = 88$)

President Biden was among those who offered their thanks and praise to Big Bird, while critics included Senator Ted Cruz, a Texas Republican, who decried Big Bird's tweet as "government propaganda." The social media post, which features an image of Big Bird, reads: "The beloved Muppet tweeted on Saturday that he had gotten the shot, which is newly available for Americans between the ages of 5 and 11." The author of the social media post quotes a Twitter post ostensibly from Big Bird that reads: "My wing is feeling a little sore, but it'll give my body an extra protective boost that keeps me and others healthy." Details like this suggest that Big Bird's vaccination was designed as a form of informal education for children while also reassuring parents of the normality of pain from the jab. For some, this post is an example of the increasing political polarization in the United States, where even a beloved children's educational television program has become controversial. Of course, this post may even be functioning as a type of marketing for the *Sesame Street* brand while it introduces to the public vaccine availability for children ages 5 and up. The user who uploaded this post gave an explanation on why this example fits in the concept of beneficial propaganda, stating, "Entertainment is so powerful in influencing attitudes and behaviors." This artifact was perceived as mostly beneficial by Mind Over Media users, because 53% indicated it was very beneficial, 40% indicated it was somewhat beneficial, and only 7% of users indicated this social media post was "somewhat harmful."

Music can be highly effective in targeting people's hopes, fears, and dreams. Another artifact that is explicitly addressing audience needs is a YouTube video from the Vietnamese Institute of Occupational and Environmental Health and Ghen Cô Vy. It is called the "Washing Hand" song and it was part of the public campaign to fight pandemic. Now with 72 million views on YouTube, this animated video with the title "Vietnam Coronavirus" has received significant public attention from media in the U.S. and Western Europe. It features a

catchy and romantic pop song with male and female vocal artists who depict the story of a lonely and jealous coronavirus from Wuhan that has been spreading far too widely. The pop song playfully urges listeners to stay away from jealous corona by washing hands, keeping social distance, and cleaning. Although the neon green coronavirus tries to present itself as charming and cute, it is indeed highly dangerous. Considering that nearly 60% of the nearly 100 million people in Vietnam are under the age of 40, a pop song format is likely to reach people in both urban and rural communities (Government of Vietnam, 2020). On the Mind Over Media platform, users have the option to view the video on YouTube directly, where it is possible to view the 30 comments from previous viewers, who admire the appeal of the song. This video was uploaded by the platform user who described it as "beneficial propaganda that aims to use illustration and music to change attitudes and behavior." Public service announcements do not often take the form of an animated music video, but this one was perceived as very beneficial (40%) or somewhat beneficial (40%), with 10% not sure and only 10% rating it as harmful. Even for those who love the music video, seeing that some people consider it to be harmful can promote critical thinking as users engage in "what if" imagining under the influence of the point of view and reasoning of a potential critic (Hobbs, 2020a).

Some users of the platform did not just share an artifact they found online but instead uploaded their own user-created infographics as their contribution to a vaccination campaign. The example from S.B. titled, "It's just a Jab," tried to reply to the myth that, with a vaccine, you receive a microchip as well. The infographic visually presents a dialogue where one person says, "I'm concerned about a microchip in the vaccine." The answer: "Scientists haven't created a chip small enough to be injected without anyone noticing it. Remember, the vial your shot came out of is shared among 6 people, making it a poor delivery system even if we did have the chip technology." The author offers a response to explain why they believe it is a form of propaganda, explaining that this is propaganda because, "S.B., the author, really wants you to get a vaccine." Activities that involve students in creating a propaganda poster about a current, modern-day issue that they feel passionate about is a time-honored practice of media literacy education in both English language arts and social studies education (National Constitution Center, n.d.).

Propaganda Activates Strong Emotions in Ways That Override Thinking and Reasoning The ancient Greeks recognized the power of activating emotion and identified the many situations and contexts when emotion supersedes reason. Digital media texts, tools, and technologies present a range of new strategies for mobilizing and capturing affect and emotion, and these new modalities can be used to activate love or hate, fear, or pride, surprise or resentment, in ways that tie politics to emotion (Boler & Davis, 2020).

In times of pandemic, authors may create propaganda to relate the current moment in time by referencing the historical propaganda examples of the past. In

one example, the artifact titled, "War Propaganda Covid 19" is a contemporary poster that uses imagery that looks to be from the mid-twentieth century, using well-known graphic design illustration techniques found in World War II propaganda. Many readers will be familiar with the twentieth-century posters that warned people to watch who they talk to since it could be a spy. This coronavirus poster shows an illustration of a woman with an old-fashioned hairstyle, wearing medical scrubs and a mask. The text reads, "Help those on the frontlines. Stay in. Stop the Spread." In this artifact, the term "frontlines" is used, thus reframing the word's meaning from its original military connotation in order to position coronavirus healthcare workers as the new warriors. It was produced in 2020 by the artist Sylvia Bueltel, who uses retro design, and finds inspiration in World War II propaganda posters. The user who posted this artifact seems to have learned about it from an ABC TV show, *The View*, where the co-host Meghan McCain shared the artwork. Another example of repurposing or remixing historical imagery to activate strong emotions is found in the artifact titled "Vaccine Free Utopia." The artifact is a tweet from an American TV producer who shared a historical photo showing people lying in giant metal ventilators during the 1940's polio epidemic. The title "Look at this Vaccine Free Utopia" offers an ironic pro-vaccine message that reminds viewers of the human cost of dangerous viruses and the historical importance of vaccination as a public health strategy.

Many artifacts that activate strong emotion take the form of memes and illustrations that use people's connection to popular culture to offer humorous commentary on the social isolation that people experienced during the crisis. There are gifs, animated content, often accompanied by decontextualized quotes from famous singers, actors, and athletes. One meme of this kind is titled "Coronavirus Aftermath." It was uploaded by a user who found it on Instagram. The meme features a still image of Paul Rudd from the 2018 film *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, a narrative about the struggles of juggling a dual identity (in this case, as a superhero and father). In the plot, the character played by Rudd has been lost in the Quantum Realm since 1987 before being returned to the present day. The closed caption below a closeup of Rudd's face reads: "What's it like out there? I mean … Do people still dance? Are food trucks still a thing?" The upper title, created as a meme, reads: "Me when the government tells me that the quarantine is over." By linking Rudd's experience as Ant Man with a user's experience, the Mind Over Media user notes that "due to the unknown of how long we will be inside the quarantine" this meme could "influence people into believing that things will change so drastically that nothing will be the same." For this reason, the user considered this to be a form of harmful propaganda.

Propaganda Attacks Opponents to Create an Us-Versus-Them Mentality That Unifies a Group Against a Shared Enemy This is a principle most closely associated with the use of propaganda in wartime (Welch, 2013). Dehumanizing and othering a group is a tool to inspire soldiers to kill, and it has had devastating consequences throughout history, in all corners of the world. In the twentieth century, history educators understood this even while it was occurring in Nazi

Germany. "What is Propaganda" is one of the most important propaganda education materials created during World War II by the American Historical Association (1944). Designed as a pamphlet series for veterans and their families, the material includes a section titled "Enemy Propaganda," and it explains how the Nazis turned their wrath on the Jews, blaming them for World War I and all the economic troubles that followed it. Hitler frequently used metaphors that compared Jews to bugs, pests, and insects to dehumanize them. Applying the dogma of racial superiority, Paul Joseph Goebbels, head of the propaganda ministry, had "unlimited funds and authority to foment trouble" and he united propaganda with terror. As the historians explained:

> Nazi strategists exploited antagonisms, including racial, religious and political tensions and elevated certain groups of "discredited political figures, demagogues, extreme reactionaries, misguided idealists, and die-hards who can be misled by glittering promises. Play our game, the Nazis told some of these groups, and we will elevate you to positions of power and influence". (AHA, 1944, 1)

Although only about 15% of the coronavirus artifacts are identified by users as employing the "attack opponents" persuasive technique, a variety of different enemies are identified. Politicians are the most common target among the coronavirus propaganda artifacts, and many attack specific statements and actions by the former President Donald J. Trump. In one YouTube video, titled, "Failure: Trump and Coronavirus!," the user who uploaded it explained, "It's clear that the main goal is to attack the President." This is a political ad from the Lincoln Project, an American political action group led by Republicans who supported the campaign of President Joseph Biden. The video presents a timeline of Trump speeches and tweets about the coronavirus, with an ominous music bed and a bright red numerical ticker on the upper right-hand side of the screen, showing how many coronavirus cases and deaths were occurring at the time he made statements dismissing or downplaying the public health crisis. This propaganda elicited divergent responses from Mind Over Media users, as 47% saw it as beneficial, while 40% saw it as harmful.

News and journalism can also function as propaganda by presenting "enemies" through framing and other techniques (Lippmann, 1922/2017). Television news networks may attack opponents while simultaneously simplifying ideas. One artifact in our sample, "Origins of Covid," was a tweet from One America News Network (OANN), a far-right, pro-Trump cable channel that has been accused of promoting conspiracy theories and a variety of debunked claims, specifically concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 election. In this tweet, a specific journalist-anchor intends to "track down where the coronavirus came from and expose who just might be responsible for releasing it." This sensationalistic clickbait style of journalism blaming China for the virus led to reactions by the users of the Mind Over Media platform. The user who uploaded this post explained that "the news organization is profiting from spreading false information. Shameful." Among Mind Over Media users, 20% saw this post as beneficial, while 45% perceived it as harmful.

Propaganda Simplifies Ideas in Ways That Make Information Easy to Understand and Remember When Walter Lippmann (1922/2017) wrote about the massive propaganda campaign that the U.S. government launched during the Great War, he recognized that democracy was being shaped by politicians who were skillfully using symbols to simplify complex information for public consumption. By producing a series of stereotyped ideas and images, journalists' work functioned as propaganda because it was shaped by the government and business sources they relied upon. Because information providers inevitably shape content in ways that reproduce their pre-existing biases, all media messages represent a political struggle over opinion shaping. Lippmann's critique of journalism was rooted in his appreciation of its limits. As Petersen (2003, 252) explains:

The news deals only with that part of the reality that has become visible, with something that has happened. If the people who know about these matters fail (knowingly or unknowingly) to pass on this information, the news will be colored partly by the sources' and partly by the journalists' interests, metaphors, coding, decoding, culturally determined discourses, stereotyping, interpretations and so on. Only a small part of reality is absolutely recognizable. There exists but a very small body of exact knowledge that requires no outstanding ability or training to deal with it. The rest is at the journalist's discretion. News and truth, therefore, are not the same thing.

To recognize that propaganda is simplifying information, it is imperative to have background knowledge on the topic at hand. Among our coronavirus propaganda artifacts, only 13.6% were identified by users as "simplifying information and ideas." One artifact "Brasil não pode parar" (Brazil Cannot Stop) was an Instagram campaign developed by President Jair Bolsonaro, who maintains an army of social media professionals to amplify his messages and attack his opponents. With the "Brazil cannot stop" online influence campaign, President Bolsonaro expressed the idea that the citizens of Brazil needed to keep up with their routines of work and daily life during the pandemic. Bolsonaro called COVID-19 "a little flu." It was a simple statement that may have encouraged people in Brazil to ignore public health recommendations to stay home, wear masks, and engage in social distancing. At the time he made the statement (May, 2020), there were 330,000 cases of coronavirus and Brazil's hospitals were in crisis mode. Mind Over Media users were in general agreement, with 67% of users rating the oversimplification as harmful. Still, 8% rated it as beneficial, because judgments of value are contingent on individuals' background knowledge and pre-existing beliefs.

The content analysis has revealed that the examples of coronavirus propaganda found on the Mind Over Media website include a wide variety of forms and genres. Coronavirus propaganda generally appeals to audience values, but it may also activate strong emotion, attack opponents, or simplify information. Ratings data from the interactive features of the Mind Over Media digital platform reveals that "propaganda is in the eye of the beholder" (Hobbs, 2020a), as people perceive the value or harms of propaganda differently, applying their unique prior knowledge, life experiences, and identity.

Discussion

During the high school and college years, students may learn that Ancient Greek rhetoricians offered three routes to persuasion: through cognition (*logos*), emotion (*pathos*), and character (*ethos*). To understand the nature of online influence campaigns, however, it is important to also consider the concept the Greeks called *kairos*, which acknowledges the importance of delivering messages at "the right time" for persuasion. A close look at coronavirus propaganda shared to the Mind Over Media digital platform reveals the importance of timing in the meaning-making process. At many points during the coronavirus pandemic, people created and shared forms of propaganda that tapped into the special anxieties of the moment. To capture the particularities of thought and feeling, users shared examples of propaganda that made connections with elements of current events, popular culture, and changing phases of the public health crisis.

Propaganda is deeply embedded in online life, as language, imagery, music, and interactive media are disseminated through private and public channels and networks to address complicated feelings, needs, worries, and fears. In this study, we found that coronavirus propaganda is represented through a variety of different genres and forms, including entertainment, news, and personal creative expression. A detailed analysis of artifacts has shown that many examples make use of the (de)contextualized quotes of politicians and state officials with (mis)informative relations to historical events. Propagandists also use a frontal approach through the construction of public service announcements where politicians and public health officials advance public awareness through content that skillfully mixes information, entertainment, and persuasion.

Media literacy educators should help learners of all ages recognize forms of propaganda and invite them to reflect on their potential impact on audiences. Holocaust educator Joanna Wasserman is fond of saying that propaganda cannot work without the active participation of the people who interpret it (Brodie, 2014). For this reason, propaganda that addresses the feelings, thoughts, and needs of audience members is most likely to be effective. We found that, among the artifacts that address the coronavirus crisis, most of them use the persuasive technique of appealing to people's deepest hopes, fears, and dreams. This is to be expected for addressing the most massive public health crisis in modern times, one that has, as of this writing, taken the lives of more than 5.2 million people.

The examination of coronavirus propaganda may be useful to address the overall lack of attention to persuasive genres in the context of secondary education worldwide. Scholars of writing and composition have found that "fear of persuasion" is widespread among educators (Fleming, 2019). Although substantial efforts are underway to support educators as they examine social media in the context of teaching social studies (Krutka, 2020), educators still lack knowledge about how to teach about the contemporary dilemmas related to propaganda as it intersects with algorithmic personalization, surveillance,

control, and profit motives in online environments (Hobbs, 2020b; Nichols & Stornaiuolo, 2019).

Further empirical research should test how interactive features of the platform may cultivate intellectual curiosity and multiperspectival thinking that promotes tolerance for ambiguity and complexity. More research is also needed to examine the instructional practices that media literacy educators employ when they use the Mind Over Media platform in high school and college settings. Do teachers value crowdsourcing? Do students? Why or why not? Does the use of crowdsourced content help teachers gain confidence in teaching about contemporary propaganda?

We recognize that the sample of artifacts on the Mind Over Media platform is dependent on the choices made by the users who freely choose to post on it; they are likely to be people with an interest in media literacy education. For this reason, we make no claims to generalizability that the types of propaganda on the platform mirror the types of propaganda people find via their online platforms. But the coronavirus content found on the MOM platform does reveal patterns that have value for teaching and learning.

Finally, the use of a crowdsourced digital platform holds significant promise for media literacy educators around the world. Crowdsourcing enables anyone, anywhere to analyze and share artifacts, which provides an opportunity for learners to encounter propaganda that they might never otherwise access. Gaining awareness of how contemporary propaganda functions on a global scale can be humbling. It may help learners reflect more deeply on the potential benefits and harms of propaganda. We also believe that crowdsourcing can be a valuable strategy for educators in their aims to keep media literacy education relevant and responsive to the moment in time in which we live. Crowdsourcing should someday be a core feature of media literacy curriculum resources because it helps to distribute the expense of curating media artifacts globally while it creates opportunities for cross-national dialogue, discussion, and analysis. Digital platforms offer value to media literacy educators aiming to prepare students with the competencies they need to manage the barrage of propaganda that is a key part of work, life, and citizenship.

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Health, Science and Data (Diagnosis)

Part III Introduction: Julian McDougall

Continuing our set of critical diagnoses of the complex nature and diverse range of our topic, this part brings together contemporary research into the relationship between health and science, climate change and the omnipresence of data in our understanding of misinformation. Whilst we are still focussed here on evaluating the misinformation crisis and the challenges it presents, before we move towards responses, the chapters presented in this part extend our thinking and our international scanning as we are helped by the authors who contribute to connect media and communication studies and journalism with science, health and data.

We begin with Chap. 11 by Antonio López. This work uses López's established media ecosystem thinking to map the 'network of denial and delay' across the Big Carbon Disinformation EcoSystem. In this environment, coordinated disinformation about climate science can be considered a form of gaslighting writ-large, an appropriate metaphor for the efforts of the fossil fuel industry to confuse the public into believing climate concerns are warrantless. As a form of propaganda, it is an organised campaign to manipulate the public for desired outcomes. The spread of climate disinformation coincides with increased political tribalism, where right-wing ideology and climate science denial converge. Next, we move to a specific case study of COVID health misinformation, Chap. 12 by Xin Zhao and Yu Xiang. This chapter examines user-generated interventions in dealing with health misinformation. This oral liquid, among all medicines rumoured to be effective in curing the novel COVID-19 virus, was the only one that triggered panic-buying among the Chinese public. It triggered interventions from Weibo users who did not believe in the rumour to correct rumour endorsers. The former used disparagement humour to ridicule rumour endorsers in undifferentiated and unreasonable medicine consumption, unquestioning panic-buying, lack of common sense and mental issues. This chapter offers a rich and nuanced account of the complexity of the conditions of possibility for misinformation and the strategies employed to

respond to it, when public health is at stake, which serve to transcend and challenge more 'binary' tools for verification. Moving onto the ways in which our lives are increasingly 'datafied', and what this means for both literacy and the spread of misinformation, Simeon Yates and Elinor Carmi's Chap. 13 addresses these questions by exploring citizens' digital and data literacies, especially the social networks (personal and digital) that citizens depend on for support. Yates and Carmi argue that people engage with others in 'networks of literacy', drawing on insights from their project 'Me and My Big Data: Developing citizens data literacies'. The chapter explores the extent to which citizens possess the resources they need to develop digital and data literacies to address dis-/mis-/mal-information in a datafied society. Peter Cunliffe-Jones' research in sub-Saharan Africa informs his Chap. 14. From this work, Cunliffe-Jones generates transferable principles for categorising misinformation in his '6 Cs model'—*context, creation, content, circulation, consumption and consequences*—and moves onto a series of recommendations for how media literacy can start out from a better place. In Chap. 15, Dipak Bhattarai explains how the spread of false or misleading information—whether by word-of-mouth, media or otherwise—is an age-old phenomenon in the region and then, how Facebook recently played a crucial role in driving the genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar, as false stories about Muslims' actions in Rakhine state flooded the platform in Myanmar in the run up to the atrocities. Facebook has long promoted itself as a tool for bringing people together to make the world a better place. However, the social media giant has acknowledged that in Myanmar it did the opposite. A report commissioned by Facebook found the company failed to keep its platform from being used to 'foment division and incite offline violence' in Myanmar. Writing from the perspective of working with BBC Media Action in South Asia, Bhattarai, like Cunliffe-Jones, also uses his chapter to reframe the positionality of media literacy, in this case mobilising a collaborative, multi-stakeholder perspective. This will require the cooperation of media practitioners, media organisations and media support organisations in communities to 'come together and combat information disorder together'.

The chapters in this part all contribute, again, to our diagnoses of media information's plethora of variants and mutations, but they also set up the final part, where our authors work through a set of responses to the crisis. All of the authors in this part speak to the need for approaches that are targeted on this 'cluster' of challenges—the role or complicity of 'Big Media' in climate misinformation; the need for responses to health misinformation to work with the idioms and 'local' conventions of the genres of misinformation they are seeking to disrupt; the need for responses to understand and embrace the challenge of datafication; the need for responses to start out from a more differentiated and categorical approach to the problem and the need for a joined up approach between journalists and media literacy practitioners. These concerns are the focus of the following parts, by way of responses.

Gaslighting: Fake Climate News and Big Carbon's Network of Denial

Antonio López

In 1944 Ingrid Bergman won best actress for her role in *Gaslight* for depicting a woman who is tricked by her husband into believing that she is going insane. The term "gaslighting" has gone on to become a colloquialism, prompting the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* to list it as manipulating "another person into doubting his or her perceptions, experiences, or understanding of events" (*gaslight*, n.d.). If we scale-up this concept from the individual to society, coordinated disinformation about climate science can be considered a form of gaslighting writ-large, an appropriate metaphor for the efforts of the fossil fuel industry to confuse the public into believing climate concerns are warrantless. As a form of propaganda, it is an organised campaign to manipulate the public for desired outcomes. The spread of climate disinformation—"explicitly false or misleading information" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 32) or "accurate information deliberately presented in such a way as to be misleading" (Treen et al., 2020, para. 12)—coincides with increased political tribalism, where right-wing ideology and climate science denial are carbon copies (pun intended), leading to conditions where "ideologically driven confirmation bias (misinformation) is almost indistinguishable from intentional deception (disinformation)" (Cook, 2016, para. Reducing 2).

In the case of the fossil fuel industry—the network of extractors, producers, refiners, and distributors of coal, gas, and petroleum referred throughout as

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Big Carbon[1]—the primary goal of deploying disinformation is to delay climate action. Due to scientific evidence demonstrating the harm to environment and human health caused by fossil fuel pollution (UN, 2021), Big Carbon is concerned that action by civil society, government (local, state, federal), and international governing bodies will end the era of fossil fuels and its business model. Faced with such an existential threat to its industries, the aim of Big Carbon is to deliberately create doubt about "not settled" climate science, maintain a "denial space," and deny climate solutions. This strategy connects directly with past public relations (PR) efforts by Big Tobacco, encapsulated in a famous 1969 memo, "Doubt is our product, since it is the best means of competing with the 'body of fact' that exists in the minds of the general public. It is also the means of establishing a controversy" (quoted in Oreskes & Conway, 2010, p. 13).

Disinformation is a tool for Big Carbon to further its political agenda. A YouGov poll in 2021 demonstrates how this strategy works with targeted groups (McGreal, 2021). With a 99% agreement among scientists that global heating is caused by humans (Lynas et al., 2021), in the United States 89% of Democrats accept the scientific consensus, but only 42% of Republicans agree and 36% deny it completely. According to *The Guardian*'s reporting on the survey, "The division also reflects Americans' perceptions of oil companies. The poll showed that Exxon, the US's largest petroleum firm, and Shell have high positive ratings among Republicans but high negatives among Democrats" (McGreal, 2021, para. 11). While the general public's perception of climate science increasingly sides with the scientific consensus, the views of political parties and their affiliations impact whether legislation can be passed, or treaties can be signed to mitigate the effects of climate change. When climate denying officials sit on school boards, court benches, and in regulatory agencies, they can enforce Big Carbon's legislative agenda. Many studies connect political polarisation, social media, and disinformation to the election of Donald J. Trump (Tucker et al., 2018), which directly impacts climate policy. In the aftermath of Trump's election to the US Presidency in 2016, the US withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement and pro-industry and anti-regulation figures were put into agencies charged with environmental policy, and radical judges hostile to climate regulation were appointed and confirmed.

Climate denial is the original fake news (Pooley, 2017). "Fake climate news" is the term I use to describe deliberate climate disinformation and networked propaganda designed to reinforce right-wing ideology about the market economy and to disorient the public about climate science. Renee Hobbs

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[1] Often the term Big Oil is used, which refers to the major global oil firms BP, Chevron, Eni, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, TotalEnergies, and ConocoPhillips. To encompass other significant players, such as Koch Industries, Big Carbon denotes an expanded group that includes other carbon fuel industries, such as gas and coal industries. While this study does not directly address the role of petrostates, such as Saudi Arabia and Russia, they do actively contribute to international trade groups and lobbies like the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) that benefit from the Big Carbon's PR and political activities.

(2020) identifies three categories of fake news: disinformation and propaganda (controlling knowledge, attitudes, and values); hoaxes and parody/satire (cultural criticism or creative expression); and errors in journalism and partisanship (informing and engaging the public). This chapter focuses on climate disinformation, propaganda, and partisan media. Big Carbon promotes disinformation through PR and networked propaganda, "the ways in which the architecture of a media ecosystem makes it more or less susceptible to disseminating these kinds of manipulations and lies" (Benkler et al., 2018, p. 24). Leveraging a climate change countermovement (CCCM), they gaslight the public by manipulating mainstream media, exploiting social media, and feeding a closed right-wing media ecosystem's echo chamber, where climate denial and so-called energy independence often harmonise with petrol-masculinity, gun rights, white nationalism, and COVID-19 conspiracies.

By design, the purpose is to make it difficult to know whether climate news is real or fake. As propaganda directed at targeted audiences, it induces misperceptions, disorientation, and distraction to change attitudes and beliefs (Benkler et al., 2018). Because of the "framing effect" (Lakoff, 2004), people remember disinformation once it spreads, which makes it very difficult to debunk. Fake climate news is effective because of the psychology of illusory truth: the more someone is exposed to a falsehood, the more likely it will be believed (Resnick, 2017). Disinformation is reinforced through anchoring—the tendency to rely on the first piece of information offered—and in-group bias, which favours those who belong to a group. Whoever tells the story first will be trusted the most. Unfortunately, prior knowledge doesn't make people immune.

Rather than being a matter of scientific fact and evidence, climate science becomes a belief or opinion. In the words of a 1991 memo from the industry front group, Informed Citizens for the Environment, global warming should be positioned as a "theory (not fact)" (Supran & Oreskes, 2021b). Journalism scholar Jay Rosen asserts that Big Carbon PR's strategy has a corrosive social impact and is partly to blame for low trust in journalism (Westervelt, n.d.). PR turns journalists into a political opposition. The impact of this strategy is not limited to climate doubt but is part of a larger post-truth "epistemic crisis." Conspiracy theories triumph over scientific consensus, carrying over to other public health crises, such as the COVID-19 public health emergency. Doubts and misinformation about masking and vaccination are generated by the same networks as climate denial (Braun, 2020).

Disinformation and conspiracies are part of a larger right-wing effort to, in the words of former Trump advisor Steve Bannon, "flood the zone with shit" (Illing, 2020). This leads to overwhelming professional news organisations and scientists by forcing them to debunk disinformation and to cynical weariness for members of the public, who start to believe that nothing is knowable. The danger is that when people no longer trust institutions, especially media, science, academia, or government, it can serve a larger project of fascist politics where "anti-intellectualism," "unreality," and "propaganda" prevail (Stanley,

2018). Increasingly, there is little buffer between informed and thoughtful debate and extremist content. Indeed, some polarising right-wing discourses are mutating into nativist eco-fascism that blame environmental degradation on migrants and low-income countries. Furthermore, the proliferation of conspiracies is a troubling trend. Conspiracy theories from the right-wing postulate that elites ("globalists" like liberals or the UN) are lying and that climate change is a hoax perpetrated by scientists to garner funding (Cavanagh, 2018). This serves Big Carbon's interests by distracting from blame and responsibility. "Exposure to anti-global warming theories can lead to decreased efforts to reduce one's carbon footprint, and exposure to anti-vaccine theories can lead to reduced intention to get vaccinated" (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 19).

Synergy with political polarisation and culture wars matter because climate disinformation is repeated and amplified in the right-wing "influencers echo chamber" (people in positions of power such as the media, politicians, and prominent bloggers) and then reaches a wider audience to influence how the public understands the climate crisis (Treen et al., 2020). By undermining science and trust in the media, disinformation makes it more difficult to mobilise the public for action. It produces a chilling effect on scientists, educators, and academics, forcing them into bad-faith arguments (Cook et al., 2019, p. 4). Most insidiously, as the theory of spiral of silence predicts, people become unwilling to converse or discuss climate issues. Ultimately, as we explore the networks of climate denial, it becomes difficult to deny the impact of climate gaslighting in creating a "politics of dissensus" that has generated political inaction on the climate, which is precisely Big Carbon's goal.

THE STRATEGY: HACK MEDIA ECOSYSTEMS WITH DISCOURSES OF DENIAL AND DELAY

For generations Big Carbon has deployed a variety of strategies to counter scientific and environmentalist claims about our warming planet. This has included Dark Money networks that fund think tanks, educational non-profits, political campaigns, and Super PACS; creating fake environmental organisations (called astroturfing); funding contrarian scientists ("merchants of doubt") and pro-industry economists; ad spending by the oil lobby; gaming search engines; "advertorials" that make misleading claims; developing and promoting education curriculum; ad hominem attacks against scientists; leveraging online media to pressure legacy media through flack; and harnessing right-wing media and culture war politics. As a result, disinformation and pseudoscience proliferate to deceive the public about the dangers of weather chaos caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. The aim of Big Carbon is to ensure its agenda "wins" the battle of discourses to become taken-for-granted common sense, positioning fossil fuels as essential to the world's "natural order."

The global media commons is an arena of environmental claims-making (Murphy, 2017). So, when environmental problems are identified, why do some claims become prominent over others and who sets the agenda? Why do certain issues become news? What issues are not discussed and why? To answer these questions, practitioners in the field of environmental communication assert that social problems are constructed through language framing and the claims-making process. According to Hansen (2009, p. 9), "Frames … draw attention to particular dimensions or perspectives and they set the boundaries for how we should interpret or perceive what is presented to us." Metaphors can trigger different frames, such as "climate change" versus "climate crisis" or "climate denier" versus "climate sceptic." Anyone can frame, but it's more difficult for people not in power to set the frame. For example, in news media the practice of "objectivity" creates false equivalence, favours those in power and the status quo, and limits the range of acceptable opinion. What is valued tends to be an internalisation of the dominant worldview that determines what is news or not news. Maintaining strong social inertia in the global media commons for a fossil fuel culture has been a long-term project of Big Carbon. The goal is that powerful cultural, institutional, and individual processes "work collectively to inhibit actions and social change" (Corbett, 2021, p. 37).

The Network of Denial and Delay

In the industrialised world, there was a major corporate backlash against the gains made by the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s. "The extractive industries treated the Clean Air Act (1963), the Clean Water Act (1972), and the EPA (1970) as existential threats. It didn't take an oracle to see that environmental regulations would take a bite out of coal, the mining profits, and could promote a culture of alternative energy that could end the fossil fuel era. A battle ensued between environmental activists, affiliated with the Democratic Party and liberal Republicans, and their adversaries, the extractive industries and their allies" (Nelson, 2019, pp. 63–4). Corporate networks fought back by using similar strategies as environmentalists through coalition building, grassroots organising, telephone and letter-writing campaigns, generating research reports, testifying at hearings, and enlisting media. This network engaged in "propaganda warfare for capitalism," utilising the Advertising Council, endowing department chairs, funding think tanks, producing educational materials that were "economically educated," strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP), and funding the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which writes pro-business legislation (Beder, 1998, p. 16). One of the key intellectuals of the movement, Irving Kristol, said, "You can only beat an idea with another idea, and the war of ideas and ideologies will be won or lost within the 'new class,' not against it," the "new class" being government bureaucrats, academics, and journalists who produce ideas, not products (quoted in Beder, 1998, p. 19). Another key thinker of the backlash strategy, Brian Tokar, said, "the growth of ecological awareness in the

industrialized countries may be one of the last internal obstacles to the complete hegemony of transnational corporate capitalism" (quoted in Beder, 1998, p. 23). The goal: "give a corporate view of environmental problems, and avoid solutions that would involve reduced consumption, increased regulation, or reduced corporate profits" (Beder, 1998, p. 25).

Corporate and philanthropic actors fund producers of climate disinformation, which is then fed into the influencers' echo chamber. Big Carbon coordinates with and finances conservative activists to create lobbying groups like the Global Climate Coalition and the Information Council for the Environment. This is part of a network of libertarian think tanks, such as the Heartland Institute, Cato Institute, and the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which produces counterfactual climate research and pundits ("fake experts") to debate on cable news programmes. The climate-sceptic group International Climate Science Coalition (ICSC), who receives funds from the Heartland Institute, is funded by Big Carbon and right-wing actors like the Mercer family (funders of Breitbart, Cambridge Analytic, and the Trump campaign). In recent years, climate denying think tanks have been supported by Big Carbon and other major industry leaders, such as Volkswagen, Monsanto, Google, Microsoft, and Facebook, likely because of their aligned positions on taxes and state regulations (Eisele, 2017). Trade groups like the American Petroleum Institute, America's Natural Gas Alliance (ANGA), Manufacturers' Accountability Project, and Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers are also channels for messaging and funding. A major study showed a direct link between corporate and foundation funding of contrarian blogs to discredit climate science and individual scientists, challenge climate policy, and attack renewable energy (Coan et al., 2021). The primary donors, all American, included the Donors Capital Fund, ExxonMobil Foundation, Koch Affiliated Foundations, and the Vanguard Charitable Endowment Program, an arm of the investment company Vanguard, which is the largest investor in the global coal industry (Vetter, 2021).

Climate disinformation spreads as network propaganda through online media and actors, such as fake news entrepreneurs/political clickbait fabricators; Russian sock puppets; Facebook news feed algorithms and online echo chambers; right-wing and conservative media ecosystems; politicians and political parties (Trump is a disinformation "superspreader"); and internet subcultures composed of white supremacists and alt-right trolls (Benkler et al., 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). These forces converge in what could be described as a Big Carbon disinformation ecosystem[2] that combines elements of right-wing media (far-right news, message boards, clickbait, talk radio, YouTubers, evangelical media, partisan TV networks, apps like Zello and Telegram, social media groups), Dark Money (think tanks, Svengali/political operatives, mega-funders), armed extremists (NRA, Proud Boys, Three Percenters, Oath Keepers), astroturf groups, and coordinated disinformation warfare (trollbots,

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[2] Desmog.com has created an extensive database of actors: https://www.desmog.com/climate-disinformation-database/

gamed algorithms and searches, manipulated Wikipedia entries, and hackers). An example of how fake climate news easily circulates in this network is the story of the bogus petition of scientists claiming climate change is a hoax, which became the top social media news story in 2016 (Readfearn, 2016). Research demonstrates that what differentiates this network from other kinds of media (mainstream, centre-left, and Left-wing) is that it is insular and lacks commitment to journalistic truth-seeking and norm-constraints. The epistemic crisis is largely partisan and lacks a "reality check" (Benkler et al., 2018).

Climate deniers are overwhelmingly white male conservatives: "Researchers attributed this in part to their desire to 'protect their cultural identity'—big, strong, fearless men. Researchers also attributed it to their desire to maintain the economic system that disproportionately benefits them" (Atkin, 2020, para. 4). Climate deniers worry about the loss of "a certain kind of modern industrial society built and dominated by their form of masculinity" (para. 6). There are disagreements and differences among all these groups, but in general they share a common right-wing ideology that is anti-government regulation, pro-free market, neoliberal, anthropocentric, and often accompanied by misogyny and white nationalism.

Gatekeeping media institutions and professional journalism are susceptible to the disinformation assault because of a lack of trust in media, technological disruption, decline of local news, and the attention economy. Anne Nelson, a scholar of the American radical Right, describes the current media environment as experiencing "media colony collapse" (in reference to colony collapse disorder experienced by bees): "voters in many battleground states are surrounded by partisan media with no respect for fact- and evidence-based reporting, subject to the professional editorial process. Fundamentalist broadcasting and alt-right digital platforms rush to fill the vacuum" (quoted in Lee, 2019, para. 4). Not all actors are spreading disinformation because of ideology, and may only do it for money, attention, and status (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). But frictionless platforms like Facebook, with little or no breaking mechanism deployed on its algorithms, can easily spread disinformation. Gizmodo reported that internally Facebook has a laissez-faire attitude about climate denial (Kahn, 2021a). As one study demonstrated, during the February 2021 power outages in Texas, 99% climate disinformation went unchecked (Friends of the Earth, 2021). In another Facebook study (Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2021), ten publishers are shown to be responsible for 69% of digital climate change denial content, with 92% of the most popular articles having no label about climate crisis misinformation (Paul, 2021). *The Daily Caller*, a well-known spreader of climate disinformation, is one of Facebook's fact-checking partners (Legum & Atkin, 2020). According to a 2021 report by *Stop Funding Heat*, there were between 818,000 and 1.36 million views of climate misinformation every day on Facebook, but only 3.6% were fact checked. After CNN's climate change town hall in 2019, there was a surge in activity of trollbots on Twitter, which originated from sites known to be unreliable or for repeatedly violating Twitter's terms of service (Lavelle, 2019). In 2020 a quarter of all

tweets about the climate crisis were produced by bots (automated user accounts), which amplify climate disinformation. Bots can be augmented through Twitter's promoted tweets option, which allows accounts to boost their posts (Milman, 2020). Research in 2020 showed that YouTube was driving millions of people to watch climate misinformation videos every day, which was monetised by some of the top brands in the world (Avaaz, 2020). (To be fair, the brands did not know their ads were running during climate disinformation content.) Avaaz, who performed the study, called for YouTube to "detox" its algorithm, demonetise disinformation, and correct the record by informing viewers with fact-checking and providing data to researchers.

Certain features of online communities favour a closed, increasingly radicalised information ecosystem that affords the spread of disinformation (Benkler et al., 2018; Treen et al., 2020). The following factors can aid the spread of fake climate news to the wider public:

- Internet subcultures take advantage of the current media ecosystem to manipulate news frames, set agendas, and propagate ideas.
- Far-right groups develop techniques of "attention hacking" to increase the visibility of their ideas through the strategic use of social media, memes, and bots—as well as by targeting journalists, bloggers, and influencers to help spread content.
- The media's dependence on social media, analytics and metrics, sensationalism, novelty over newsworthiness, and clickbait makes them vulnerable to such media manipulation.
- While trolls, white nationalists, Men's Rights Activists, gamergaters, the "alt-right," and conspiracy theorists may diverge deeply in their beliefs, they share tactics and converge on common issues.
- The far-right exploits young men's rebellion and dislike of "political correctness" to spread white supremacist thought, Islamophobia, and misogyny through irony and knowledge of internet culture.
- Media manipulation may contribute to decreased trust of mainstream media, increased misinformation, and further radicalization (red-pilling). (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 1)

Conspiracies and disinformation emerge from fringe platforms and online communities, gaining momentum with groups before entering the mainstream. The loss of local news and increased media conglomeration lead to tension between legacy media and emerging digital media, creating various weaknesses and gaps that allow Big Carbon to exploit these systems to deceive and gaslight the public.

Discourses of Denial

With a growing consensus between the environmental movement and politicians to act, in the 1980s there was momentum for addressing climate change.

Even though fossil fuel companies knew from their internal scientific research that anthropogenic climate change was indeed exacerbated by greenhouse gas emissions from their industry, tactics were deployed to undermine climate action. In an Exxon strategy memo from 1988 titled, "The Greenhouse Effect," public affair managers stressed scepticism about climate science and planned to "emphasize the uncertainty in scientific conclusions regarding the potential enhanced Greenhouse effect" and "urge a balanced scientific approach" (Carlson, 1988). In 1989 they created the Global Climate Commission to promote doubt, lobby lawmakers, and block climate treaties. At the time of the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the industry increased ad spending. Indeed, the pattern is that whenever there is political and civil pressure against the industry, PR campaigns and ad buys are ramped up (Supran & Oreskes, 2021b). For example, during the period leading up to the US withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement, 25% of climate-related tweets originated from bots, the majority of which supported President Trump's decision and spread disinformation about "fake science" (Milman, 2020). In 2021, The American Petroleum Institute inundated Facebook with ads targeting the budget reconciliation debate's climate initiatives, sending users to their "Energy Citizens" page and thanking politicians like Senator Joe Manchin for being a "Champion of American Made Energy" (InfluenceMap, 2021).

Contrarian scientists have been labelled as "merchants of doubt," whose role is to create "deliberate obfuscation" of climate science (Oreskes & Conway, 2010). In a wide-ranging study of the period between 1998 and 2020, 33 prominent climate contrarian blogs and 20 conservative think tanks were analysed (Coan et al., 2021). Five major tactics were identified in the blogs: (1) global warming is not happening; (2) human-produced greenhouse gases are not causing global warming; (3) climate impacts are not bad; (4) climate solutions won't work; and (5) climate science or scientists are unreliable. Utilising the Big Tobacco playbook, the central tactic is to attack the scientific consensus through science denial, which was developed from market research by political strategists and industry groups (Dunlap & McCright, 2011; Luntz, 2002). Science denial is deployed as FLICC: fake experts, logical fallacies, impossible expectation, cherry picking, and conspiracy theories. *Fake experts* are non-experts with no prior climate research, scholarly background, or training who are promoted as qualified authorities; *logical fallacies* are "flawed arguments that lead to false conclusions" such as red herrings, non-sequiturs, and false dichotomies; *impossible expectations* means "demanding unrealistic standards of certainty before acting on the science"; *cherry picking* is "selectively choosing data that supports a desired conclusion that differs from the conclusion arising from all the available data"; and *conspiracy theories* propose "a secret plan among a number of people, generally to implement a nefarious scheme such as conspiring to hide a truth or perpetuate misinformation" (Cook et al., 2019, p. 10).

There are many examples of Big Carbon manipulating legacy news organisations by using FLICC. For many years the PR strategy to fund

"advertorials"—advertisements that are made to look like editorials—were successfully deployed in the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* op-ed sections. The aim was to influence the influencers. "ExxonMobil's advertorials in the NYT overwhelmingly emphasised only the uncertainties, promoting a narrative inconsistent with the views of most climate scientists, including ExxonMobil's own" (Supran & Oreskes, 2017, p. 15). Climate advertorials had headlines like, "Lies they tell our children," "Apocalypse No," "Science: what we know and don't know," and "Unsettled Science." In internal memos, Exxon argued to "extend the science" and "emphasise the uncertainty in scientific conclusions" in their messaging campaigns. In recent years, so-called Beltway newsletters that cover insider politics and policy for senior level audiences, such as *Axios*, *Punchbowl*, and *POLITICO*, are heavily targeted by Big Carbon. In some cases advertisers use a newsletter format to make their material look like regular editorial content (Atkin & Taft, 2001). As noted by Robert McChesney, "The best PR is never recognized for what it is" (McChesney, 2014, p. 19).

Advertising pays for much of our media, and Big Carbon deploys it strategically. Exxon, BP, Chevron, Shell, and ConocoPhillips spent $3.6 billion over 30 years (1986–2015) on reputation building (Brulle et al., 2020). ExxonMobil was the biggest ad spender in the world on Facebook and Instagram for the US-midterm and presidential elections in 2018–2020 (Supran & Oreskes, 2021b). Over the years Big Carbon ads pushed several themes, such as repositioning global warming as a theory (not fact). These ads have headlines like, "Who told you the earth was warming … Chicken Little?" and "Doomsday is Cancelled. Again." Other ads engage in economic fear-mongering, with headlines like, "Don't risk our economic future," "Americans Work Hard For What We Have, Mr. President. Don't Risk Our Economic Future," which targeted Kyoto negotiations. (President George H.W. Bush ended up rejecting the treaty.)

Discourse of Delay

Rather than outright denial of science, there has been a shift to "discourses of delay" intended to promote "inactivism" (Lamb et al., 2020; Shenker, 2021). This approach has four main themes: individual change, not system change (redirect responsibility to consumers and the developing world); push non-transformative solutions that don't disrupt the status quo; fear-monger about potential disruption caused by climate action; and accept that climate action is not possible (Westervelt, 2021). With BP leading the way, in the early 2000s they started to shift blame to consumers for climate change. BP introduced the carbon footprint calculator and ran ads with themes that stressed "routine human activities" and the lifestyle choices of individuals. In 2019 they ran the campaign, "Know your carbon footprint." Like Big Tobacco, they were positioning themselves as "neutral" and "innocent," as they were merely serving consumer demand (Supran & Oreskes, 2021b). On the "there is nothing that

can be done about it" front, some rhetorical ploys include claiming CO2 is a trace gas or touting the benefits of a warming world (excessive CO2 is beneficial and "the Earth is greening"), or that CO2 is "the gas of life." A corollary of this is that global heating is a result of natural cycles.

In what can be described as "pro-fossil fuel propaganda," from 2006 to 2008 BP peddled its "all of the above" and "clean bridge" energy strategy, a narrative identified as "fossil fuel solution-ism," which includes re-branding methane and fossil gas as "clean" energy sources (Brulle et al., 2020). The American Petroleum Institute ran ads touting, "Real climate solutions won't happen without natural gas and oil." This narrative has given cover to politicians, including the Obama Administration, to ramp up fossil gas (usually called "natural gas") production and fracking. Increasingly, so-called responsibly sourced gas (RSG) is touted as a "lower carbon" fuel (Kelly, 2021). These rhetorical tricks are called paltering, a kind of greenwashing in which statements are literally true, but they are misleading. Companies will state they are developing carbon capture for their extraction operations—a climate "solution"—even though captured carbon is sold to businesses to produce more oil. During Congressional hearings in 2021 to determine whether the fossil fuel industry misled the public about global heating, ExxonMobil's paltering strategy was to claim the company is "working to reduce emissions and help advance climate solutions" and "advancing climate solutions like carbon capture and storage to help create a lower-carbon energy future." But "lower carbon" is intentionally vague. Other Big Carbon ads included references to reducing their "carbon emissions intensity." ExxonMobil assures that they are "Helping customers meet their environmental goals" (Supran & Oreskes, 2021b). Big Carbon now wants to position itself as a Fossil Fuel Saviour, "that downplays the reality and seriousness of climate change, normalises fossil fuel lock-in, and individualizes responsibility" (Supran & Oreskes, 2021a).

Chevron's "Human Energy" campaign stresses how they are working with "major universities to develop the next generation of biofuels," such as those based on algae. Ironically, ExxonMobil spent more money on advertising biofuels than algae research, and BP spent more on re-branding British Petroleum as a green company than on renewable energy projects. "Greenwashing confers companies with an aura of environmental credibility while distracting from their anti-science, anti-clean energy disinformation, lobbying and investments. The goal is to defend what BP calls a company's 'social licence to operate'" (Supran & Oreskes, 2021b). Big Carbon boosts "cooperative relationships" with scholarly institutions as they "colonise academia" (Supran & Franta, 2017). They also greenwash through cultural influence, like sponsoring museums, art galleries, music and arts festivals, and performance groups (operas, ballet, theatres, symphonies), or underwriting public media.[3] From 1970 to 1981 Mobile Corporation branded PBS' *Masterpiece Theatre* in order to mould

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[3] Ironically, museums are having to invest in protecting their collections from climate change (Cummins, 2017).

the "collective unconsciousness" (Yoder, 2019). In 2015 NPR came under fire because the American Natural Gas Association underwrote their reporting on fracking (Jensen, 2015). Even though ExxonMobil is the fourth-biggest polluter in the world, it is also one of the biggest donors to charities. Branding culture has become part of fossil fuel infrastructure: "That logo, that name, is part of fossil fuel infrastructure. … It is as essential as the wellhole, as the pipeline, as the transportation barge, as the refinery" (Yoder, 2019, para. 9).

Pivoting to show what Big Carbon is for, a recent tactic is to portray themselves as reasonable and caring about the environment, such as the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) memo that calls for a "balanced energy-transition roadmap for a constructive debate that will enable policymakers to instigate and, perhaps, lead a realistic energy transition" (Kahn, 2021b, para. 6). They portray themselves as addressing the climate and wanting "clear" and "better" solutions to climate change, so there is nothing for the public to worry about. Through multicultural and diverse demographic representation, there is also an element of "wokewashing" with these campaigns: "A casual social media user might get the impression the fossil fuel industry views itself as a social justice warrior, fighting on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and women" (Westervelt, 2021, para. 2). Climate wokewashing has two threads: "either warnings that a transition away from fossil fuels will adversely impact poor and marginalized communities, or claims that oil and gas companies are aligned with those communities" (para. 14).

Solutions Denial

An analysis of 300,000 tweets between January 2016 and May 2021, which included commonly used denier hashtags such as #climatechangehoax, #climatechangeisfake, and #climatecult, confirmed an evolving strategy from outright science denial to attacking solutions, creating fear, and culture war misinformation (Levantesi & Corsi, 2021). This tactic is meant to change the subject from culpability for disseminating disinformation and responsibility for the climate crisis (Atkin, 2021). Big Carbon is adapting Republican "cancel culture" and "woke capitalism" talking points, asserting that they are being victimised, intimidated, and "badgered." They have claimed that defunding or cancelled funding of fossil fuel projects is akin to the racist banking practice of redlining, or, as the Gas Exporting Countries Forum insisted, that Big Carbon is victimised by the oppressive and undemocratic woke left mob in an "ongoing reductionism and cancel culture on hydrocarbons" (Kahn, 2021b, para. 2). Big Carbon represents itself as responsible adults that are providing reliable energy, technological innovation, high standards of living, and jobs. Climate activists are hysterical alarmists and "doom-mongers" (they want to take away your hamburgers!) who behave like disrespectful and ungrateful children. Climate activists are portrayed as an elitist cult trying to brainwash the public. The climate youth movement Fridays for Future and Greta Thunberg are addressed as

petulant children who should apologise for attacking fossil fuels (not to mention a pinch of misogyny (Gelin, 2019)).

Part of this tactic is to paint climate action as promoted by hypocritical elitists and activists who fly around the world in private jets while lecturing people to change their lifestyles. They label decarbonisation as class privilege and utilise the language of social justice, describing "environmentalists as an aloof, out-of-touch establishment," and fossil fuel allies as "insurgents, defending the values and livelihoods of ordinary people" (Shenker, 2021, para. 11). The Twitter study showed that the "higher-costs" narrative was applied to policy proposals like the Green New Deal ("an unrealistic pipe dream") and as a response to the IPCC report calling for climate action (Levantesi & Corsi, 2021). Widespread fears of recession, poverty, and higher taxation were being exploited, with tweets claiming that environmental regulations and climate policies will economically disadvantage average households and impoverished communities (apparently without irony regarding Big Carbon's racist practises of exploiting sacrifice zones and expendable populations[4]). Like rhetoric deployed around Brexit, this wedge can be exploited with great effect; just replace EU with environmentalists.[5]

Given the scientific consensus and the untenable claim that climate science is unresolved, the shift from climate denial to solutions denial combines a fear narrative with the fossil fuel–saviour narrative: "oil has provided wealth and a higher quality of life, and that banning fossil fuels only endangers lives and 'drives humanity back to mediaeval times'" (Levantesi & Corsi, 2021, para. 8). Stories about blackouts and energy shortages and unreliable wind/solar energy over reliable energy are pushed, especially perpetuated during the February 2021 blackouts in Texas. Other scare tactics are far-right tropes, such as environmentalism serving as a "trojan horse" for socialism, communism, and a one-world government takeover by the UN. The "Great Reset" conspiracy

[4] "Sacrifice zones" are places designated as politically acceptable for pollution and ecological destruction. These populations are usually lower-income people of colour, referred by ecojustice critics as "disposable populations" (Hopkins, 2020).

[5] "The idea that decarbonisation is inherently elitist is a myth, peddled largely by political figures who have shown little concern for deprived communities in any other context, and who ignore the fact that without a net zero transition it is the very poorest—globally and domestically—who will suffer most severely. But like all effective myths, it is founded on a kernel of truth: namely that under successive governments, political decision-making has felt remote and unaccountable, the rich have got richer, and life for a great many of the rest of us has grown harder. … They're inviting people to ask themselves: can the same government that made the poorest pay for the banking crisis really be trusted to design a fair climate policy?" (Shenker, 2021, para. 24)

prevalent in the QAnon world asserts that environmental policies are part of a strategy to create a totalitarian new world order.[6]

In 2020, a narrative emerged from the climate denial network claiming that COVID-19 pandemic was a pretext for a "green tyranny" when governments and global elites would use climate change to curtail civil liberties. This "climate lock-down" narrative was appropriated by the right-wing media ecosystem,[7] converging with anti-climate activists from the far-right who fear the curtailment of individual freedoms and mobility. They use the term "eco-fascist" pejoratively, as evidenced by the variety of "Greta Thunberg as a Nazi girl" memes. Eco-fascist in this usage is aimed at environmental activists and their perceived authoritarianism. But in other usages it refers to far-right ecological fanatics (Counterpoint, 2021).

NetZero and Beyond

Studying Big Carbon disinformation is an important prompt that just as communication maintains the social order, it is also necessary for transforming it. James Carey (2009) reminds us that, "Communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (p. 19). In many ways, climate communication is broken and must be repaired, thus Carey's axiom remains true as ever: "To study communication is to examine the actual social process wherein significant symbolic forms are created, apprehended, and used" (p. 24). Post COP26, the emerging discourse of NetZero and what it means will be the new communication battleground for how to shape future climate action. Whereas climate action can unite people for a common cause, polarised politics will continue to divide.

The shift to discussing costs and fairness of climate mitigation, instead of debating climate science, is a sign that the denial claims are no longer effective. Discourses about costs and social justice are substantive. With lawsuits and

[6] "Drawing from the same conspiracy theories on hidden governments and deep states that fueled the rise of QAnon, this fear tactic claims that climate policy is part of a large-scale plan for world control, depopulation, and technological dominance. It often depicts images of a technological dystopia where machines run the world and human life has no value. Many of the tweets in this category claim that any observable changes to the climate system are, rather than the logical result of centuries of humans releasing greenhouse gases, the result of governments manipulating the weather" (Levantesi & Corsi, 2021, Full on para. 4). Now, "Climate change, socialism, Covid-19, a new world order, and meat bans are all different sides of the same denial coin. And the message is a simple one: climate change is a dangerous plot to limit individual liberty, depopulate the Earth, and destroy national governments. In this scenario, discussing science is no longer relevant—climate change becomes exclusively a political matter, completely removed from science or facts" (Full on para. 9).

[7] "Once it had garnered attention, the notion was swiftly integrated into a pre-existing 'culture war' framework and related national offshoots—this was less driven by fringe bloggers, and more by high-visibility outlets like Fox News who transformed 'climate lockdown' into a vision of impending authoritarian doom … such ideas have crept into a broader swathe of far-right and conspiracy movements, most recently appearing in forums for the infamous QAnon cult" (Maharasingam-Shah & Vaux, 2021, p. 4).

government hearings about whether Big Carbon lied in their PR strategy, legal culpability could shape future messaging. But the ideological and cultural shift marked by political polarisation and conspiracies remains a great concern. Efforts by platforms to curb disinformation and conspiracies should be a top priority. Already Google and YouTube have banned ads on climate disinformation content (Wakabayashi & Hsu, 2021), and Facebook claims to be changing practises by creating a Climate Science Information Center. But some have charged that this is an act of greenwashing. Unless Facebook (and other social media networks) finds ways to put the brakes on the general problem of disinformation and conspiracies, little will change (Legum & Atkin, 2020).

The problem of fake climate news recalls the oft-cited wisdom of H.L. Mencken (2004), "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by an endless series of hobgoblins, most of them imaginary" (p. 29). Whereas the climate crisis is demonstrably real and threatening, many are led to believe in imaginary conspiracies, half-truths, and dangerous propaganda that, if not confronted and resolved, could hinder our ability to successfully address the climate crisis. The outcome of Big Carbon's widespread climate disinformation is reduced climate literacy, political polarisation, silencing scientists and scholars, and negatively impacting how scientists engage the public. Society depends on trust, but the industry's pursuit of profits has undone trust and upended our world. One thing is certain, as long as there is an existential threat to their business model, Big Carbon will deploy every trick in the dark arts of PR—which increasingly acts like propaganda and psychological warfare—to continue gaslighting the public into believing climate action is pointless.

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Using Disparagement Humour to Deal with Health Misinformation Endorsers: A Case Study of China's Shuanghuanglian Oral Liquid Incident

Xin Zhao and Yu Xiang

Introduction

The health misinformation engulfing social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic intensifies the importance and urgency of exploring effective strategies to deal with health misinformation. The battle against misinformation is far more complicated than merely debunking or correcting the misinformation itself. How to deal with the endorsers of misinformation should also be taken into consideration. Echoing the growing body of scholarship in understanding the role of user-generated interventions in dealing with misinformation, this study zooms in on how the public who do not believe in health misinformation interact with the endorsers. This study focuses on China's shuanghuanglian (SHL) oral liquid incident. It dissects the application of disparagement humour by those who did not believe in the rumour regarding the effectiveness of SHL in curing the novel COVID-19 towards the rumour endorsers on Weibo. This chapter ends with a discussion about the consideration of the social, cultural, political,

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and psychological intricacies where the misinformation is contextualised when identifying effective user-generated interventions in combating misinformation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Misinformation can be broadly defined as incorrect information that counters expert knowledge on an issue but with no intention to mislead (Bode & Vraga, 2018; Scheufele & Krause, 2019). Misinformation has many categories, including political, science, and health misinformation (Vraga et al., 2019). Specifically, health misinformation refers to a false health-related claim of fact that lacks scientific evidence and expert opinions (Li et al., 2019; Vraga & Bode, 2017). Health misinformation has emerged as one of the core research areas of media and communication studies (Li et al., 2019) due to its consequence in causing detriment to people's health (e.g. Guidry & Messner, 2017; Jolley & Douglas, 2014) and inducing fear, anxiety, and mistrust in institutions (see the review by Wang et al., 2019). Misinformation is an umbrella term that contains many formats, one of which is rumour that refers to the unverified information that can be either true or false (Wu et al., 2019).

Coping strategies to intervene in and correct health misinformation on social media has been one of the emerging research agendas in the disciplines of communication, health care, and information systems (Li et al., 2019). This research agenda is especially urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic when various health misinformation about the pandemic are prevalent on social media, which might mislead people in effectively dealing with the physical, mental, and collateral societal damages caused by the pandemic (Gabarron et al., 2021; Tsao et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2020). This context calls for academic studies to explore and identify effective coping strategies to address this urgent challenge.

A growing body of scholarship has been devoted to finding strategies to debunk and/or correct misinformation on social media, for example, relying on expert sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to correct misinformation (Vraga & Bode, 2017), designing cognitively inspired information architectures (Lewandowsky et al., 2012, 2017), and engaging with the digital advertising industry to identify fake news publishers (Bakir & McStay, 2018). While the above institutional, technological, and economic strategies are important in the battle against misinformation on social media, the scholarly focus should also be put on the role of the public in tackling misinformation. The prevalent and easy-access social media platforms provide the public with opportunities to intervene in various scenarios, for example, cancer prevention and control (Cavallo et al., 2014), political activist intervention (Ferrari, 2018), reducing excessive consumption (Herziger et al., 2017), and enhancing pro-breastfeeding attitudes (Jin et al., 2015). Some studies have

started to explore the effect of user-generated interventions in tackling misinformation. For example, Bode and Vraga (2018) found that social corrections, that is individual social media users discrediting and debunking misinformation on social media, are effective in limiting people's misperceptions. Similarly, Kligler-Vilenchik (2021) confirmed the active and discursive role of social media users in addressing political misinformation.

Winning the battle against misinformation is far more complicated than debunking/correcting the misinformation itself. How to intervene in correcting the endorsers of misinformation, including those on social media (Mena et al., 2020), is also an urgent task. Therefore, besides dealing with misinformation itself, it is also intriguing to examine the role of the public who do not believe in misinformation in interacting with the endorsers of misinformation. The in-group identity might forge solidarity among those who do not believe in one piece of misinformation and distance themselves from the endorsers of that misinformation, which might force the change of misperceptions (Dunaway, 2021).

Humour has been viewed as a lubricant that can benefit the bonding and sense of belonging in group settings (Martin & Ford, 2018). Studies have found that social media users have been using humour to forge solidarity among their in-group members on many scenarios, for example, coping with cancer (Demjén, 2016), criticising extremist incel (i.e. hateful involuntary celibate men) ideology (Dynel, 2020), crystallising political arguments for the extreme groups (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020), and boycotting companies (Dynel & Poppi, 2020). Among all the strategies or formats of humour, disparagement humour, which refers to the "remarks that (are intended to) elicit amusement through the emigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target" (Ferguson & Ford, 2008: 283), has been used to enhance in-group pride and (re)inforce the in-group and out-group distinction (e.g. Abrams & Bippus, 2011; see Martin & Ford, 2018 for a review).

The role of humour in the battle against misinformation has received growing empirical and scholarly interest. For example, the Taiwan government has used the tactic named "humour over rumour" on social media to counter health misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic (Quito, 2020). Existing scholarship dominantly focused on the effectiveness of humour-based corrections (e.g. offering corrections through a reply tweet) in fighting misinformation (Kim et al., 2020; Vraga et al., 2019; Yeo & McKasy, 2021). Nevertheless, seldom study has zoomed in on how the public used humour to deal with the endorsers of misinformation. It leaves a gap for a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of the battle against misinformation from the perspective of the public and via the strategy of humour. This chapter will explore how the public used disparagement humour to deal with the endorsers of misinformation in China's SHL oral liquid incident.

CASE STUDY

During the initial breakout stage of the COVID-19 pandemic in China, Lu (2020) found that COVID-19-related misinformation in the Chinese context centres on the prevention and treatment of the disease, crisis situation updates, authority action and policy, and disease-related information. Among the misinformation regarding the prevention and treatment of the disease, one of the most prominent pieces is the rumour that SHL oral liquid, a well-known traditional Chinese medicine usually used to treat acute upper respiratory tract infection (Zhuang et al., 2020), could effectively prevent COVID-19 (Leng et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). During the pandemic, although other medicines were rumoured to be effective in dealing with COVID-19, SHL oral liquid was the only one that triggered panic-buying (Zhang et al., 2020).

The rumour was initiated by the public's misunderstandings of a news report by China's state-affiliated news media, including Xinhua News Agency and *People's Daily*,[1] released on 31 January 2020 (Chen, 2020). The report claimed that the latest joint research between Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica under the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Wuhan Institute of Virology found that SHL oral liquid, a Chinese patent medicine, is effective in inhibiting COVID-19 (Chen, 2020). People rushed to buy the medicine even during the night on the same day the news report was released online and offline regardless of the quarantine and social distancing regulations (Ci & Zhang, 2020). On 1 February, *People's Daily* explained on its Weibo account that "inhibition" is not equivalent to "prevention" or "treatment" and tried to stop the panic-buying (Chen, 2020).

The SHL oral liquid incident deserves a close examination because it is a reflection of the long-standing contestation between the supporters of traditional Chinese medicine and those who hold dissenting opinions (Chen et al., 2018). Traditional Chinese medicine has been closely linked to the Chinese cultural identity and nationalist sentiments (Chen et al., 2018), especially during the pandemic (Peng & Chen, 2021). It is intriguing to explore how the group of publics who did not believe in this rumour and endorsed the correction of this rumour dealt with those with contrasting opinions, thus to force the change of misperceptions and to stop the panic and anxiety caused by the panic-buying.

In China, social media users have been actively engaging in discussions on social media platforms during major public events (e.g. Bondes & Schucher, 2014; Tong & Zuo, 2014; Xie et al., 2017), and the SHL oral liquid incident is no exception. This study focuses specifically on relevant public discussions on

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[1] The news report by Xinhua News Agency was titled "Two institutes jointly found that shuanghuanglian oral liquid can inhibit coronavirus." The authors did not find the original report disseminated by Xinhua News Agency itself but found a repost here https://finance.sina.com.cn/china/gncj/2020-01-31/doc-iimxyqvy9384228.shtml. The news report by *People's Daily* was titled "The Chinese Academy of Sciences found that shuanghuanglian oral liquid can inhibit coronavirus" and can be found here http://scitech.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0131/c1007-31566098.html.

Weibo, the top social media site in China gauged by a combination of average daily visitors and pageviews over one month (Alexa, 2021).

Weibo categorises posts containing the same hashtag into a forum and uses the hashtag as the name of the forum. Among all forums whose names include "shuanghuanglian," the one titled "#shuanghuanglian can inhibit the novel Coronavirus" (the original Chinese title is #双黄连可抑制新型冠状病毒#) attracts the largest numbers of both discussions (n = 559,000) and reading frequencies (n = 2.22 billion). We chose to focus on posts from this forum. Each Weibo forum has a "most popular posts" filtering function. Although Weibo does not specify the criteria measuring the popularity of the posts, the posts selected as the "most popular posts" have attracted a considerable amount of reposts, comments, and/or likes. In the selected forum, about 160 posts were listed as the "most popular posts." We chose to use relevant posts from this pool because they are more influential in voicing their opposition to the rumour regarding the SHL oral liquid. We selected posts from non-institutional Weibo users to examine relevant public opinions disseminated on the platform.

This study focused specifically on the posts using the strategy of ridicule, a form of disparagement humour that intends to make fun of something about an individual's behaviours (Janes & Olson, 2000) and aims to demean and/or humiliate the victims and construct the "us" and "them" division (Billig, 2005; Dynel, 2020). To minimise the researchers' subjectivity in gauging which post used the strategy of ridicule, besides checking whether the posts comply with the above definition of ridicule, we also make sure that the author of the post and/or the comment(s) indicated the amusement of the posts through, for example, emojis (e.g. laughter or hysterical laughter) or verbal evaluations (Dynel, 2020). We have selected 20 posts. The largest amount of reposts among all the selected posts is 168, comments 403, and likes 2299 (as of 18 October 2021 when we finished our data collection).

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the data focused on the multimodal elements of the posts, including texts, pictures, and/or images, in light of the socio-political context of the posts (e.g. the panic and anxiety caused by the rumour endorsers, and the in-group and out-group dichotomy) (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2015). The study unpacked the posts from the following three aspects of cultural items that can be imitated and circulated from person to person, namely form (message composition of the item), content (ideas and ideologies conveyed within the item), and stance of the posts (how addresser positions themselves in relation to the addressee) (Dynel, 2020; Shifman, 2014). Therefore, this study is situated in critical discourse analysis which aims to elaborate on the construction and legitimisation of power relations (van Leeuwen, 2013). Moreover, informed by pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016), the multimodal data were examined through iteration and categorised into four overarching themes, namely undifferentiated and unreasonable medicine consumption, unquestioning panic-buying, lack of common sense, and mental issues. Table 12.1 includes example posts in each theme.

Table 12.1 Themes and example posts using disparagement humour towards the SHL oral liquid rumour

Themes	Example posts
Undifferentiated and unreasonable medicine consumption	– Posts showing a shortage of stock of online products with the name of SHL, for example, SHL oral liquid for animals, such as chickens, dogs, and pigs, with some embedded with texts translated as "I drink as much as a pig would do" or "SHL oral liquid for animals can be used for people who are in urgent need since we are all mammals" – Posts ridiculing people who panic-bought mooncakes with fillings named SHL (same pronunciation but with different Chinese characters) – Posts predicting that if experts and official media claimed that eating shit is effective in curing Covid-19, there would be panic-buying of glycerine enema – Posts predicting that if experts said that the urine from a dog could cure COVID-19, no dogs would be left with any urine by tomorrow – Posts predicting that if experts claimed that soups made with dog fur could cure COVID-19, no dogs would be left on the street alive by tomorrow – Posts ridiculing that rumour endorsers should buy and eat bats to cure COVID-19 because as a medicine, bats are supposed to cure cough
Unquestioning panic-buying	– Posts ridiculing people being deaf to experts' warning of staying at home but keeping a tight schedule of panic-buying different things every day driven by different misinformation, namely, masks on Monday, rice on Tuesday, sanitiser on Wednesday, eye protection goggles on Thursday, ultraviolet light on Friday, gloves on Saturday, and now SHL oral liquid – Posts ridiculing panic-buyers who are now able to make themselves a drink by mixing some banlangen (another traditional Chinese medicine widely used for the prevention and treatment of virus-related respiratory diseases, added by authors) they panic-bought during the 2002 SARS outbreak, some salt they panic-bought amid fears of a potential radiation crisis from Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in 2011, SHL oral liquid they've panic-bought during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, spirits, and ice
Lack of common sense	– Posts showing that people gather around to give a toast to common sense, instead of good health, with SHL oral liquid that is contained in thumb-size brown bottles (the usual package of SHL oral liquid, added by authors) – Posts ridiculing the lack of logical thinking of the rumour endorsers by questioning whether the doctors working in Wuhan were doing nothing but merely playing card games to kill time since some widely used Chinese traditional medicines are effective in curing COVID-19 – Posts ridiculing that young people were not immune to the panic-buying of SHL oral liquid, which indicates that after 50 years, these people will become the target of health product scams
Mental issues	– Posts equalising rumour endorsers to patients being barred behind the gate of the psychiatric hospital – Posts ridiculing that rumour endorsers should drink the SHL oral liquid while paying attention to the fengshui of their houses and reading out loud their requests to the gods and ghosts to ensure the effectiveness of the medicine in curing COVID-19

The above themes and illustrative posts showed that members of the group who did not believe in the rumour regarding the effectiveness of SHL oral liquid in curing COVID-19 ridiculed the rumour endorsers through the strategy of disparagement humour. By disparaging the rumour endorsers, the posts indicated that those who did not believe in the rumour prided themselves on their rational medicine consumption and buying behaviours, common sense, and mental health. They cemented their internal solidarity and group identity through their self-assumed intellectual superiority and demonstrated their disaffiliating stance from the rumour endorsers (Billig, 2005; Dynel, 2020). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the above user-generated interventions in correcting the rumour endorsers deserves more examination. Several challenges arise from our observations of this case.

First, the attitudes towards and perceptions of the effectiveness of SHL oral liquid in treating COVID-19 and the behaviours towards buying the medicine among the rumour endorsers might not be easily changed. Chinese traditional medicine has a long history and has been widely embraced in China (Peng & Chen, 2021). They have also been linked to nationalism and patriotism especially during the pandemic when the virus and the treatment have been globally politicised (Peng & Chen, 2021). Also, SHL oral liquid is cheap (about 30 pence per bottle). Even people who do not believe in the rumour might still stockpile SHL oral liquid especially when the scientific evidence of the effectiveness of SHL oral liquid is tentative. Moreover, the consumer stockpiling behaviours, including stockpiling medicine, during the COVID-19 pandemic are associated with a range of factors, such as personality traits, health literacy, and attitudes to the governmental response to the crisis (Dammeyer, 2020). Therefore, pointing out the irrationality of the rumour endorsers in the SHL oral liquid incident through disparagement humour might be far from sufficient to correct the rumour endorsers.

Second, social media users who are engaging in the interventions seem to be individual and random, instead of collective and organised, which might weaken the effectiveness of the interventions. During the pandemic, the government has politicised traditional Chinese medicine by endorsing them as a potential treatment for COVID-19, aiming to establish and enhance the governmental pandemic mitigation measures (Peng & Chen, 2021). The censorship in China allows space for criticism of the government on social media but closely monitors and controls collective and organised expressions and actions (King et al., 2013). Although social media users can vent out their anger towards the rumour endorsers for causing the panic, anxiety, and fear during the pandemic, they might still be under self-censorship because the whole incident is closely linked to the governmental stance towards the effectiveness of SHL oral liquid being broadcasted by the governmentally affiliated news media, the effectiveness of traditional Chinese medicine in

curing COVID-19, and the governmental responses to the panic-buying and the wider pandemic mitigation measures.

Third, the disparagement humour made by the social media users who did not believe in the rumour might humiliate and embarrass those from the out-group, that is those who believed in the effectiveness of SHL oral liquid in curing COVID-19. It is an exclusive strategy to obtain consent within a small community while pushing away people of divergent opinions instead of inviting them in. When the confrontation against misinformation is concretised as hostility against certain groups of people, the genuine purpose behind the antagonism, to correct the misinformation endorsers, is buried and forgotten. Therefore, the adversarial relationship and one-dimensional victory are perhaps not the best practical framework for dispelling rumours. This could further strengthen the division between the in-group and out-group (Martin & Ford, 2018), and consequently cast the effectiveness of humour-based user-generated interventions in misinformation in question.

The above reflections point to the complicated mechanisms of combating misinformation. Recent years have witnessed scholarly efforts in identifying the effective one-for-all measures of correction to misinformation, such as specific correction source (experts or non-experts), type (factual elaboration or simple rebuttal), and format (text or text and image) (Walter et al., 2021), and inoculation (Compton et al., 2021). While it is desirable to identify a universal formula for misinformation treatment, the social, cultural, political, and psychological intricacies of different types of misinformation in different contexts require customised investigation to excavate indigenous uniqueness. The latter research agenda is especially important when considering the user-generated interventions in the battle against misinformation. This chapter is one of the many academic attempts to diversify this field and to provide empirical reference for future research.

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Citizens' Networks of Digital and Data Literacy

Simeon Yates and Elinor Carmi

INTRODUCTION

As argued throughout this volume, dis-/mis-/mal-information are a cause for growing concerns across the world (Carmi et al., 2020). Focusing on misinformation Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) argue that misinformation is 'information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm'. However, scholars and the media tend to use this term interchangeably in various contexts, mixing it with disinformation, malinformation, fake news (Farkas & Schou, 2018) and the idea of an infodemic (Simon & Camargo, 2021). While the exact definition of misinformation is not the topic of this paper, for the following discussion we need to highlight that the practices around it can vary quite a lot and depend on how it is applied conceptually and practically. As our own research points out (Carmi et al., 2020; Yates et al., 2020b) mis-/dis-/mal-information as technically defined by scholars are not everyday terms used by citizens. What does overlap are the concerns shared by scholars and citizens over the spread of 'misinformation' or 'fake news'.

As noted in this volume and elsewhere scholars have been discussing the spread of misinformation around such things as elections, COVID-19 or the climate crisis. They have documented how people across the world are effectively bombarded with misleading messages through various media from social

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media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or TikTok), private messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, WeChat) and broadcast media. This raises the question of how citizens can respond to this? What resources (social, cultural and material) can they draw upon to identify, evaluate and respond to mis-information?

This chapter focuses on this question by exploring citizens' digital and data literacies, especially the social networks (personal and digital) that citizens depend on for support. We will argue that these networks, which we call *networks of literacy*, are key to understanding the way people engage with digital media and systems. *Networks of literacy* are the ways in which people engage with others, where they engage and with which media to gain the understanding, skills and competencies in a way that suits them. We will specifically draw on insights from our 3-year Nuffield Foundation funded project 'Me and My Big Data: Developing citizens data literacies'. We explore whether citizens possess the social networks they can draw upon to support the digital and data literacies needed to address dis-/mis-/mal-information. As we argue elsewhere (Carmi et al., 2020), understanding people's data literacies are key to developing education programmes, or demand policy changes that can assist them to better manage misinformation and more broadly in a datafied society.

Underpinning Research

The Me and My Big Data project spanned from 2018 until 2021, and aimed to understand the levels of and variations in UK citizens' data literacy. In particular, we sought to explore the extent of citizens' understanding of the use of their data by industry, government and third sector. In the 4 years since the project was initially designed much has changed. The focus of concern around online harms has shifted from privacy and data exploitation to dis-/mis-/mal-information (Carmi et al., 2020). The project consisted of three stages (see Yates et al., 2021 for full details):

1. A review of current research
2. A nationally (UK) representative survey
3. Citizens focus groups

The survey followed a similar methodology to that employed in our recent studies of digital inequalities (Yates, Carmi, Lockley, et al., 2020; Yates, Carmi, Pawluczuk, et al., 2020b; Yates et al., 2015, 2020; Yates & Lockley, 2018). We used Latent Class Analysis to identify six groups according to their use of digital systems and media:

1. Extensive political users—likely to undertake most activities measured.
2. Extensive users—likely to undertake most activities measured but not political action.
3. General users—some use across most activities.

4. Social and entertainment media users—low use apart from SNS and entertainment media.
5. Limited users—low to very low use across all measures.
6. Non-users—not online.

We conducted focus groups during Autumn 2020 and Winter 2021 via community digital literacy centres across the UK (more on the methodology of focus groups during a pandemic see Carmi et al. (2022)). Groups were divided according to their data literacy levels as listed above and their age. This chapter uses findings from both the survey and focus group work.

DIGITAL AND DATA LITERACY

The term 'digital literacy' is ubiquitous but often goes undefined in discussions of digital media use. The idea builds on multiple prior concepts including media literacy (see Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013), data literacy (see Crusoe, 2016; Grillenberger & Romeike, 2018) and information literacy (see Carlson & Johnston, 2015). The theoretical examination of ICT use as a form of literacy has a long heritage (e.g. Finnegan, 1989) and there is a much deeper history tied to broader theories of literacy (see Street & Street, 1984). Importantly, such social, political and cultural understandings of literacy are rooted in the idea of literacy practices and their 'uses' by citizens and communities (see Hoggart, 1957). It is important to note that the idea of digital literacy is not simply one of making an analogy between a skill set needed for 'written' texts and one for 'computer systems'. Writing is itself a technology and written literacy and digital literacy fundamentally intersect today as the majority of text consumed by citizens is provided via digital media and systems. As Danet noted in 1997:

> In perhaps 50 years' time, our understanding of the nature of literacy and of the social functions of texts will have so radically changed that few will be alive to attest to 'how things were' at the close of the 20th century. (Danet, 1997, p. 7)

Literacy is therefore always about the use of the communication technologies at the time, though it is of course a highly social and culturally differentiated set of practices. Importantly, certain literacy practices are deemed more worthy or useful—in other words—there are notable *normative* assumptions in play around what types of behaviours and knowledge citizens should have. These points all hold for use of digital media including the normative assumptions about what is 'good' digital literacy (Arora, 2019). To this set of ideas, we bring the concept of 'data literacy'. This is not just 'numeracy' under another guise but reflects the fact that the use, interpretation and manipulation of data are key components of citizens' engagement with digital systems and with the digital society. Data misuses, privacy breaches and role of algorithms require that citizens be equipped not only with technical but also critical skills to make

sense of and manage the data they generate online (see Andrejevic, 2014; Selwyn & Pangrazio, 2018; Hintz & Brown, 2017; Zuboff, 2019).

Digital and data literacy are key to citizens' ability to understand and manage the content and algorithmic ordering they encounter online. According to OfCom's (the UK media regulator) adults' media use and attitudes report from 2021, there are many gaps in UK citizens knowledge when it comes to critical understanding of digital media. For example, some internet users were unaware of the potential for inaccurate or biased information online; 3% of internet users believed that all information they find online is truthful, 30% thought most is, and more worryingly, 24% didn't even think about whether the information they find is truthful or not. When it comes to trust and misinformation, the report argues that a majority (65%) of search engine users were aware that some websites that appear in their search results could be inaccurate or biased, but 18% thought they would all have accurate and unbiased information, and a further 10% did not consider this at all. According to the report, younger search engine users (aged 16–24) tended to be less media-literate in interpreting the accuracy of search results; 31% thought that if they had been listed by the search engine, these websites would have accurate and unbiased information. These findings match others in the past years that indicate that many people lack an understanding of how the digital media and systems they use everyday work and, importantly, what the consequences are for them in their lives.

As part our project we developed a Data Literacies framework we call 'Data Citizenship' that contains three dimensions:

1. Data Doing: Citizens' everyday engagements with data (e.g. deleting data and using data in an ethical way).
2. Data Thinking: Citizens' critical understanding of data (e.g. understanding data collection and data economy).
3. Data Participating: Citizens' proactive engagement with data and their networks of literacy (e.g. taking proactive steps to protect individual and collective privacy and wellbeing in the data society as well as helping others with their data literacy).

We would therefore argue that digital and data literacies have many, if not all the same features as written and media literacies:

- They are technology dependent.
- They have clear social, cultural and political elements—including normative assumptions.
- They are complex and consist of a range of practices that combine into different literacies.
- Different literacies and literacy practices often correspond with specific social contexts or groups.

- Lack of or limited literacies can have significant material, physical, emotional and mental impacts on citizens.
- *Literacies are often heavily dependent on citizens' social networks.*

It is this final point, the ways in which data and digital literacy are dependent on citizens in-person and digital social networks that we explore in this chapter. Our focus group data points to a version of the two-step-flow model of influence, originally conceived by Lazarsfeld and Katz (Katz, 1957), in citizens networks of literacy. Though falling out of fashion as an approach in the later parts of the twentieth century—in part due to the difficulty in empirically testing the model—two-step-flow patterns are notably present in social media interactions and digital networks (Choi, 2015; Hilbert et al., 2017; Soffer, 2021). We would point to two areas where this structure has a role in citizens networks of literacy. First, as evidenced in other work (Choi, 2015), the dissemination of (dis)information is often via key 'leaders' or 'influencers' within broader digital and social media networks. Second, and closer to home, citizens rely on key individuals within their local social networks both digital and in-person (Hilbert et al., 2017) to verify information or gain advice on using digital media and systems. This is complicated further by the role of algorithms in the dissemination of information and creation of links in digital networks (Soffer, 2021). Therefore, in the following section, we present some of our project findings and argue that citizens' *networks of literacy* are key to how they navigate data, information and content.

Citizens Data Literacy Networks

We explore citizens' social networks in two ways. First, how they rely upon their networks to understand and verify digital media content. Second, we examine how they support others to understand and use digital media.

Verifying Information

From our survey work we found that most users only trust some of the content they encounter online (Yates et al., 2021). We therefore asked respondents to indicate which methods for checking content they used as set out in Table 13.1.

In relation to social media, on average, respondents are using less than three of these checking methods (Figs. 13.1 and 13.2). With most common actions being to check if the information was provided by a known or trusted organisation. Our 'Limited' users, 'General users', and our 'Social and entertainment media' user groups are far less likely to verify content at all (Table 13.2). Our 'Social and entertainment media' user group are also more likely than other groups to use checking methods that rely on other people (trust in the person that posted the content, check with friends, check comments on post) than evaluate the content itself (Table 13.3).

Table 13.1 Social media and web search checks

Social media checks	Web search checks
Check if it was by an organisation I had heard of	Check if it was from an organisation I had heard of
Check if it was by an organisation I thought was trustworthy	Check if it was from an organisation I thought was trustworthy
Look at how professional the content looks, e.g. are there spelling mistakes, do the images or videos look high quality	Look at how professional the website/app looks, e.g. are there spelling mistakes, do the images or videos look high quality
Think about what the article is about to see how likely it is to be true	Look at how credible the site/app looks (e.g. check the web address, the links to other sources, etc.)
Check to see if the same information appears anywhere else	Think about the content to see how likely it is to be true
Think about whether the person who shared it was someone you trusted	Check to see if the same information appears anywhere else
Look at the comments/what people have said about the article	Think about whether you trust the author(s)
Check the information with another person (friend, family member, colleague) and see what they think	Look at the comments/what people have said about the website/app
Something else	Check the information with another person (friend, family member, colleague) and see what they think
	Something else

Looking at search engine use, we find a similar pattern (Table 13.4). Here there is a big difference in the extent of checking between our two types of 'Extensive' users and the rest of the respondents.

These results highlight two things. First, a significant proportion of citizens, between 16 and 78% depending on user types and media, do not check or are not aware of the veracity of social media or web content. Second, the overall 'depth' and variety of basic checking of the veracity of social media and web content is low across all citizens. Third, where there is checking, those likely to have lower digital and data literacies are more likely to depend on checking with friends or evaluating the 'person' rather than the content itself. We would, therefore, argue that for many citizens their in-person and digital social networks are key to understanding how they interact with and manage dis-/mis-/mal-information in digital contexts.

In our focus group discussions, we also found that the overall range of checking was low across all groups. In fact, a majority of our participants indicated they use Google search to verify information and trusted the results they found without any critical assessment. Where we do find evidence of verification and assessment of content it was tied to older participants who had older media literacies. They articulated this in terms of broader media literacy and discussing how they cross checked information online with that found in broadcast media. This was clearly articulated by Participant G7:

Latent class membership by Q15 score
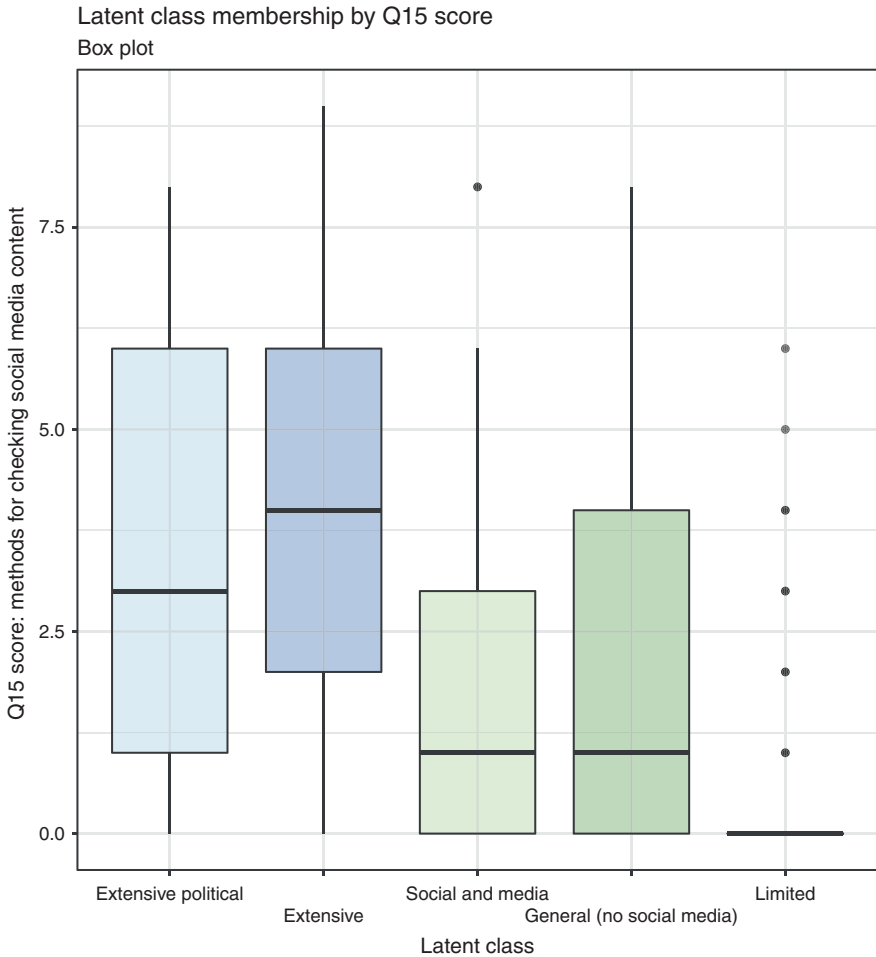
Box plot

Fig. 13.1 Box plot of the range of checking of social media content by user types

Well, the Times, Telegraph, maybe the Spectator, but I wouldn't give any of them 100% clearance as to the truth because they're all politically biased and you just have to look at the people who own them to realise that so I think when you get to our age you tend to use a lot of common sense and not believe everything you read or hear. On the BBC App you do get fact checks on certain things that have appeared in the press or in the media which at times is quite illuminating so I tend to take those with more belief than the general stories that come out. (Participant G7: M; 78 years old; post-18 education)

However, for the majority of focus group respondents' verification of information and content came via digital or personal networks. For example, when asked how they verify things Participant E2 said:
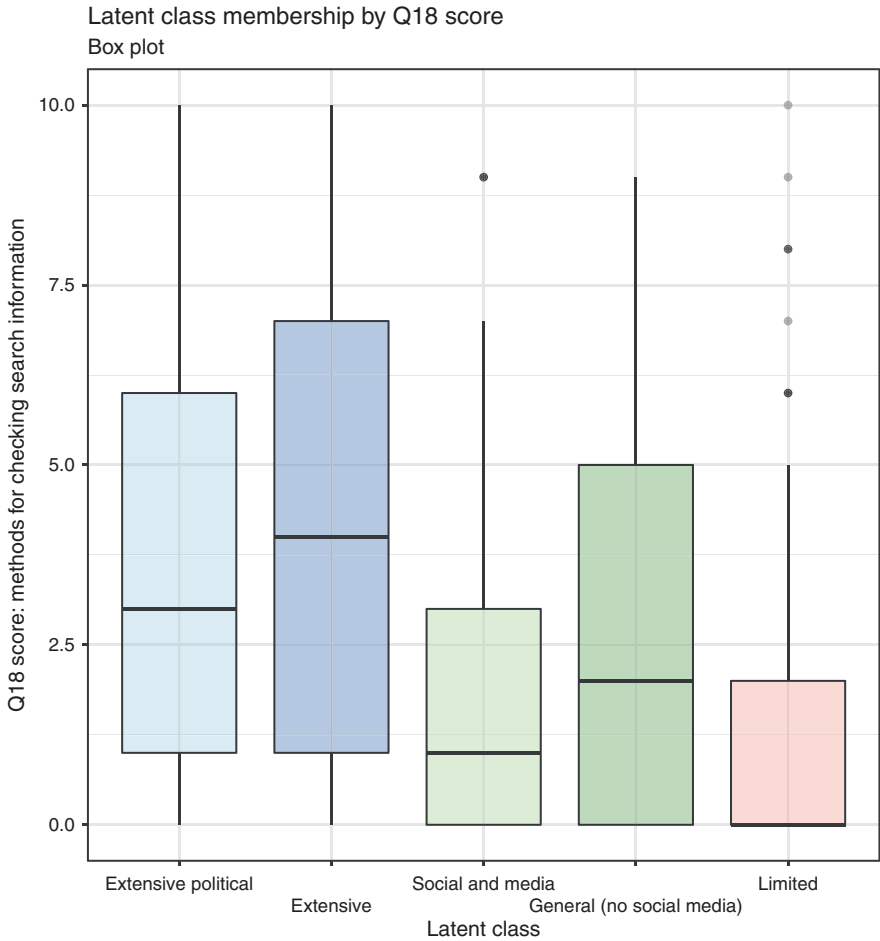
Fig. 13.2 Box plot of the range of checking and search engine content by user types

Table 13.2 Likelihood (%) of checking social media content

Checking social media percentages	EP	E	S & M	G	L
Don't check	20	16	38	40	78
Some checks	80	84	62	60	22

$\chi^2(4, 1322) = 259.152$, $p = 0.000$, Cramer's $V = 0.443$

Medium effect size

I think nowadays I just google it, YouTube it, anything like that just to find something out whereas historically I would've used books I would've gone to a library or bought a book and gone to a bookshop and looked something up or you

Table 13.3   Proportion (%) of checks depending on others or evaluating poster

Checking social media percentages (people based)	EP	E	S & M	G	L
Percentage of checks	20	20	24	19	23

Table 13.4   Likelihood (%) of checking search engine results

Checking social media percentages	EP	E	S & M	G	L
Don't check	16	20	39	31	55
Some checks	84	80	61	69	45

$\chi^2(4, 1322) = 102.414$, $p = 0.000$, Cramer's $V = 0.278$

Medium effect size

would've spoken to somebody like a tradesperson and you'd have used directory enquiries to get a phone number, but you just don't need to do that anymore it's basically obsolete because anything and everything you want to find out is somebody's done a video on it for you. (Participant E2: F; 45+ years old, no post-18 education)

Ironically, therefore digital media are now a primary location for the verification of content found online. Such a position is reasonable where there is evaluation of the reliability of sources as noted above. Unfortunately, we only found evidence for this in relation to our two types of 'Extensive users' in our focus groups and survey responses. However, as we presented above (Figs. 13.1 and 13.2) the overall range of checking methods used is low across all respondents in our survey and focus groups. Though it is very low, if not absent for our 'Limited' and 'Social Media and Entertainment' user groups. Reflecting the survey findings, more limited users spoke mainly of checking or verifying information with their immediate social network or friends and family. Though some respondents would also go beyond their immediate social network and reach out to their digital social networks. As Participant F1 stated:

I Google it put in whatever the words are to see if it comes up and then I might go on WhatsApp to the group and ask them if they know of this and I do sometimes go on Facebook and put it up and ask if anybody has experienced this or done that what the results have been which I found has been pretty good way of getting a cross section of answers, I don't always trust the BBC or the news because it can all be manipulated to fit the facts as we all know so I tend not to believe everything that comes on the news or anything else, I'm very cynical about it I try and find out other facts if I can before I accept stuff. (Participant F1: F; 45+ years old; no post 18 education)

Though this does not mean that everything encountered online is accepted. Interestingly, we find differentiation between content from respondents' own networks (friends and family) and content from outside that network. Here H4

describes not trusting social media content from a 'random person', and the need to assess this against broadcast media:

> If I got something through on Facebook, I'd check the news sites first rather than just believing some random person that's put a cure for Covid or something I wouldn't just take that at face value I'd look on the usual news websites, I know there's a bit of bias on somethings but they're generally accurate… The main ones like BBC ITV Sky that kind of thing I wouldn't just take someone on Facebook especially if I didn't know who it was. If someone posted something major had happened in the area on Facebook, I'd just go on Manchester Evening News and see if it said anything on there. (Participant H4: F; age not provided—retired; no-post 18 education)

In line with our survey findings, focus group participants who fall into our 'Extensive users' groups describe quite complex processes for assessing content based on multiple factors rather than relying on others. Participant N5 provides an example of this:

> If I'm uncertain, I suppose maybe I'd Google it and see if there are other articles that are saying the same thing but I would say that I've probably become quite used to making a decision about whether an article's legitimate or not based on how they present themselves so if I think it looks a bit click baity or a bit gimmicky I might not trust it or if in the URL it doesn't have one of those padlocks I might not trust it or I think if it's a bit sensationalist I might not trust it. So I think I've become quite attuned to knowing what looks legit and what doesn't but if I'm unsure then I'll Google and cross reference. (Participant N5: F; 26 years old; undertaking post-18 education)

What this shows is that people's data and digital literacies, here when it comes to verifying information, depend on their background—socio-economic status, education attainment and also age.

BEING HELPED AND HELPING OTHERS WITH DIGITAL AND DATA LITERACY

In our survey we asked respondents about activities such as supporting each other and using data to support their community. We call this *Data Participating*—the way people use data with others, for the benefit of their communities. We found that our 'Limited' and 'Social and entertainment media' user groups, are least likely to have undertaken such activities. The most common activity for all groups has been to verify, via the internet, data or information pertinent to ongoing interactions with friends, family or colleagues (Fig. 13.3).

We also explored the extent to which respondents had used data and digital skills for personal, community or civic activity. Once again 'Limited' and 'Social and entertainment media' user groups show almost no use of data for any of
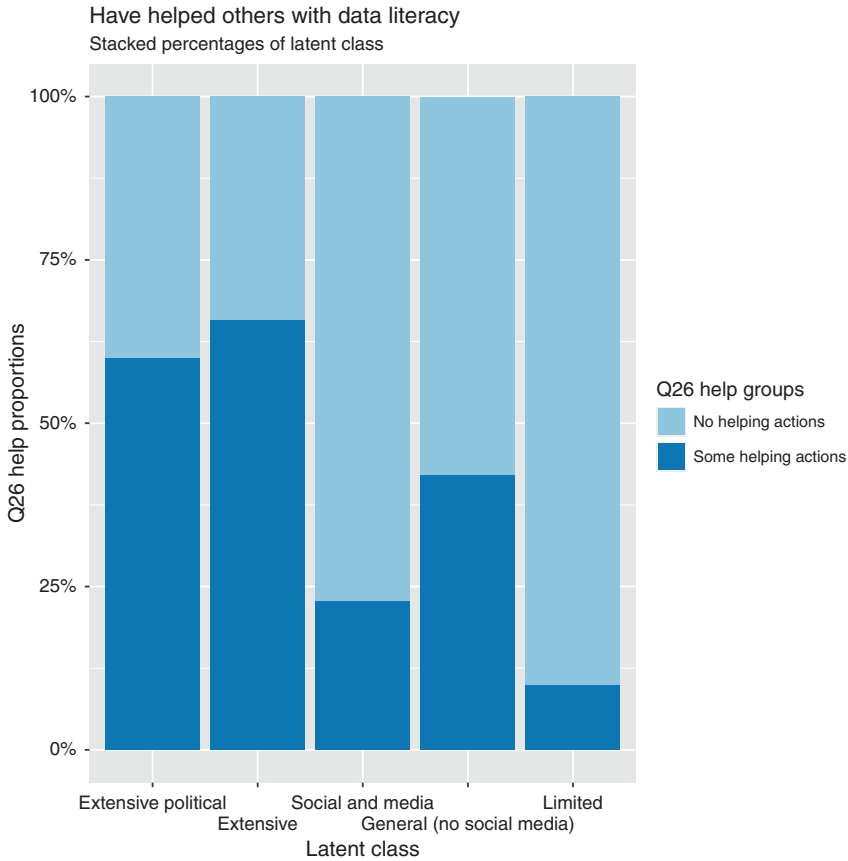
Fig. 13.3 Data participation—helping others

these activities. Even our 'Extensive' user groups average just three of the eight activities surveyed. Looking at the spread of activities, work and personal uses are the most common. Overall, we conclude that a limited number of our respondents actively support others in their social networks with their data and digital activity. An even smaller number use their data and digital skills to support their community or engage in civic action.

What then about the reverse? Where do citizens go for support and help when they need it. There are many examples in the focus group discussions of respondents drawing on and overtly establishing social networks to support their digital activities. As with checking content this is very often based around close family as Participant E5 notes in relation to getting help:

> I've got a 6 year old who's a right whizz so you know but also I've got a boy-friend who works in IT and he's very helpful in fact I've got two friends both

work in IT so I ring them up and say so how do I do this? and they explain over the phone how to do it. (Participant E5: F; 45+ years old, no post-18 education)

Again, as with checking content, social media themselves, of course, can support this behaviour as they are often one of the main means by which people rapidly connect across their social networks. L4 describes how they seek out knowledgeable friends and family in tier network:

> I do a bit of that on WhatsApp if I'm not sure about something I'll get in touch with someone who knows a bit more than I do so just to give me that bit of reassurance as to what's going on so we can discuss it… I've got a couple of friends and I speak to my son all the time on WhatsApp so just little things in general just to get some reassurances, so if you're not sure about something it's always best to ask or talk to someone about it isn't it? (Participant L4: M; 57 years old; no post-18 education)

This quote also points out a key feature of these networks as routes to 'reassurance' or 'confirmation'. It might seem at first contradictory that a limited number of respondents engage in support of others—be that friends, family or local community—yet many respondents talk about having 'go to' people for help or reaching out to close network members. We interpret these results as indicating that there are a limited number of key members of most networks of literacy (in person or online) who act as help and reference points for data and digital literacy support. We see evidence here of a form of 'two-step flow' in which digital media content may often be filtered and mediated by key actors in citizens networks.

CONSEQUENCES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS: NETWORKS OF DATA AND DIGITAL LITERACY

In relation to both checking of data and digital content and in giving or receiving help with data and digital activities we find that citizens are very dependent on local networks (as in close social network ties). We would argue that these networks of literacy, operating on different scales and with different levels of skill and knowledge among their members, are in fact key to citizens' data and digital literacy. They provide a basis for their navigation of digital content, their acquisition of skills and knowledge, their verification of information and support their community engagement. They, therefore, underpin and cut across all three of our Data Citizenship three dimensions. They support citizens in 'doing' things with data, they support their 'thinking' about and with data and they underpin their data participation. As a result, if many citizens' ability to verify information relies on accessing key people in their social networks, then their ability to assess misinformation is also highly dependent upon the membership of these networks.

As evidenced by both our survey and focus group work, citizens are split in their levels of digital and data literacy. Those with lower levels of digital and data literacy (Yates et al., 2021) are far more likely to depend on members of their social and digital networks when they seek to assess online content. Yet, as is well noted elsewhere, the value of social networks lies in their extent and diversity. We have demonstrated elsewhere (Yates, Carmi, Lockley, et al., 2020a; Yates, Carmi, Pawluczuk, et al., 2020b; Yates et al., 2015, 2020; Yates & Lockley, 2018) that citizens levels of digital media use and likely levels of digital and data literacy are tied to their levels of social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1997). It is also well documented that lower social capital, effectively less diverse and extensive social networks constrain and limit citizens' ability to critically examine online content. Similarly key markers of cultural capital, such as levels of educational attainment, are also found to correspond with low data and digital literacy (Yates et al., 2021). The converse is also true and we find evidence of our 'Extensive' users having both greater knowledge but also more diverse networks. As Granovetter (1973) demonstrated, 'weak ties' in extended social networks have a value for citizens far greater than might be expected. Put simply, knowing a doctor on a COVID ward provides a route to assessing the veracity of posts about the pandemic. Where citizens' social networks lack this diversity, these wider 'weak ties', then resources to assess digital content will also be lacking.

Conclusion

Citizens depend on their networks of digital and data literacy as a resource to help navigate our datafied society. These are built on their existing social networks (both digital and personal). Where strong and diverse, they provide citizens with a resource to help navigate dis-/mis-/mal-information. Conversely, where they are more limited and weaker, they are likely to limit, constrain or potentially hamper effectively navigating the stream of information online. As we noted earlier this sets up specific friends or acquaintances, key individuals online or specific social and digital media sources to act as key mediators of citizens' interactions with digital content. To address the social and political challenges created by dis-/mis-/mal-information requires a much deeper understanding of the networks upon which many citizens' data and digital literacies depend. We would therefore argue that further work is needed to explore the everyday networks and everyday practices of citizens if we are to provide solutions to these issues. Whether these come in the form of enhanced data and digital literacy for citizens, technology changes or the regulation of digital platforms.

to develop skills in quantitative and scientific methods. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the Ada Lovelace Institute. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation.

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CHAPTER 14

Re-thinking Media Literacy to Counter Misinformation

Peter Cunliffe-Jones

In 2017, 25 Stanford University undergraduates, 10 history PhDs and 10 professional fact-checkers, were asked by researchers to evaluate the accuracy of a set of information presented online. The historians and undergraduates were all highly capable, media literate individuals, educated to assess information. In every task they were given, however, the academics and students were both slower and less accurate in distinguishing reliable and unreliable information than the fact-checkers. The difference between the groups was the methods they used, the researchers said (Wineburg & McGrew, 2017).

Around the world, calls for media literacy to be used to reduce susceptibility to misinformation have grown since the political upheavals of 2016 (Barron, 2017; Livingstone, 2018; Seargeant & Tagg, 2018). Programmes teaching different elements of media and information literacy (MIL), news literacy and digital literacy have expanded in countries from the United States (Barron, 2017; Tugend, 2020) to Finland (Charlton, 2019; Henley, 2020).

The calls have been made with some reason. A 2012 meta-analytic review of the effects of 51 media literacy interventions found that, taken as a whole: "Media literacy interventions had positive effects on outcomes including media knowledge, criticism, perceived realism, influence, behavioural beliefs, attitudes, self-efficacy, and behaviour". The more teaching time devoted to the subject and the narrower the focus of the courses taught, the stronger these positive effects, the research found (Jeong et al., 2012).

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What the review did not identify specifically was the effect of such teaching on students' ability to identify accurate information from misinformation, or the propensity to do so. The question raised by the Wineburg study and others is whether, if even students and academics for whom media literacy is a given struggle to evaluate information accuracy, maybe the type or types of media literacy being taught are not the solution needed.

Media Literacy: A "Complex Patchwork of Ideas"

The idea that teaching students some form media literacy might reduce the societal effects of misinformation is not a new one. "There are three ways to deal with propaganda—first, to suppress it; second, to try to answer it by counterpropaganda; third, to analyse it", the founder of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA), Clyde R. Miller, said in a lecture in New York in 1939. Miller was referring not only to his organisation's frequent newsletters but also to its programme to educate schoolchildren in what we would today call a form of media or news literacy skills: a scientific mindset of fact-finding, logical reasoning and critical thinking (Schiffrin, 2018).

If media literacy has indeed long been seen as an answer to misinformation, the first challenge for those promoting it is agreeing a definition. First a loose idea, media literacy was defined quite broadly in the 1980s by UN educational organisation UNESCO, as "the knowledge, skills and attitudes which will encourage the growth of critical awareness and, consequently, of greater competence among the users of electronic and print media" (UNESCO, 1982). A decade later, the discipline had expanded to include themes such as informed citizenship, social advocacy, self-esteem and consumer competence (Aufderheide, 1993). By 2013, UNESCO identified a newer, broader concept, Media and Information Literacy (MIL), bringing together an even wider array of forms of literacy: "Information Literacy and Media Literacy, along with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Digital Literacy". UNESCO defined the new and overarching concept as "a set of competencies that empowers citizens to access, retrieve, understand, evaluate and use, create, as well as share information and media content in all formats, using various tools, in a critical, ethical and effective way, in order to participate and engage in personal, professional and societal activities" (UNESCO, 2013. p.29).

On the ground, US media literacy scholar W. James Potter in 2010 identified the form or forms of media literacy taught in the United States as "a large, complex patchwork of ideas" (Potter, 2010). Media literacy programmes taught tend to fall into three broad categories: (1) those that look at the "economic motivations that undergird popular media and information streams", (2) education that relates to democracy and civic life; and (3) efforts to "evaluate the quality of information"—not exclusively on grounds of accuracy (Huguet et al., 2019).

In Europe, governments have promoted media literacy education in schools for decades (Aguadad et al., 2016). Denmark, Greece, Finland and France

were judged as among the more advanced EU countries in media literacy in 2017 (Frau-Meigs et al., 2017). As in the United States, the effectiveness of these programmes varies, however. Education policy is left to national governments across Europe, and approaches, resources and course content differ. In the United Kingdom, no longer a member of the European Union, decades of efforts aimed at teaching students the ability to identify false information appear to have had limited success, with a vanishingly small percentage of school children able in one study to accurately distinguish accurate and inaccurate information (National Literacy Trust, 2018).

In Latin America, where schools teach elements of digital literacy such as search and digital skills, for example in countries such as Peru and Mexico, broader themes related to the accuracy of information found, do not feature in most school curricula, a 2020 study found (Vicol, 2020). In India, there is at present only limited media literacy teaching in most schools, with no focus on the accuracy of the information provided (Roy, 2017). And a 2020 review of media literacy in five East and Southeast Asia countries—Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand—found a wide array of challenges for those hoping media literacy will enable students to sort fact from fiction. "Applying critical thinking skills to decode the meaning of information and media messages could result in questioning or challenging authoritative voices in some cases, including those of teachers, which can be considered disrespectful in all countries", the study noted (Kajimoto et al., 2020).

In 2021, I published with five colleagues[1] a study of the teaching of media literacy in sub-Saharan Africa. We reviewed the curricula most widely used in state-run primary and secondary schools in seven sub-Saharan African countries[2] for the terms "media and information literacy", "news literacy" and "fake news", or French-language equivalents, and terms related to key elements of the UNESCO definition of broad media literacy or MIL. Across the region studied, while officials in some countries expressed interest in the concept, the curricula, with the sole exception of South Africa's, included barely any elements of broad media literacy. The limited themes covered included ICT/digital skills in Cote d'Ivoire, civic education in Ghana and empathy and self-awareness in Kenya. Only one province of South Africa includes in its curriculum a short course specifically related to information accuracy: a programme of "online safety" for grades 8–12, typically ages 14–18, aimed at establishing a mindset of "click restraint" among learners (Cunliffe-Jones et al., 2021).

[1] Dr Sahite Gaye, Wallace Gichunge, Dr Chido Onumah, Cornia Pretorius and Dr Anya Schiffrin
[2] Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda

The Knowledge and Skills to Identify Misinformation

The concern identified by Wineburg, Keener and West and others is that in the United States, South Africa and elsewhere the competencies taught as media literacy—as important as they are—do not provide the knowledge and skills to distinguish accurate and inaccurate information. To do so, it is necessary first to establish an understanding of misinformation: the forms it takes, where and when it is or may be found, how and why it misleads and how to identify accurate information.

The first step is to agree on definitions; a challenge for the misinformation field as many acknowledge (Bernstein, 2021; Vraga & Bode, 2020). Most but not all current definitions distinguish between "misinformation", that is: information that is or may be inadvertently false or misleading, and "disinformation"; that is: information intentionally created to mislead for political, social, financial or other reason (Bontcheva & Posetti, 2020; European Commission, 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). From my own study of misinformation and disinformation, due for publication next year (Cunliffe-Jones, 2023), I both accept these distinctions and the need to go further, identifying both misinformation and disinformation as falling into one or more of five broad forms of false or misleading information whose distinct characteristics and sources of authority ensure they appear in different settings, create different effects and require different responses if they are to be successfully countered.

First are *individual or specific false or misleading claims*, which cause or have the potential to cause or contribute to specific direct effects; the false statistical claim made on a specific issue by a minister in parliament, or the video shared online promoting a dangerous health treatment. We know from numerous studies that presenting accurate corrective information, such as fact-checks, has the potential to correct the false belief (Porter & Wood, 2021; Walter et al., 2019). Second are *broad false narratives,* from so-called big lies to conspiracy theories, which bind together a series of specific false claims into a more powerful whole, and are harder to counter (Allport & Lepkin, 1945; Pennycook et al., 2018; Swire-Thompson et al., 2017). Third is *complex information from supposedly authoritative sources*, which may spawn or feed into individual false claims or broad narratives but has its effect through the authority of the source and requires a different approach to counter than misinformation from less august sources. The canonical example is the set of false claims made by the former medical doctor Andrew Wakefield linking the MMR vaccine and autism in an article in the *British Medical Journal* (Larson, 2018). Fourth, I would identify *myths or misleading beliefs long-entrenched in community networks*, often ignored by misinformation researchers whose effect comes from their socio-cultural status as a long-standing community belief, as hard or harder to counter than broad false narratives. Fifth, I would identify *meta-misinformation*, which I would define as misinformation en masse and misinformation about misinformation that, not by its topic but either by its prevalence or suggested prevalence, undermines trust in information itself.

I set this out in some detail since, if learners understand misinformation as limited to one particular form, or other, they are unlikely to identify misinformation in its other forms. For the same reason, it is important to understand the different ways these varied forms of misinformation and disinformation distort reality; information that is often neither true nor false but misleading, bearing an element of truth that explains why it may be judged credible by some of its audience. Often presented in a binary true or false paradigm, I divide misinformation into ten forms of distortion: (1) Unproven claims stated as known fact; (2) Claims that are outright false; (3) Claims that mislabel or misattribute content such as photographs or videos; (4) Claims that bear an element of truth but overstate or understate a position; (5) Claims that bear an element of truth but are misleading in other ways; (6) Claims that are accurate in themselves but conflate issues; (7) Satire understood as true; (8) Deliberately fabricated or manipulated content, where the intention is thus clearly to mislead; (9) Imposter content; and (10) Coordinated inauthentic behaviour—not misleading content as such but patterns of online behaviour intended to distort understanding.

To understand and be able to identify misinformation properly, it is important, therefore, to understand not only what misinformation is, and how it distorts understanding, but also who creates misinformation and disinformation, in what channels and settings it is to be found and what drives the process, from the financial incentives of clickbait websites to the psychological traits that prompt us to believe in false information congruent with our political views or interests. If this understanding is, furthermore, to lead students to act on this understanding, and not share but reject information they cannot verify, it is also important for them to understand the different consequences it may have. I set out below the reasons.

From "Media Literacy" to "Misinformation Literacy"

In 2020, researchers in the United States proposed a new definition of news literacy: a sub-type of broad media literacy. News literacy, by their definition, comprises: "knowledge of the personal and social processes by which news is produced, distributed, and consumed, and skills that allow users some control over these processes" (Vraga et al., 2020). By this assessment, for a student to be fully news literate requires knowledge and skills in five domains: the five Cs: (1) Context: the social, legal and economic environment in which news is produced; (2) Creation: the process in which journalists and others engage in conceiving, reporting and creating news stories and other journalistic content; (3) Content: the characteristics of a news story or piece of news that distinguishes it from other types of media content; (4) Circulation: the process through which news is distributed and spread to potential audiences; and (5) Consumption: the personal factors that contribute to news exposure, attention and evaluation.

This is a compelling theory. At the same time, if the goal is the ability to distinguish accurate and inaccurate information, it could be said news literacy is both too broad a concept to apply perfectly to the field of misinformation, extending as it does to far more than the accuracy of news, and also too narrow in that it is limited to aspects of "news" which—even if news can be broadly defined—does not cover all the types or channels in which misinformation circulates, ranging as noted above from false claims spread online or in parliament to long-standing myths in community networks and complex information in scientific journals.

Based on my studies of the field, I propose a sub-type of media literacy, *misinformation literacy*, with its own set of knowledge and skills in those same five domains and one more, adapted to apply more closely to the question of information accuracy. For clarity, I define this misinformation literacy as: *Knowledge of the forms that misinformation and accurate information take, the processes by which they are produced or emerge, are distributed and consumed, by whom, where, and on what topics, and the skills to distinguish the one from the other*. Knowledge comprises six Cs.

The Six Cs of Misinformation Literacy

Based on a combination of research studies and the sort of methods used in the fact-checking field (Wineburg & McGrew, 2017) I argue knowledge and skills are needed in the following six fields to enable learners to consistently identify and dismiss misinformation as such, and identify and adhere to accurate information.

Context: Knowledge of the Contexts—Social, Cultural, Economic, Political, Informational and Events—in Which False and Accurate Information Are Produced

Studies of misinformation show that misinformation is more likely in some contexts than in others: health crises or political upheavals (Hill, 2020; Larson, 2018), and worrying natural events such as floods, fires or health crises (Torpan et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2021) among others. This was demonstrated recently with the wave of false and misleading health information during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brennan et al., 2020; Thomas, 2020).

Teaching learners the contexts in which they may expect to see false information "can reduce susceptibility to misinformation across cultures", studies published in 2020 and 2022 showed (Roozenbeek & Van der Linden, 2022; Van der Linden et al., 2020). This forewarning of the type of information to be seen and when they might see it is built into the training practices of fact-checking organisations for new staff, and a first important element of misinformation literacy.

Creation: Knowledge of the Types of People and Institutions Found to Create False and Accurate Information, Their Different Motivations and the Skills to Identify Those Who Produce Specific Information Online

To identify and distinguish misinformation from accurate information, it is also important to know the types of people and organisations who create or promote false and accurate information, and their different motivations. Studies show the public often see information from certain types of individuals or organisations as more or less reliable than it is (Newman et al., 2020; Vicol, 2020; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2018). Learning the types of individuals and institutions who regularly create false information, and those responsible for accurate information, and their different processes and motivations, is critical to knowing when to question information on the basis of the source.

At the same time, those who produce misinformation online often operate from behind false identities. And to properly judge the reliability of information requires both understanding and skills to identify who created and spread information when the originator is concealed.

Content: Knowledge of the Difference Between Facts and Opinions, the Different Ways Information Can Mislead, and the Skills and Practices to Distinguish Accurate and Inaccurate Information

Research from the United States shows the public often struggle with the "basic task of differentiating between factual and opinion news statements" (Mitchell et al., 2018). In a survey in South Africa, 70% of respondents said they "struggle to separate fact from fiction online" (Roper et al., 2019). The training practices of fact-checking organisations show knowledge and skills essential to identifying a wide range of content types: (1) the differences between a factual claim and an opinion, (2) the different ways misinformation distorts understanding, (3) practices such as lateral reading, (4) technical skills from statistics to geolocation of images and (5) skills to identify and retrieve accurate information online and offline. Misinformation literacy needs to include this range of knowledge and skills in order to be effective.

Circulation: Knowledge of the Processes by Which Accurate and Inaccurate Information Circulate and What Drives People to Share Information

To reduce susceptibility to misinformation, it is necessary to understand the processes by which traditional and social media do and do not verify the information they distribute and why individuals and institutions online and offline may share information. In 2019, a study by US researchers provided evidence that "possessing a working knowledge of how the news media operate aids in the identification and (reducing the) effects of fabricated news" (Amazeen &

Bucy, 2019). This applies equally to the processes that drive misinformation and accurate information on social media and in offline settings. For example, knowing the financial or political motivations of those posting false information can reduce its perceived credibility (Cunliffe-Jones, 2023). To be effective, misinformation literacy needs to include this range of knowledge.

Consumption: Knowledge of the Reasons We as Individuals May Believe False or Misleading Information to Be True

A variety of conscious and unconscious biases in the way we think make individuals susceptible to certain types of false information. People are often unaware of these biases. Polling data from around the world finds people often believe misinformation is something that fools others, not themselves (Duffy, 2018). This risks stopping people from asking questions that are needed to identify misinformation that they believe true. Knowing the reasons why we as individuals may believe false or misleading information to be true is essential to misinformation literacy.

Consequences: Knowledge of the Different Forms of Actual and Potential Harm Caused by Believing and Sharing False and Misleading Information

Acquiring this combination of knowledge and skills may, however, do little to reduce the harm caused by misinformation if the students do not put them into practice. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, for knowledge and skills to affect behaviour, they must be combined with (a) individuals' attitudes to the perceived behaviour, (b) social norms relating to the behaviour and (c) individuals' perceived ability to control the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Evidence in my upcoming study of misinformation suggests knowledge of misinformation consequences may influence information sharing behaviour (Cunliffe-Jones, 2023), and thus play an important role in misinformation literacy.

OBSTACLES TO MEDIA AND MISINFORMATION LITERACY IN SCHOOLS

While schools in many countries provide students with substantial elements of broad media literacy, or MIL, the subject is not widely taught in many countries in southeast Asia (Kajimoto et al., 2020), Latin America (Aguadad et al., 2016) or the sub-Saharan countries I studied with colleagues in 2020 (Cunliffe-Jones et al., 2021). And teaching of the sort of elements of misinformation literacy identified above is limited in many schools in Europe and the United States.

In many parts of the world the reasons for this failure range from bureaucratic resistance and time-pressure on the curriculum, to the lack of political will, and poor support provided to teachers and teaching.

In the study I led in seven sub-Saharan countries, the most profound obstacles found to the introduction of either MIL or misinformation literacy are bureaucratic challenges within the education sector and a lack of political will to address the issue of misinformation through education. According to Professor Amadou Camara, coordinator of a project promoting curriculum reform in Senegal, the main reason media literacy is not included in that country's curriculum at present is "that it is not the responsibility of any existing discipline". Momar Talla Beye, inspector of elementary school teaching, added that while media literacy was declared a national priority in 2018: "On the practical level we have run into difficulties... The need for media literacy is not accepted on the ground. Teachers are more concerned by assessments, and we lack the specialists to teach the subject".[3] In Nigeria, media literacy advocates cite a lack of funding for media literacy materials in schools and libraries, part of a wider problem of under-funding of the whole state-run education sector: a sign of a lack of political will. According to Dr Grace Baguma, Director of the National Curriculum Development Centre in Uganda: "At the primary and secondary level, the focus is on getting the learners literate in numeracy, literacy, science mainly, and these areas take up the bigger part of the programmes of study".

More widely, lack of clarity and agreement on the range of themes that are or should be covered by media literacy, and its intended outcomes, makes it challenging for scholars to assess either the extent of teaching or its effects. In 2013, UNESCO published a detailed framework for assessment of media and information literacy competencies around the world (UNESCO, 2013. pp 41–64). However, a 2019 report argued that many of the ways of measuring the effects of media literacy programmes do not capture their effects fully and are difficult to compare. Goals and objectives differ. Some studies rely on self-reporting while others use multiple-choice assessments and still others rely on performance-based assessments (Huguet et al., 2019).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Numerous studies have identified the positive effects of different media literacy interventions on outcomes such as media knowledge and perceived realism (Jeong et al., 2012). More recent studies of courses teaching digital literacy with a focus on online misinformation, have also produced encouraging result (Pavlounis et al., 2021). However, as set out above, comparing what is taught and what is known of misinformation, it is clear that many of the broad media literacy (MIL) themes taught around the world bear little correlation to knowledge and skills needed to reduce susceptibility to misinformation in its

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[3] Interviews with my colleague Dr Sahite Gaye May 2020

many forms and settings. Rather, building on the five domains of news literacy (Vraga et al., 2020), and adapting them to the specifics of misinformation, it is possible to identify a form of misinformation literacy, that would be possible to teach, providing knowledge of the forms that misinformation and accurate information take, the processes by which they are produced or emerge, are distributed and consumed, by whom, where and on what topics, and the skills to distinguish the one from the other.

The challenges for doing this differ around the world, with the political, social, cultural, economic and informational context in which educators work. In some countries, they include bureaucratic challenges and a lack of political will. In others, they include lack of clarity around the teaching concepts, goals and measures required to assess progress. For governments, education and curriculum authorities, media leaders, fact-checkers and others concerned by the effects and potential effects of different forms of misinformation, I would offer the following recommendations.

Governments, Public Figures and Institutions

Those who wish to reduce the harm caused by misinformation must set social norms (Ajzen, 1991) of neither originating nor spreading false information.

Those who wish to reduce the harm caused by misinformation must fund public education, and provide high-quality teacher recruitment and training, making media literacy and misinformation literacy part of the teacher training curriculum.

Education and Curriculum Authorities

Introduce misinformation literacy themes into primary and secondary school curricula featuring these six domains of misinformation knowledge and skills: its context, patterns of creation, content, circulation, consumption and consequences.

Liaise with subject experts ranging from educationalists around the world to non-partisan fact-checking initiatives and misinformation researchers to ensure the new curriculum theme remains up to date,

Introduce assessment of misinformation literacy at key stages through the student's progress with benchmarks of misinformation literacy knowledge and skills for different ages.

Media Leaders, Fact-Checkers, Media Literacy and Library Associations

Provide greater transparency about the processes by which you verify the accuracy of information you publish or broadcast and admit any mistakes you make openly and honestly.

Work with educational authorities to identify the knowledge and skills, particular to each country, required by students to reach media literacy.

Social Media, Messaging and Search Platforms

Develop and strengthen misinformation literacy messaging on your platforms, enabling and encouraging users to carefully consider the accuracy of information, its source of origin and its potential effects before it is shared.

Provide funding support for independent media, fact-checking organisations, media literacy centres and library associations that can provide essential support to the work of educational authorities on misinformation literacy.

Researchers into Education and Misinformation

Review and test the definitions and arguments of effects proposed in this chapter.

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Combatting Information Disorder: A South Asian Perspective

Dipak Bhattarai

It was a chilly Kathmandu morning of December 25, 2000. I was preparing to have my breakfast before rushing to the office of SpaceTime newspaper, where I was a correspondent. There wasn't much excitement about the Christmas in Nepal as it was a Hindu majority country with limited effects of globalisation.

Rumours started spreading in Kathmandu that the popular Indian actor Hrithik Roshan had insulted Nepali people by saying that "*Nepal is the country he dislikes and the Nepalese are the people he dislikes the most*" in response to the question*: which country and people do you hate in the world?*

The day earlier, some local youth staged a protest in Chitwan district against the alleged slur by the Indian actor. They even vandalised shops run by Indian nationals, or even Indian-looking nationals. When a local newspaper published a news article about the rally, more protests broke out in other parts of the country.

As the protests escalated, four people were killed and dozens injured in clashes between protesters and police. Thousands of demonstrators burnt tyres on the streets and ransacked shops. Kathmandu's streets were deserted, and shops and restaurants closed in protest against the Bollywood actor (ABC, 2006).

A few weeks later, the Nepal Government formed a committee to investigate the matter and no proof was found that Mr. Roshan had made any such statement. Roshan said he wanted to tell the Nepalese people that he loved them.

"*Horrifying news—Rohingyas are killing Hindus and eating their flesh, a case from Mewat, this news may send shivers down your spine*," read a fake news

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published on the website of Dainik Bharat on December 18, 2018. The article carried photographs depicting people dismembering bodies. The Dainik Bharat article also included a Facebook post by an individual user who shared a newspaper clip from a newspaper called Aaj Tak Gurgaon (picture above with tweet). According to this clip, Rohingya refugees in Mewat, a Muslim dominated area of Haryana, were "eating the flesh of a Hindu youth." Delhi High Court lawyer Prashant Patel Umrao tweeted a similar claim, calling Mewat the "Mini Pakistan of Haryana."

However, using Google's reverse image search, a blog post written in October 2009 was found to be one of the earliest instances of the image appearing on the internet. According to the blog, this image is representative of a funeral ritual of the Tibetan people, who believe in donating their bodies to wild birds (Patel, 2018).

This fake news has already created lot of hate speech towards Muslims and Rohingya.

A picture of Mohammed Naeem, begging for his life with folded hands, his face dripping with blood, shirt ripped and his vest soaked in blood was splashed across several newspapers on May 19, 2017 in India. Naeem, along with six other people, were lynched to death in Jharkhand, India after child kidnapping rumours went viral on WhatsApp. A Hindi text (translated) that was circulated via WhatsApp claimed, "Suspected child lifters are carrying sedatives, injections, spray, cotton and small towels. They speak Hindi, Bangla and Malayalam. If you happen to see any stranger near your house, immediately inform local police as he could be a member of the 'child-lifting gang'." The fear of losing one's own child had caused people to come out on the street and lynch seven people, none of whom had committed any crime. Had internet come with a handbook, just the way the cooking stove in your home does, these seven people might have been alive today and over a dozen people would not have been jailed for the crime (Pratik Sinha, 2019).

These are a few examples of how fake news spreads in South Asia, often instigating hate speech, mob lynching and killing.

Below are some of the rumours that spread in February 2022 in Myanmar when Covid vaccination was supposed to take place in the country. All three rumours are shared by UNICEF on its weekly Newsletter to a group who are working in risk communication in Myanmar:

- Rumor 1: Breastfeeding mother cannot breastfeed after getting COVID-19 vaccine (See Post, https://www.facebook.com/groups/410548973652715/permalink/687310732643203)
- Rumor 2: Getting booster shot during pregnancy can lead to abortion (See Post, https://www.facebook.com/groups/410548973652715/permalink/687310732643203)
- Rumor 3: WHO says Omicron is the last variant of COVID-19 and COVID-19 pandemic will be ending very soon (See Post, https://www.facebook.com/groups/410548973652715/permalink/687310732643203)

According to the data of National Crime Records Bureau, India there was a 214% increase in the circulation of "false/fake news" and rumours in 2020 as compared to previous years in India. A total of 1527 cases of fake news was recorded in 2020 as against 486 cases in 2019 and 280 cases in 2018 (Vishwanath, 2021).

However, record keeping of false/fake news is a new experience in India and around this continent. There will be thousands of others not reported false/fake news spread in the region. There are few factcheck organisations working in this region to counterpart the information disorder, but it is insignificant compared to the number of information disorder that is spreading.

Mahabharata and Misinformation

The spread of false or misleading information—whether by word-of-mouth, media or otherwise—is an age-old phenomenon in this region. One of the most prominent Hindu mythologies "Mahabharata" is an example of how misinformation was used in the war. Yudhishthir, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, reputed for speaking the truth, has used misinformation as a tactic to win the war against the Kauravas in Mahabharata. And interestingly spreading of the misinformation was suggested by one of the most worshipped Hindu gods, Lord Krishna. In Mahabharata, Guru Drona, who was leading the Kaurava's army, was proving to be a tough contender for Pandavas. To remove Guru Drona from the Pandava brothers' path to victory, Krishna suggested the use of misinformation as a war tactic. Lord Krishna said that the only way to overpower Drona was to tell him that his dear son Ashwatthama, who was also fighting against the Pandava, was dead. Hearing this, Drona would abandon his weapons, and he would become vulnerable. Lord Krishna convinced the Pandavas to kill an elephant, also named as Ashwatthama—the son of Guru Drona, and spread the news about the death of the elephant in a misleading way. The person assigned to confirm the news was Yudhishthir. Even the enemies swore of Yudhishthir's nature of honesty and truthfulness. Confirming Ashwatthama's death from Yudhishthir, Drona was grief-stricken and gave up the fight. That is the moment when war falls in favour of the Pandavas.

Facebook and the Rohingyas

And in this century, the internet can reach people more widely than any other tool and influence mass behaviour change, for better or for worse. Facebook, for example, played a crucial role in driving the genocide against the Rohingyas in Myanmar, as false stories about Muslims' actions in Rakhine state flooded Facebook in Myanmar in the run up to the atrocities (Antonio Silva, 2020). The violence has led to a flood of social media posts purporting to depict torture and killings. then Turkish deputy prime minister, Mehmet Simsek, was criticised for tweeting graphic images of corpses, alongside a message warning of a massacre against the Rohingyas. "Stop turning a blind eye to ethnic

cleansing in #Arakan #Myanmar Int'l community must act now," he said on Twitter. He later deleted the tweet and issued a correction (Simsek, 2017) after readers questioned whether the images depicted Myanmar. His post was shared more than 1600 times online and liked by more than 1200 people. One of the photographs had been taken in Rwanda in 1994 (The Guardian, 2017). Images shared by Simsek prompted allegations on Twitter that reports of human rights abuses against Rohingya people are fake. Meanwhile, an image being shared which claimed to prove that Rohingyas are militia has been shown to depict soldiers training in Bangladesh.

Facebook has long promoted itself as a tool for bringing people together to make the world a better place. However, the social media giant has acknowledged that in Myanmar it did the opposite. A report commissioned by Facebook found the company failed to keep its platform from being used to "foment division and incite offline violence" in Myanmar "We agree that we can and should do more," the executive, Alex Warofka, a Facebook product policy manager, wrote (Stevenson, 2018).

The worst case of hateful fake news occurred on July 1, 2014 with a false allegation on Facebook that a female Buddhist staff at San Cafe in Mandalay was raped by two Muslim teashop owners Ne Win and San Maung. Shared by U Wirathu on his Facebook on June 30 (Justice Trust, 2015), riots broke out leading to deaths of a Buddhist man and a Muslim man.

U Wirathu is one of the prominent Buddhist monks in the country with lots of controversy though. He wrote on his Facebook page on July 3, alleging Muslims of potential jihad and calling upon the government and the Buddhist people in and outside Myanmar for decisive action against Muslims (Justice Trust, 2015). U Wirathu's alarmism was convincing because Muslims' fasting month Ramadan fell in July 2014 and thousands of Muslims were attending mosques in Mandalay (Aim Sinpeng, 2020).

The whole crisis towards Myanmar Muslims took a momentum then. Certain groups of Myanmar Buddhist monks started a campaign through social media against minority Muslims. As Buddhists monks are in the highest rank of social status in Myanmar, people have lots of trust on them. Buddhist monks like U Wirathu succeeded in spreading misinformation and fake news through Facebook. With the very limited digital literacy and news medium in the country many Burmese believe what they read and see in Facebook.

Information disorder is one of the reasons for the Rohingya crisis. Buddhist monks spread misinformation like Muslims are marrying Buddhist girls and changing their religion forcefully to knock down Myanmar from being a Buddhist country. In August 2017, a deadly crackdown by Myanmar's army on Rohingya Muslims sent hundreds of thousands fleeing across the border into Bangladesh. Kutupalong, the largest refugee settlement in the world according to UNHCR, is home to more than 600,000 refugees alone. At least 6700 Rohingyas, including at least 730 children under the age of five, were killed in August 2017 after the violence broke out, according to medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

In some countries, Facebook's experiments have helped amplify fake stories, while its slower response in other developing countries, including Sri Lanka, has allowed rumours to spark violence. Facebook has faced also sharp criticism for being too slow to act in the Philippines, another country where its ubiquity has led it to become a platform for spreading hate speech and false information (Stevenson, 2018).

With advances in technology, increasing access to both traditional and social media, and changes in how people interact with information are propelling the spread of false information at a speed and scale not seen before. Whether it's rumours, hoaxes, sophisticated and deliberately false or manipulated information, or simple misinterpretations, "information disorder" divides societies and threatens health and well-being of people (BBC Media Action, 2021).

Combatting information disorder is one of the biggest challenges in the region. To combat fake news, mis/disinformation we need to understand the cycle of information disorder, where it originated from, why it originated, is anyone getting any kind of benefit from it, who are sharing it, why are they sharing it, what damage can it bring and then only we can think about how to combat it. Any news institution, factchecker, media organisation, media development organisation working on the sector need robust research to understand what drives engagement with, trust in, and reaction to information.

Media Action

BBC Media Action, the BBC's international charity which believes in media and communication for good is among the different players working on digital literacy, media ecosystem to enable the public to fight against information disorder in the Global South. Its national audience surveys and regular research on people's access to media, people's consumption of media and people's behaviours, perception towards media are regular kinds of researches that help to understand people's behaviour on communication. More than that its approach and research capacity, community feedback mechanisms and links with BBC Monitoring mean that BBC Media Action is able to identify key information disorder trends in a particular context, understand how false and misleading information is spreading and examine how it is affecting different groups of people.

We need to help people recognise the psychological factors at play in how they engage with information—such as content that plays on their emotions—and to help shape their beliefs and practices about what it means to consume, share and produce information safely and responsibly. Combatting information disorder needs a collaborative approach from different organisations. One of the best approaches for media literacy is incorporating it in school curriculum, so that every child from the school days is aware of information disorder and are equipped with tool kits to examine and challenge the information they are receiving. We should empower and increase skills and confidence of people from an early stage to constructively challenge friends or family who are

sharing false or misleading information. The other element to combat information disorder is to talk more, discuss more about the information disorder. Governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, intuitions, and communities should hold discussions at different levels to make the public aware about information disorder. Professionals in the sector should produce different kinds of public service advertisements (PSA) and publicise those through different available mediums. It is all about making people aware that everything available in internet, coming through any print or broadcast mediums, through your family, friends and including social media to you may not be trustworthy. We must encourage people to question the information, equip them to verify the information and make them understand not share it to others unless they are sure of it.

This needs investment. Information is aid, equally like food and shelter. State and non-state actors should invest in combatting information disorder so that personal well-being as well as community's well-being can be maintained. As there would be crisis management plan of food supply in emergencies there must be a proper plan for combatting information disorder when rumours, fake news, mis/disinformation are risks impacting on people's lives.

With its robust research of understanding of information disorder BBC Media Action produces content itself or helps its media partners in different country offices on producing compelling content that is emotionally engaging and seeks to understand and reflect—rather than fuel—the fears, concerns, values and motivations of diverse audiences. This helps BBC Media Action to produce content that is able to "cut through" with different target audiences, maximising impact.

BBC Media Action believes that the principles of public service broadcasting have never been so relevant, and supplying accurate, trusted and trustworthy information on media platforms that reaches people on a large scale is one of the most effective antidotes to information disorder. At the heart of BBC Media Action work is training and mentoring journalists, editors and other media professionals working in local and national media organisations, supporting them to deliver trusted information in the public interest (BBC Media Action, 2021). BBC Media Action also strengthens capacity of journalists and media organisations to tackle information disorder, with more robust editorial processes, use of audience research, production and journalism skills, including investigative journalism, fact- and source-checking.

In fighting with information disorder, it is time to invest in public service media which will increase access to, and consumption of, accurate and inclusive information and trusted engaging content on issues of importance to people's lives. There must be resources for media practitioners and organisations to have knowledge and awareness of information disorder, including why it spreads and what impact it has on lives of people. There should be skills, networks and coalitions to identify and respond to harmful information disorder when it occurs, including fact and source-checking approaches. Journalists need to develop their skills to investigate and challenge public figures

responsible for creating or perpetuating information disorder, contributing to greater accountability for those who do so.

Government and the non-government sectors need to invest in fact-checking institutions, where public has easy access and can check with the information they have received. There must be a toll-free number available where people can report and check the information.

We have seen how the world came together to fight the Covid-19 pandemic; we need a similar approach to fight with information disorder. Because information disorder is not only linked with governance and health, but also with the future of the planet. We need accurate information to change and adapt new behaviours to save our planet; any distorted information that neglects climate change will bring early end of humanity.

Information disorder distorts the political debate and increases polarisation. It reduces social cohesion and works as catalyst for violence and conflict. It might encourage people to practise ineffective or dangerous health behaviours. To tackle this, we need cooperation and collaboration of media practitioners; media organisations and media support organisations around the communities and countries should come together and combat information disorder.

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Journalism (Response)

Part IV Introduction: Karen Fowler-Watt

Following the diagnoses offered in the first three parts, the final two parts of this volume move to consider response from different communities of practice: journalism and media literacy. The chapters in Part IV focus on journalism, often seen as the source of the problem, as much as the solution. Globally, trust levels in journalism have plummeted, despite a brief reprieve in the heart of the pandemic, when fact-based information was at a premium, with news audiences displaying less of an appetite for impartial reporting, turning to social media and personalised newsfeeds. As a result, as we edited this collection, the industry was actively debating the merits of transparency over objectivity and tussling with ways of re-drawing the boundaries of journalism as a profession—if indeed it is. For many it remains a trade, a craft at best. In a landscape shaped by the misinformation crisis, compounded by a faltering sense of professional identity and ideology, a range of journalists, practitioner-academics and industry observers offer a range of responses, with the caveat that there are no immediate solutions or easy answers, but an acute awareness of the urgent need for responsible and responsive action.

For journalism practitioner-academic, Graham Majin, the key challenges, in a context of information chaos, reside in journalism's shifting identity as a practice. In Chap. 16, he argues that different journalisms emerge at different times in history to serve the ideology of the age. Contemporary journalism—labelled here as Official Journalism—is largely the product of the Boomer generation, its values and ideals. Hence the early twenty-first century is a period of flux due to demographic change as the Boomers fade from the scene. His chapter describes how, as the Boomer Ideology is challenged by disruptive, new forces, we witness the rise of a new journalism (Unofficial Journalism). The battle between them signals a wider epistemic struggle to define the nature of reality, truth and misinformation.

In 2014, Jon Sopel was appointed as the BBC's North America editor, covering three presidents before leaving the United States at the end of 2021.

Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US Presidential election was a defining moment for journalism—a time when journalists were vilified as 'the opposition', accused of peddling 'fake news' and thrown into disarray by a president who generally preferred to conduct the affairs of state on Twitter, rather than through conventional press briefings. When the pandemic hit in 2020, as the next presidential race was just underway, Sopel narrated his highly personal account of 'an election and a year like no other' in *UnPresidented* (2021). His opening Chap. 17, What Happened Next? is re-published here, recounting the drama as Trump declared the election and its outcome—the victory of his opponent, Joe Biden—as 'fake'. As Sopel warns, Trump may no longer be in power, but Trumpism continues to cast a long shadow.

Trump discerned The Agenda-Setting Power of Fake News (Chap. 18) like no other. In this chapter, Fran Yeoman and Kate Morris, two former journalists, now working in academia, note the argument posited by agenda-setting theory that news media can shape what its audiences think about, and that certain vulnerable communities are more exposed to this influence than the rest of society. They argue that there is growing evidence that the same, unequal agenda-setting power applies to so-called fake news, but relatively little is known about the work being done to combat these harms. The chapter reviews the impact of mis-, dis- and malinformation on different user groups and sets it against an analysis of educational media literacy projects in the UK. Yeoman and Morris argue that those vulnerable communities most at risk of the agenda-setting power of 'fake news' face an uphill struggle to access meaningful information to help them navigate the online world. This is in part due to a fractured and ill-funded media literacy sector.

Fracture, dissonance, disrupted are words we hear frequently when describing journalism. In their chapter, US academics Patrick R. Johnson and Melissa Tully contemplate the road to recovery, asking Can We Rebuild Broken Relationships? Examining Journalism, Social Media, and Trust in a Fractured Media Environment (Chap. 19). Here the notion of professional boundaries is revisited, to consider how the ability for journalists to produce work for and connect with their audiences through social media has contributed to shifting notions of professional journalism. In a messy media environment, where the audience is less easily defined and in which professional journalists compete with everyday users—some with bad intentions—to produce and circulate news and to get their content in front of audiences, issues of trust and credibility have become so pervasive as to raise the alarm. The authors look at several organisations that are working to rebuild audiences' trust in the news and in journalists and are leveraging the same social media tools and platforms that have played a role in the diminishment of trust in journalists and journalism.

A key challenge facing journalists in their everyday practice is how to verify content. In Chap. 20 former journalists Susan Moeller and Stephen Jukes (now both professors in the US and UK respectively) assess how journalism can respond to the rising threat of fakes, deepfakes and manipulated digital images. Images dominate today's media landscape, facilitated by the digital

technologies that provide both the tools to take them and the platforms on which they are distributed. There are advantages: For mainstream news reporting, the unprecedented volume of user-generated images and video allows the global public to witness events otherwise inaccessible. But the technology to manipulate digital images—or even to generate entirely fake ones—has far outpaced journalists' abilities to detect the falsifications. While newsrooms across the world are increasingly committed to countering mis- and disinformation, there are real-time limits to the verification tools now being trialled. This chapter looks at the types of fake and 'deepfake' images in circulation, and outlines the tools and methods being deployed to generate and tackle them, including artificial intelligence, machine learning and deep neural networks. It also highlights how misinformation, disinformation and deepfakes have destabilised democracies, and offers a call to action: the urgent need to find ways to counter these rising threats to society.

The Unhealed Wound: Official and Unofficial Journalisms, Misinformation and Tribal Truth

Graham Majin

Introduction

We live in a divided world. Looking around, we see two rival tribes confronting each other, each with its own facts and opinions, frequently reopening this unhealed wound (Pasternak, 1958). It is a world of "Official" and "Unofficial" journalisms, in which each tribe dismisses the narratives of the other as misinformation, disinformation and fake news. It is as if we have stumbled into an epistemological maze—a place of darkness. How did we get here? How do we get out?

   This chapter argues that the word "journalism" does not refer to a single, unchanging thing. Different journalisms emerge at different times to serve the dominant ideology of the age. For example, during the nineteenth century, Victorian Liberal Journalism developed to support the ideology of Victorian Liberal Democracy. Journalism's role was to help create an informed citizenry. Truth was understood as a process of enquiry in which different views confronted each other in free and open debate. Journalism's methodology stressed impartiality and objectivity. During the late twentieth century an ideological shift took place. The Baby Boomer generation rejected the imperfections inherent in Victorian Liberalism and evolved an alternative, more idealistic ideology. Boomer Journalism saw itself as having ethical-political responsibilities, and truth came to be understood as the consensus of people with shared

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ethical-political values and goals. Journalism's methodology shifted to the creation and management of narratives intended to help create a better, more socially just world.

However, the 2020s is a period of renewed ideological flux as the Boomer consensus unravels and is confronted by alternative ideologies. Boomer Journalism, which has become "Official Journalism," finds itself challenged by "Unofficial Journalism." Since they rest on radically different understandings of the nature of truth and knowledge, each considers itself to be genuine and its opponent "fake." Thus, "fake news" and "misinformation" have become tribal labels to stigmatise the journalism, ideology and epistemology of the other. This chapter draws on insights from generational cohort theory, and is offered as a framework which can be used to understand the schism of journalism and public discourse in the early twenty-first century. It does not provide a quick way out of the maze, but it does, at least, offer a lantern and compass to help us see where we are.

A Galaxy of Journalisms

In his 1956 classic *Four Theories of the Press*, Frederick Siebert argued that there is no single thing called journalism. Instead, different journalisms evolved to meet the demands of their societies. As Siebert put it (1963, pp. 1–2) "the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates." However, Siebert's greatest insight was epistemic, not socio-political. Siebert recognised that journalism always seeks to communicate truth, however, different ideologies understand truth differently. In other words, what counts as legitimate knowledge changes. For example, Siebert explained that for most of human history, people had lived in authoritarian societies in which knowledge of the official narratives (i.e., knowing the correct things to believe, say and do) was more important than knowing whether those things were objectively true. Hence, for most of human history, truth was official truth and legitimate knowledge was official knowledge. Siebert explained that these were produced by (op cit., 2),

> a few wise men who were in a position to guide and direct their fellows. Thus, truth was thought to be centered near the center of power. The press therefore functioned from the top down. The rulers of the time used the press to inform the people of what the rulers thought they should know and the policies the rulers thought they should support.

Siebert's thesis is well supported by historical evidence. For example, in 1662 the authoritarian government of Charles II introduced a regime of censorship in England requiring all printed material to be licensed. The Act explained that (Charles II, 1662), "many evil disposed persons have been encouraged to print and sell heretical, schismatical, blasphemous, seditious and treasonable Bookes, Pamphlets and Papers." Censorship was therefore required

to stop the spread of misinformation, or as the Act put it, "any Doctrine or Opinion" contrary to the official doctrine of the "Church or the Government." The Act left England with only one newspaper: *The Intelligencer*, published by the country's official censor Roger L'Estrange. Unofficial narratives were not tolerated.

Victorian Liberal Journalism: Making Truth Fashionable and Profitable

A radically different type of journalism began to emerge in England during the 1820s to support a new ideology and system of government. Victorian Liberalism grew out of the values of the Anglo-American Enlightenment and stressed the primacy of the individual. Ideological shift brought epistemic change and a new understanding of the nature of truth and knowledge. As Siebert puts it (op cit., 3),

> Man is no longer conceived of as a dependent being to be led and directed, but rather as a rational being able to discern between truth and falsehood… Truth is no longer conceived of as the property of power. Rather, the right to search for truth is one of the inalienable natural rights of man. And where does the press fit into the scheme? The press is conceived of as a partner in the search for truth.

Journalistic truth became a quasi-scientific, quasi-judicial concept—reasonable belief supported by evidence. John Stuart Mill, the most famous theorist of Victorian Liberalism, argued that the new epistemology would contribute to the "mental well-being of mankind" by helping to "put an end to the evils of religious or philosophical sectarianism" which had cursed previous ages. Mill famously explained (2011, p. 97) that the greatest evil was the old tribal, narrative-led way of knowing that omitted uncomfortable facts and led audiences to pre-determined, partisan conclusions,

> Not the violent conflict between parts of the truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it, is the formidable evil: there is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides; it is when they attend only to one that errors harden into prejudices, and truth itself ceases to have the effect of truth, by being exaggerated into falsehood.

The role of Victorian Liberal Journalism should be understood therefore, not as an active process of discovering objective truth (which was viewed as impossible), but rather as a negative process of restraining the numerous cognitive biases and prejudices to which fallible and frail humans are susceptible. During the nineteenth century, a journalistic methodology was developed mimicking that of scientific experiment, or a legal trial. Techniques such as the separation of fact from opinion were designed to train journalists to become impartial enquirers. Another epistemic tool valued by Victorian Liberal

Journalism was impartiality—ensuring that the other side of the argument was honestly and fully represented. As the American historian Carl Becker summarised (1958, p. 38), the epistemology of Victorian Liberalism was based on the belief that,

> the sole method of arriving at the truth in the long run is by the free competition of opinion in the open market… since men will invariably differ in their opinions, each man must be permitted to urge, freely and even strenuously, his own opinion, provided he accords to others the same right… from this mutual toleration and comparison of diverse opinions the one that seems the most rational will emerge and be generally accepted.

According to this epistemology, misinformation and fake news can be understood as partisan narrative-led reporting that omits opposing views and recklessly mixes fact and opinion.

One of the first newspaper editors to supply accurate, truthful news was Thomas Barnes who edited the *London Times* between 1817 and 1841. It was Barnes, as one biographer notes, who (Britannica, 2021) "established its reputation and founded a tradition of independent journalism." Barnes paved the way for his successor John Thadeus Delane who embraced the latest technology and continued to turn truthful impartial journalism into a profitable business. For example, by 1847 *The Times* possessed the most advanced steam press in Europe, capable of printing six thousand papers per hour (Joslin, 2018). But it was *The Times*' single-minded pursuit of journalistic truth that attracted readers, with the paper's leader writer Robert Lowe famously declaring in 1852 that,

> The duty of the journalist is the same as that of the historian—to seek out truth, above all things, and to present to his readers not such things as statecraft would wish them to know, but the truth as near as he can attain it. (Hodgins, 1943)

The formula of reporting different points of view fairly and honestly, instead of supplying a single narrative, proved popular with a wide readership among all classes. As the rival *St. James's Chronicle* reported in 1831 (Simkin, 2020),

> For every one copy of *The Times* that is purchased for the usual purposes, nine we venture to say are purchased to be lent to the wretched characters who, being miserable, look to political changes for an amelioration of their condition.

It was a virtuous circle. *The Times*' growing circulation attracted revenue from advertisers seeking to reach the paper's audience. Thus, the new epistemology helped liberate journalism from its eighteenth century business model, one heavily dependent on patronage and state subsidy (Horne, 1980).

In the US, it was not until after the trauma of the civil war and reconstruction eras, that a new cultural landscape began to emerge and with it, new journalisms. Melville Stone, who launched the *Chicago Daily News* in 1876, was one of the first American editors to embrace the epistemology and

methodology of Victorian Liberal Journalism and make it profitable. Stone (2017) described the new approach as being like a "witness in court, bound to 'tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'." Adolph Ochs printed his famous declaration of principles in *The New York Times* in 1896, promising to

> give the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of party, sect or interests involved; to make of the columns of *The New York Times* a forum for the consideration of all questions of public importance, and to that end to invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion. (Ochs, 1896)

This was the "New Journalism"—truthful, impartial news which was to become the dominant model in American journalism for the next hundred years. It saw off competition from proto-tabloid "yellow" or "muckraking" journalism which combined sensationalism with moral and political crusading. What was distinctive about Victorian Liberal Journalism was not that it possessed a magical power to know and communicate objective truth, but that its driving *motive* was the search for truth regardless of the consequences. As Och's biographer explains, telling the truth was

> his intent, not always his accomplishment, for who attains his ideal in this frustrated world? But it is a lordly intent, one of the highest goals of human endeavor… It is, flatly, a goal no mere mortal has ever attained; but this man strove for it. (Johnson, 1946, p. 147)

However, the single-minded pursuit of truth is not the only motive that can be used to guide journalism.

The Rise of Boomer Journalism

Cohort Theory has become popular as a research methodology in the social sciences (Norval, 2005, p. 2), but is curiously understudied in the field of journalism. Cohort theory was pioneered by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim who argued that membership of a particular generation,

> endows the individuals sharing in [it] with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action. (1952, p. 291)

The boomer generation is the cohort *par excellence* because its members are widely seen (Phillipson et al., 2008, p. 3) as having "distinctive experiences that set them apart from previous generations." For example, the boomers were more idealistic and Utopian-minded than their parents and grandparents. Writing in 1965, the American scholar Allan Bloom noted that the boomers

had grown up during an age of extraordinary affluence which led them to see themselves as a new type of "aristocracy." These young people, he said,

> have never experienced the anxieties about simple physical well-being that their parents experienced during the depression. They have been raised in comfort and with the expectation of ever-increasing comfort. Hence they are largely indifferent to it: they are not proud of having acquired it and… because they do not particularly care about it, they are more willing to give it up in the name of grand ideals. (Bloom, 1988, p. 49)

Above all, the boomers saw themselves as a unique generation, qualitatively different to any that had previously existed. This sense of boomer exceptionalism is captured by Charles Reich in his 1970 best-seller *The Greening of America*. In it, Reich dismisses Victorian Liberalism as an outmoded philosophy of denial, duty and responsibility which has crushed man's soul and created a mass of alienated people unable to enjoy life. As Reich puts it (1970, p. 131)

> Imprisoned in masks, they endure an unutterable loneliness. Their lives are stories of disappointed hopes, hopes disintegrating into bitterness and envy… Death is with them already, in their sullen boredom, their unchanging routines, their minds closed to new ideas and new feelings.

The baby boomers saw themselves, writes Francis Beckett (2010, p. ix), "as pioneers of a new world—freer, fresher, fairer and infinitely more fun." It was a new world that required a new type of journalism and a new epistemology.

Boomer Journalism first appeared as the underground journalism of the counter-culture which flourished during the 1960s. The media scholar Aniko Bodroghkozy summarises (2001, p. 11),

> Those who wrote for the underground newspapers saw themselves not as observers of youth activism and lifestyles but as participants… Journalistic notions of objectivity, distance, balance and the like had no place in underground press articles, which were advocatory to the extreme and often not overtly concerned with accuracy of detail.

This was journalism based on the boomer way of knowing in which truth was understood inter-subjectively as the consensus of the boomer tribe. During the 1980s and 90s, the baby boomers moved into senior editorial positions and imported their more committed, advocacy style of journalism into the mainstream to reflect their own values and assumptions. By the end of the twentieth century, it was increasingly taken for granted that journalism should acknowledge its ethical-political responsibilities and play a part in helping to create a more socially just world. For example, in 1997, Martin Bell the BBC's Chief Washington correspondent famously broke with the Victorian Liberal tradition and called for a new "journalism of attachment"

In place of the dispassionate practices of the past I now believe in what I call the journalism of attachment. By this I mean a journalism that cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; and will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor. (1997, p. 8)

The methodology of Boomer Journalism showed little respect for the Victorian Liberal distinction between fact and opinion. Indeed, deliberately ignoring it became increasingly fashionable. The growing colonisation of journalism by opinion was noted by the historian Eric Alterman who coined the word "punditocracy" to describe it,

The punditocracy is a tiny group of highly visible political pontificators who make their living offering 'inside political opinions and forecasts' in the elite national media. And it is their debate, rather than any semblance of a democratic one, that determines the parameters of political discourse in the nation today. (1999, pp. 4–5)

Alterman noted that late twentieth century journalism was characterised by an explanatory turn, an "explosion of the punditocracy" which was generating a self-sustaining feedback loop in which news organisations created pseudo-facts, or factinions (Majin, 2021), by reporting the fact that a pundit, or other public figure, had stated an opinion. It was, said Alterman, a process that was creating a world of narratives (op cit., 8) "largely divorced from the travails that can make everyday life in the United States such a struggle."

The Boomer Way of Knowing

The changing understanding of truth was buttressed by numerous books and papers produced by the boomer generation of academics. For example, in 1972 the American sociologist Gaye Tuchman published the influential, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual" in which she mocked Victorian Liberal Journalism and its methodology. "Newspapermen," she wrote (1972, p. 660), "invoke their objectivity almost the way a Mediterranean peasant might wear a clove of garlic around his neck to ward off evil spirits." By the late 1970s this truthophobic view had become dominant. For example, a much-read 1978 textbook described Victorian Liberal journalists as (Schudson, 1978, p. 6) "naïve empiricists" who believed that "facts are not human statements about the world but aspects of the world itself." To the boomer generation of scholars, this assault on the epistemology of Victorian Liberal Journalism seemed liberating, radical and progressive. However, by unpicking the web of restraint that the Victorians had so carefully woven, the boomers truthophobic turn was also a return to pre-Victorian and pre-Enlightenment ways of knowing. The boomers had rediscovered narrative-led news and replaced their parents' "naïve empiricism" with an intoxicating cocktail of "naïve relativism" and "naïve intuitionism."

Alongside boomer epistemology and Boomer Journalism came a new boomer interpretation of history. From the 1970s onwards, revisionist histories

of journalism began to appear in which epistemological considerations were stripped out and replaced by sociological and political perspectives. For example, in 1988 James Curran and Jean Seaton produced an influential textbook in which they stated that their mission was not merely to re-examine the history of journalism, but to "stand it on its head" (1997, p. 9). Traditional scholarship was labelled the "Whig history of journalism" and described as nothing more than a "political mythology." Curran and Seaton replaced it with a new political mythology—the boomer history of journalism. The new, revisionist narrative assumed that journalism *ought* to be a force for radical social change, not a tool to assist the search for truth. The concept of truth is barely mentioned by Curran and Seaton. When it does appear, it is dismissed as an "abstract and elevated principle" which "may seem a little incongruous to contemporary ears" (ibid., 24)

The rise of Boomer Journalism and the boomer way of knowing were accompanied however by a disturbing decline in audience trust. Citizens responded to the growing fashion for narrative-led journalism with what the media scholar Yariv Tsfati described as "media scepticism." It was, said Tsfati (2003, p. 67), the feeling that, "journalists are not fair or objective in their reports about society and that they do not always tell the whole story." According to Tsfati, the rise of scepticism correlated with the retreat from impartiality (ibid.), "In the past three decades" he wrote, "communication researchers have become preoccupied with the increasingly negative attitudes audiences hold about the news media." The same worrying trend was noted by the British journalist Andrew Marr the following year when he wrote, "Our problem is less direct lying than slimy misrepresentation" (2004, p. 379). The modern requirement to make the facts fit the desired narrative was, he said dolefully, creating a journalism of deception (ibid.). "How often" he asked, "has the reporter gone through a long interview and stripped out a few words, junking all context and balance, to produce a deliberately misleading effect?" Successive opinion polls during the early twenty-first century confirm the relentless rise of scepticism. The Edelman Trust Barometer, which carries out annual assessments, finds most people now believe that professional journalists are "purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false." Its authors conclude,

> This is the era of information bankruptcy… We've been lied to by those in charge, and media sources are seen as politicized and bias. The result is a lack of quality information and increased divisiveness. (Edelman, 2021)

The *Guardian* newspaper's Stephen Marche writes that the collapse of trust in journalism points to a wider breakdown of the social contract in recent decades, "The United States has never faced an institutional crisis quite like the one it is facing now. Trust in the institutions was much higher during the 1960s." Marche adds,

The Watergate scandal, in hindsight, was evidence of the system working. The press reported presidential crimes; Americans took the press seriously. The political parties felt they needed to respond to the reported corruption. You could not make one of those statements today with any confidence. (Marche, 2022)

Official and Unofficial Journalisms

The global financial crisis of 2008, it may be argued, signalled the end of the Boomer Era. A complex matrix of changing demographic, economic, social and geo-political factors fuelled demand for a change in ideology to fit the new, harsher reality of life in the early twenty-first century. These forces are reflected in the rise of Trumpism and other forms of populism described by the historian Joel Kotkin (2020, p. 117) as a modern "peasant rebellion" driven by "suspicion among the lower classes that the people who control their lives… do not have their interests at heart." These forces, combined with the rise of the internet and the availability of new platforms and channels of communication, have led to the establishment of two epistemic universes, each with their own facts and narratives. Boomer Journalism has become Official Journalism which tends to understand truth as official truth—the consensus of experts with the same ethical-political values and goals. Official Journalism sees its role, increasingly, as protecting society from dangerous misinformation and misleading ideas. However, Official Journalism finds itself challenged by Unofficial Journalism which tends to understand truth as a never-ending process in which opposing views confront each in free and open debate. The journalism scholar Kristoffer Holt (2018, p. 51) writes that there has been a "remarkable surge" in the popularity of Unofficial Journalism outlets during the early twenty-first century. Unofficial journalists, says Holt, accuse official journalists of concealing or distorting information and of teaming up with "political elites." Holt observes that Unofficial Journalism sees its role as adding back into public discourse the information, facts and opinions that Official Journalism suppresses. Therefore,

> epistemologically, they often pose a challenge to mainstream media, since they implicitly, and often explicitly, challenge mainstream media's "fake news" these alternative media channels need to be analyzed in the light of their position as a perceived corrective of traditional media and of constrained public discourse. (op cit., 52)

This analysis is supported by the writing of many Unofficial Journalists, for example Steve McCann who writes (2021),

> a large and growing share of the American people assumes that virtually all news as presented by the current mainstream media is either a fabrication or an exaggeration to promote an authoritarian agenda.

Some commentators question the independence of Official Journalism and draw attention to changing patterns of media ownership. For example, the media scholar Merja Myllylahti (2017) points out that Official Journalism is converging "beyond ownership"—that is, collapsing into a vertical oligopoly. This means that news organisations, social media platforms and global big tech companies are increasingly owned by the same billionaires and private equity firms. The investigative reporter Tim Schwab suggests we may be witnessing a return of pre-Victorian journalistic business models based on patronage. He describes how the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has gifted hundreds of millions of dollars to news organisations including the *BBC, The Guardian, The Financial Times, Medium* and *Le Monde* (Schwab, 2020). Schwab says that the precise extent of Gates' funding is unknown. However, it touches all aspects of Official Journalism including training and education,

> Gates-backed think tanks turn out media fact sheets and newspaper opinion pieces. Magazines and scientific journals get Gates money to publish research and articles. Experts coached in Gates-funded programs write columns that appear in media outlets from *The New York Times* to *The Huffington Post*, while digital portals blur the line between journalism and spin.

Journalism's new subsidised business model also features a prominent role for government funding, especially in Europe. For example, the British journalist and author Laura Dodsworth writes that the Covid lockdowns of the early 2020s triggered a dramatic decline in traditional advertising revenues. In the UK, it was the state that stepped in to make good the shortfall. Did this, she asks (2021), lead to a less than critical acceptance of official government narratives? Others express anxiety over Official Journalism's independence and point to generous payments made by the Chinese Communist Party to Western news organisations to encourage them to "tell China's story well." As the academic Louisa Lim writes,

> China is trying to reshape the global information environment with massive infusions of money—funding paid-for advertorials, sponsored journalistic coverage and heavily massaged positive messages. (2018)

The radically different narratives offered by Official and Unofficial journalisms during the Covid pandemic vividly illustrate the sundering of society into two rival ideological and epistemic camps each with their own understanding of truth. For example, writing about the efficacy of the new generation of Covid vaccines, the BBC's Health Correspondent Nick Triggle says,

> As well as reducing the risk of catching the virus, the vaccines also reduce the risk of an infected individual spreading the virus… The ability to stop serious illness has saved countless lives as societies have opened up. (2021)

Triggle quotes researchers who believe, "vaccines saved 157,000 lives in England alone, and more than 470,000 across the 33 countries in Europe." Triggle concludes that the Covid vaccines are a "marvel of modern science." However, what is absent from his account is any mention that the vaccines sometimes cause harm. To hear this voice, it is necessary to climb over the epistemic fence into the world of Unofficial Journalism. Here we find an entirely different set of facts and opinions. Neville Hodgkinson, a former science correspondent at *The Sunday Times*, draws attention to the "high number of vaccine-attributed deaths" and adverse reactions including "the frequency of myocarditis in young adult males." Based on this, he concludes (2021),

> The Covid vaccine should never have been released to the public... Politicians, regulatory bodies, media, individual physicians, so many are culpable of the most terrible crime ever committed on humanity.

American journalism is similarly divided. MSNBC's Michael Cohen offers the official narrative (2021), "The progress that has been made on vaccinations is one of the most extraordinary accomplishments in human history." Cohen continues that, "No major or minor side effects are being reported in any significant numbers. Moreover, the vaccines are extraordinarily successful." Cohen attacks those who dissent from this narrative warning, "we must not let ourselves be distracted by the know-nothing contingent." The unofficial narrative is, however, very different. For example, under a headline claiming, "Covid Vaccines Have Killed At Least 140,000 people," Vasko Kohlmayer (2021) points to the significant number of adverse reactions recorded by the US government's Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Based on the VAERS data, he concludes, "By claiming the lives of so many people in such a short time, the Covid vaccines are the deadliest pharmaceuticals ever released into wide circulation."

Intolerance and Censorship

The divided journalistic ecosystem of the early twenty-first century is characterised by mutual intolerance, simmering hostility and growing calls for censorship. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which is funded by a consortium of social media, global tech and government agencies,[1] argues that dissent from official narratives is part of a growing problem because "the boundaries between disinformation, hate speech and harassment, conspiracy theories, and extremist mobilisation have become increasingly blurred." The report continues, "hate, extremism and disinformation" should all be seen as part of a "hybrid threat where anti-establishment street protests, established extremist movements and conspiracy theories opportunistically align." The report calls

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[1] The Institute's funders include: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Facebook, Google, YouTube, Microsoft, the UK Home Office and the US State Department (ISD, 2021)

for "radical new approaches" to combat unofficial narratives and recommends the introduction of censorship in the form of "robust requirements for algorithmic auditing" to block "extremists" and other "anti-government actors" from posting material online (ISD, 2021, pp. 5–7).

The conflict between Official and Unofficial Journalisms is usually framed as an ethical-political clash. However, this obscures a deeper epistemic clash which rests on how truth is understood. Official Journalism, drawing on the Boomer Epistemology, understands legitimate knowledge as official truth—the consensus of benevolent experts in positions of authority. Unofficial Journalism, seeking inspiration in the tradition of Victorian Liberalism, sees legitimate knowledge as the responsibility of each individual. The wider epistemic problem is that it is impossible to agree what is true, until there is agreement about the nature of truth. However, in the early twenty-first century, no such epistemic consensus exists. Instead, what we see is a clash of tribal epistemologies and ideologies. As the psychologist Cory Clark shrewdly observes, what we accept as truth is, more than we care to admit, a function of our tribal membership, "belief is guided like iron filings around a magnetic field by the forces of tribalism" (2020, p. 3). The questions posed by the existence of two rival epistemic universes are ultimately therefore tribal (Miller, 2014, p. 304; Clark et al., 2019). What our fractured journalism is really asking is: whose narratives do you believe, ours or theirs? Whose side are you on, ours or theirs?

Discussion

This chapter argues that early twenty-first century journalism increasingly resembles pre-Victorian journalism. It is partisan, tribal and more concerned with pursuing ethical-political goals than searching for truth regardless of consequence. The existence of Official and Unofficial journalisms, each with a different understanding of what constitutes legitimate knowledge and truth, is a world in which the labels "fake news" and "misinformation" are used to signal tribal membership and stigmatise the journalism, ideology and epistemology of the other. What we see in the 2020s is, increasingly, the spectacle of one tribe attempting to impose its narratives on the other. It is a situation that raises a number of tough questions, for example, what should people believe? Should citizens be encouraged to listen to both sides of the argument, or prevented from doing so for their own good? What sort of journalism will dominate in the years ahead? And what will this tell us about the nature of our society? Was the era of impartial Victorian Liberal Journalism simply a temporary departure from mankind's default mode of communication—the official, tribal narrative? This chapter offers a historical and conceptual map to help students of journalism, and the wider public, understand where we are and how we got here.

The sociologist Herbert Spencer (1898, p. 451) likened a healthy "body politic" to a healthy "living body." Following Spencer's metaphor, a divided society can be compared to an injured body—one with a painful, gaping wound. The increasingly rancorous disagreement over whose narratives are

true and whose are misinformation cannot be seen in isolation. It is symptomatic of a wider ideological, epistemic and tribal schism which shows little sign of healing.

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What Happened Next?

Jon Sopel

It is said that there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. But with Donald Trump it very quickly became clear in those sulky, raging, pouty weeks after the election that there is an additional phase. Between denial and anger there is litigation. And lots of it. Lawsuits here, there and everywhere. It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. It has been his MO through—out his business career. If at first you don't succeed, sue.

For the Biden team in the days after the election there was a singular focus. Ignore Donald Trump, his tweets, his provocations and his embryonic legal fight. In Bidenland they just wanted to get on with the mammoth task of putting together a cabinet, getting up to speed on key national security considerations, getting briefed by the Pentagon on troop dispositions, by the CIA on different perceived threat levels—and, perhaps most critically given the raging coronavirus numbers, getting briefed on where America stood with the fight against Covid and the readiness to roll out a vaccine.

From Trumpland, there were two narratives emerging. One version had it that Donald Trump in his heart knew that the game was up, that he had lost, but he needed time to process that, to come to terms with the reality that he was a one-term loser (and this narrative was the dominant view of the Republican Party). Let him rage and put up a fight, the argument went; show

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his base that he is not going quietly into the night. After that he will do what the constitution requires him to do—concede and organise a peaceful transfer of power. Just give him some space to let off steam in the meantime. It was as though these people were applying the Churchill quote about America to the outgoing president—Donald Trump can always be relied upon to do the right thing once he has exhausted all the other possibilities. But in the days and weeks immediately after the election the signs were not propitious.

In British politics a change of government happens with brutal swiftness: election Thursday night, and if you're the prime minister and you've lost, the removal van comes in on Friday morning to remove your personal effects, you wave goodbye to the civil servants—and off you go into the sunset. Meanwhile your successor is off to Buckingham Palace and by Friday lunchtime is inside Number 10 getting used to the new home on which they've just been given a five-year lease.

In the US system there is an elaborate and protracted transition. It has to be like this because the professional civil service is so much smaller than it is in the UK. Nearly all the key personnel in government departments serve at the pleasure of the president; nearly everyone is a 'special advisor.' It is also a national artefact, dating back to when the elected officials had to travel by horse and carriage—which from, say, Seattle is going to take some time.

What normally happens is that the day after the election, the president authorises an obscure official—the head of the General Services Administration—to release the funds so that the president-elect can start paying the salaries of the people who will be the key staff members dealing with defence, national security, immigration, the pandemic, the environment—and on and on. And they will then meet with the outgoing Trump officials to get briefed on all the key issues. But Donald Trump refused to set the transition process in train.

Eventually the head of the GSA, Emily Murphy—a Trump-appointed official, naturally—did set the wheels in motion for the transition, writing to Mr Biden as 'the apparent president-elect.' The funds were then released, but grudgingly and with a lip distinctly curled.

Maybe it was wishful thinking on that section of the Trump inner circle who thought that this was just a temporary toys-out-of-the-pram moment, because from Trump himself the language was 'no surrender.' To anyone who would listen, he was maintaining—on zero evidence, and we will explore that more—that there had been massive fraud, voting machines had been fixed. He had won; and won by a country mile.

And that was the other narrative: to misquote George H.W. Bush, 'Read my lips, I am never going to concede.'

This can be explained partly by ego and narcissism. Can you imagine what a blow it was to his sense of self—the 'very stable genius,' as he described himself—that he'd had the stuffing kicked out of him by the 78-year-old, sometimes bumbling Joe Biden—Sleepy Joe, of all people? He made clear how unconscionable it was during the final weeks of the campaign. 'Running against the worst candidate in the history of presidential politics puts pressure on me,'

Trump told supporters at a rally in Georgia. 'Could you imagine if I lose? My whole life—what am I going to do? I'm going to say I lost to the worst candidate in the history of politics.'

But that is what happened, and how must it have hurt that he would be soon joining that relatively short roll call of presidential one-term losers? Since the Second World War only George H.W. Bush, Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford had failed to win re-election. This was a man who liked to compare his achievements in office to America's Civil War leader, Abraham Lincoln; and who did nothing to dispel notions that his facial features should be chiselled and carved into the towering granite at Mount Rushmore. Accepting defeat was not what the 45th president was going to do.

But it is worth reflecting on this: what was it that led to Donald Trump's first impeachment (we'll get to the second one later)? It was fear and recognition that the one person in the Democratic field of hopefuls who posed the greatest risk to him was Joe Biden, for all that Trump tried to demean and belittle him. Why on earth send his errand boy, Rudy Giuliani, on that bizarre mission to strongarm the Ukrainians into digging up dirt on Hunter Biden, and by implication his father, Joe? It was self-evident: Trump was terrified by the threat the former vice-president posed. There were no such elaborate efforts to undermine the candidacies of Pete Buttegieg, or Kamala Harris, or Bernie Sanders, or Elizabeth Warren, or, or, or. Just Joe Biden.

Donald Trump is a zero-sum game man. It is perfectly binary. You win or you lose. And one thing you can't take away from him is that he has a visceral sense of danger—his fear of Joe Biden was entirely rational, well founded, even if the steps taken to destroy his nomination were reckless in the extreme. And there was another fear that Donald Trump had that was rational and grounded in reality. By being turfed out of office, Trump was losing the immunity from prosecution that—arguably—he felt he was entitled to as a serving president. The 45th president seemed to act with impunity because he believed he had immunity. It won't come as a surprise to read that he took a maximalist view of his powers—that is he could do anything he liked as president and it would be beyond the reach of the Department of Justice. But that only lasts while you're the president. Election defeat to Trump was what kryptonite was to Superman.

A number of friends of Donald Trump said that he fretted repeatedly about the legal jeopardy he could face: the Mueller report had identified a number of occasions when as president he might have obstructed justice. And one thing was certain. Were Trump quietly to pack his bags, there would be no full pardon bestowed upon him by the incoming president, as happened when Gerald Ford succeeded Richard Nixon and issued a full pardon for any crimes committed while Nixon was in office—to end 'our long national nightmare,' as Ford called the whole Watergate debacle in his inaugural address.

There was much speculation that Donald Trump would do something never done before—and that is issue *himself* a pre-emptive pardon. It was considered seriously, but the president was dissuaded by the White House legal counsel from the path of self-exoneration for a number of reasons: first and foremost,

to accept a pardon means acknowledging guilt of wrongdoing. And he was never going to do that. It is also legally highly questionable, and would doubtless end up before the Supreme Court.

One other crucial thing: a pardon is only relevant to offences under *federal* law. If you have broken *state* law all bets are off; you can still be prosecuted. And four months on from being out of office, Trump still is the subject of at least two investigations—one, a longstanding inquiry into the Trump Organisation conducted by the District Attorney in New York City, and a similar one being carried out by the state—both of which relate to allegations of fraud over the value of properties held by the former real estate developer. There is another legal case pending in Georgia, and that is a direct consequence of his behaviour after the election—but like Trump's second impeachment we will get to that shortly.

In the post-election period, Trump kept up his barrage of tweets that the election had been stolen and had been the subject of fraud. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of these weeks was Donald Trump's own behaviour. He remained more or less hidden from view. This president has always believed he is his own best spokesman. But for over three crucial weeks he didn't answer a single question from reporters. He was scarcely seen; he made the odd desultory comment—and would then walk off without expanding.

But if he was so confident of his case, why wasn't he out there selling it? He is, after all, the great marketeer. The master manipulator. Then on the Thursday night at the end of November when American families come together to celebrate all that they have in the annual Thanksgiving he did—finally—answer a few reporters' questions. Asked if he would agree to leave the White House if the electoral college vote went against him, he said: 'Certainly I will, certainly I will and you know that.' But he gave every impression that conceding was not what he was contemplating. 'It's going to be a very hard thing to concede because we know there was massive fraud,' he said, repeating the by now familiar allegation for which still no proof had been produced.

This first Q and A session since the election was odd for other reasons too. I know: a lot of the Trump presidency hasn't conformed to what you might call conventional, but this did stand out. In the Diplomatic Reception Room on the lower ground floor of the residence someone had set up a desk and a chair that was way too small for the bulk of the president. It was as though Donald Trump was sitting in a Fisher Price toy desk and chair set. Or like those parent/teacher evenings when you occupy the chair your six-year-old normally sits in. It was almost a perfect metaphor for the reality that power was shrinking away from him. Or was it a sign that he'd lost control? For a man who cares so much about the image and the visual, this was the Thanksgiving gif that kept on giving for the wags on social media. And his mood was distinctly testy when one reporter challenged him on the grounds for his complaints about the election result. 'Don't talk to me that way,' the president erupted. 'You're just a lightweight. Don't talk to me that—don't talk to—I'm the President of the United States. Don't ever talk to the President that way.'

During this period, when he wasn't on the golf course the president remained holed up inside the White House, with whole weeks of nothing marked on the published diary, meeting an ever-diminishing number of officials who were keeping the faith with him. It became vaguely comedic—each evening the White House would issue notification of the president's schedule for the next day—and it read the same: 'President Trump will work from early in the morning until late in the evening. He will make many calls and have many meetings.' That was it.

It was striking in this period to go into the White House and to observe just how few officials were around. A lot of the grown-ups wanted nothing to do with what was unfolding. The corridors were empty, and as the building hollowed out those that were left were the most fervent, die-in-the-last-ditch Trump loyalists.

There was a twin-track strategy: a legal one, spearheaded by Rudy Giuliani—entirely constitutional, entirely proper, looking for any irregularities in the results from key swing states that could alter the result; and a less creditable one—the president getting on the phone to key election officials, or inviting them to the White House to try to 'persuade' them not to certify the results.

You would imagine that when you're the president of the United States—even the outgoing one—you would assemble the brightest and best legal minds to make your case. But the motley crew led by Giuliani was like something out of a freak show. Its apotheosis came with an eagerly awaited news conference that was going to be given from Republican HQ in Washington. The headquarters of the Republican National Committee in Washington have many grand suites. But this presser would unfold in a small, cramped room with poor ventilation and a lot of camera lights. Giuliani had a meltdown. No, not metaphorically. Literally. The hair dye he'd presumably applied that morning started to bubble and melt on his head, leaving rivulets of brown liquid running down his cheeks, his forehead, his nose. How could you possibly concentrate on a single word he was saying when you were mainly wondering whether the drip coming down from his sideburns was going to reach his chin before the one barrelling down his face from his forehead. He was having a really bad hair day.

But if the sight of Rudy's face with its mud-coloured streaks is all we remember, that is probably just as well—because his legal team were promulgating some pretty far-fetched conspiracy theories to explain away Donald Trump's election defeat. One of the lawyers, an imposing woman called Sidney Powell, advanced the theory that the president had lost in Georgia because of a conspiracy involving—and I hope I have remembered all of this correctly—the Venezuelans, the Cubans, the Chinese, George Soros (you can't have a good conspiracy theory without him being somewhere in the mix), a former mayor of Chicago and Hugo Chavez—who'd been dead for seven years. The voting machines used in the state had apparently had the software 'fixed' so that Donald Trump's votes wouldn't be counted. And all of these people were in cahoots with the people running the Georgia election, of course.

When it was pointed out that those in charge of the Georgia ballots were fervent, Trump-supporting Republicans, that was brushed aside with an allegation that they'd been bribed by the aforementioned conspirators. No evidence was provided. The next day Ms Powell went on a right-wing fringe TV channel to announce she would be wreaking biblical vengeance against the state of Georgia, that she would 'blow it up' and unleash the kraken monster.

The next Monday a press release came from the Trump campaign announcing that she'd been dropped from the legal team. Too outlandish, even for Rudy Giuliani. She (along with Giuliani and others) is now fighting a multi-million dollar lawsuit brought by Dominion, the makers of those voting machines. And her defence is truly special. Her legal team seeking to have the defamation case dismissed wrote: 'No reasonable person would conclude that the statements were truly statements of fact.' In other words when she made all these allegations any reasonable person would have concluded they were bullshit.

Other organisations that regularly parroted the president's claims would also fold quickly when faced with legal challenge. The right-wing TV network, Newsmax, issued a statement on its website, stating that it had found 'no evidence' for the conspiracy theories advanced by Mr Trump's lawyers, supporters and others, and apologised to the Dominion voting machines employee, Eric Coomer, who Newsmax had alleged was behind the 'scam.' 'Newsmax has found no evidence that Dr Coomer interfered with Dominion voting machines or voting software in any way, nor that Dr Coomer ever claimed to have done so. Nor has Newsmax found any evidence that Dr Coomer ever participated in any conversation with members of "antifa", nor that he was directly involved with any partisan political organization.'

As climb-downs go, that was pretty comprehensive. But it almost spat defiance compared to the right-wing magazine, *American Thinker*, which made this craven statement about their reporters' coverage: 'These pieces rely on discredited sources who have peddled debunked theories about Dominion's supposed ties to Venezuela, fraud on Dominion's machines that resulted in massive vote switching or weighted votes, and other claims falsely stating that there is credible evidence that Dominion acted fraudulently. These statements are completely false and have no basis in fact.'

The myriad court cases, launched with such gusto and fanfare, fared about as well. There were over sixty in all, and sixty-one of the lawsuits were thrown out; one exception was a small partial victory in a case in Pennsylvania that affected only a handful of votes in a state that Biden won by over sixty thousand. Some of the judges who heard these cases, yes, had been appointed by a Democrat president, but many had been selected by Donald Trump himself. They rejected the fraud allegations and charges of ballot rigging out of hand.

And Donald Trump had problems closer to home. The man he'd appointed to be head of election security, a lifelong Republican called Christopher Krebs, declared the result the safest in US history. The Attorney General, William Barr, who was the scourge of liberal jurists for his muscular—and some would

say inappropriately partisan—interventions on the president's behalf, reached the same conclusion. No fraud had taken place that would alter the outcome of the election. Get over it, they were saying to the president: you lost. Both men were fired—and demeaned—by Trump.

What was striking in this period was not how many senior Republicans spoke out against the president; what stood out was how many of them had seemingly lost their tongues. Even though the results of the courts and the judgements of the most senior officials were the same. If America is a nation of laws, and the men and women who are charged with administering those laws—the Justice Department and the courts—come down unanimously in one direction, you would think that would be that. But no.

Which brings us to the other part of the Trump strategy: try to strongarm those in the key swing states whose job is to certify the results into not doing so. The President phoned in to a bizarre meeting of Pennsylvania lawmakers, where Rudy Giuliani—who was there in person—held his mobile phone to a microphone as the President railed against the election results. Michigan lawmakers were invited to the White House to have a private meeting about that state's results with the president. It looked dodgy as anything.

But then came Trump's tussle with the authorities in Georgia. The Secretary of State in Georgia, Brad Raffensperger, is a lifelong Republican who voted for Donald Trump and paid money towards his campaign—but whichever way he counted the results (and they were counted and recounted), the result was the same: Joe Biden had carried the state with a majority of 11,779 votes. Trump did what he does. On social media he went after Mr Raffensperger. And in one tweet at the beginning of January the president revealed that he'd been on the phone to the senior election officials in the peach state. Trump called him clueless, and said he couldn't answer any of his questions. But Raffensperger fired back with this: 'Respectfully, President Trump: What you're saying is not true. The truth will come out.'

And—boy—did the truth come out about what unfolded on that call. The hour-long audio file was leaked to the *Washington Post* in its entirety. It is astonishing as much for what Donald Trump says as what it reveals about his state of mind. The stand-out quote was Trump saying this: 'So look. All I want to do is this. I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have. Because we won the state.' In other words find me those votes so I am declared the winner. He doesn't let it go: 'So what are we going to do here, folks? I only need 11,000 votes. Fellas, I need 11,000 votes. Give me a break.'

When he is told that he didn't win the state and that he's got his facts wrong, the president seems to become bullying. 'The people of Georgia are angry, the people of the country are angry,' he said. 'And there's nothing wrong with saying, you know, that you've recalculated.' When he doesn't get his way the president seems to threaten legal consequences for Raffensberger if he doesn't do what he's asked. Again and again, the president insists he won the election by hundreds of thousands of votes. Again and again he tells those on the call there is no way that he lost.

Donald Trump is now the subject of potential legal action in Georgia. The charge would be 'election interference,' a felony crime that carries a prison sentence.

There was also an exceptional legal move instigated by several Republican states, and backed by large numbers of Trump-supporting members of Congress. Led by Texas, they would petition the Supreme Court directly to overturn Joe Biden's victory in the electoral college. Never mind that the people behind this move are the very defenders of a state's rights to manage its own affairs. Here were the attorneys general of a number of states arguing they knew best, and that results had to be overturned in states over which they had zero jurisdiction. The Supreme Court said it would have nothing to do with it—and Trump couldn't have been more angry, particularly with the three justices whom he had appointed.

With the legal path having failed dismally, and his effort to coerce state officials to 'fix' the results in his favour coming to nought, if Donald Trump was going to upend the will of the people there was only one roll of the dice left—he would have to persuade the joint session of Congress *not* to certify the results of the electoral college, that had been signed off as safe by the Secretaries of State in all fifty states of the Union.

This is a purely ceremonial occasion at which the Vice-President, Mike Pence, presides in his role as president of the Senate. It was to happen on 6 January, just two weeks before Joe Biden's inauguration on the 20th. And even at this late stage, Trump was pressuring his doggedly loyal number two to throw away the rule book. To add to the tension and the apprehension, Trump asked his supporters to descend on Washington in a show of strength to 'stop the steal'—the Trump ultras' increasingly shrill slogan. Donald Trump told them on Twitter, 'Be there, will be wild!'

Now Donald Trump is sometimes accused of hyperbole, of reckless exaggeration, even of falsehood. Let no one say there was anything OTT about this tweet. January the 6th *was* wild. And dark. And deeply troubling. And violent. And American democracy for a while seemed on the brink.

For a start, Mike Pence, who for four years had done everything that was asked of him by Donald Trump, and displayed a loyalty that teetered on the slavish and supine, made clear in a carefully argued letter that at this critical juncture he was going to follow the constitution—not Donald Trump. It was a grievous blow to Trump and one for which there would be no forgiveness. Pence had joined the list of non-people who had dared to say 'no' to Donald Trump.

The rally, which was held on the Ellipse—the area of parkland just beyond the South Lawn of the White House that goes down to the Washington Monument—had brought tens of thousands of Trump supporters from all over America. It was a frigid, grey morning. Over the years I have lost count of how many Trump rallies I've attended. Let's just say lots. And they have invariably been great fun. A lot of fancy-dress; the atmosphere of a fiesta. Trump is a great showman and entertainer. I try to capture some of that in the first diary

entry that you will read after this chapter. On 6 January in DC the atmosphere was 180 degrees removed from that day in Orlando in June 2019 when he launched his bid for a second term.

The jibes about me being fake news had no mocking element. It was aggressive. These people—every single one of them—bought totally the assertion that the election had been stolen from Donald Trump. When you asked for evidence, they said it was everywhere, but couldn't point to a single specific that would have altered the outcome of the election. These people ridiculed the idea that Joe Biden got more votes than Barack Obama, though didn't question that Donald Trump had also performed brilliantly, given his handling of the pandemic.

There was a visceral anger among these people, and the mood—as I tweeted before the rally had even started—was distinctly edgy. I met a couple of young guys who had driven across the country from Boise, Idaho, to be at the rally—a distance of roughly two and a half thousand miles each way. They were dressed like extras from the *RoboCop* movie. Grey/black body armour, helmets, and carrying rucksacks with undisclosed accessories inside them. They said they hadn't come seeking out trouble but if trouble came and found them, well, then they would be prepared. I would the next day see them dangling down from the gallery of the Senate about to jump down onto the Senate floor. Looked like they had gone in search of trouble after all. People in the crowd were berating me for wearing a mask and demanded that I take it off; and telling my cameraman where he could stick his tripod. It was unmistakably hostile.

Something else has changed in the years I have been covering the Trump presidency. Initially the admiration for Trump from his base was that though he wasn't perfect, might not always tell the whole truth, might be a bit 'naughty,' he stood up for them; he would be their champion. The outsiders, who felt neglected by the Washington elite, had a knight in shining armour—with a bit of tarnish around the edges.

But on 6 January it was more cult-like devotion. The only truth that existed came from the lips of Donald Trump and his most loyal acolytes, so any argument you put that Joe Biden had won fair and square was met with total incredulity—and fury. And when you cited the senior Republicans from the VP downwards who weren't buying it, they were dismissed as deep state swamp creatures, or RINOs—Republicans in name only.

And after Donald Trump addressed them and told them they had to march on Congress; that they had to show strength and couldn't be weak; that they had to 'stop the steal'—they followed him to the letter. He ended his speech by saying this to his angry supporters: 'We fight. We fight like hell and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore. So let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue.'

On 6 January 2021, the Trump mob ruled. This was an attempted insurrection; a concerted effort to stop the certification of election results that the courts had deemed safe and that every one of the individual states had certified.

This is—normally—a purely ceremonial rubber-stamping operation, taking around half an hour from beginning to end.

Instead, when I went on the *Ten O-Clock News* that night, the mob was still in control of Congress and Joe Biden's victory had not been certified. In my live report I said that I thought American democracy was in a precarious position—and added that I could not believe I was uttering those words. It wasn't hyperbole. It was true. This is being described as America's darkest day; the day when the beacon of democracy for the rest of the world was nearly extinguished, as rioters ran amok, defiling the most sacred sanctum of American democracy. We've all seen scenes like this in third world, tinpot regimes. But in America?

Some have sought to argue that what unfolded on 6 January and the days leading up to it was the system working. The attempts led by President Trump to have the results overturned had failed. He had bent the constitution to breaking point, but when it looked like it was going to snap, the safety mechanisms—the much-vaunted checks and balances—kicked in; the strength and durability of American democracy had prevailed.

But what is easy to forget is how close it came.

What if the VP, Mike Pence (very soon afterwards called a 'traitor' and facing death threats from Trump supporters), had gone along with the president's demands not to certify the results? Ditto the Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell—both of whom had hitherto shown all the backbone towards Donald Trump of cooked spaghetti. What if the Secretary of State in Georgia had acceded to the president's slightly menacing demands to 'recalculate' the ballots and given him the extra 11,780 votes that he needed to win? What if a lowly Michigan official had bent to the president's will and refused to certify Joe Biden's comfortable victory in the state?

In the end 170 Republican members of the House of Representatives voted *not* to certify Biden's victory. One of them would explain to me afterwards he'd felt he had to do this because so many of his voters believed that the election had been stolen from Donald Trump. So rather than alienate his base and incur the vengeful wrath of Donald Trump he would vote against certifying Biden's victory. Leadership, anyone?

Or, to put it another way, does American democracy rely on a handful of people doing the right thing to survive—even though it is at huge personal cost to themselves, when surrender would have been easier? The Georgia election official now needs security 24/7 as a result of standing up to the president. An action that has resulted in multiple death threats.

The other thing about the 2020 election is that it wasn't even that close. Biden polled millions more votes, and won the electoral college easily. This wasn't JFK's squeaky tight win of 1960 (when there almost certainly *was* widespread fraud), or 2000 (when it all came down to a few hundred votes in Florida). But what if it had been really tight? Then the pressure on state officials from the president might have been irresistible.

What we saw on 6 January was a massive security failure. But the real fragility of American democracy had been on display in the weeks leading up to that fateful Wednesday in January. There was a coup attempt which was thwarted, thanks to a few honourable patriots acting on principle, acting to uphold the constitution. But it was a close-run thing.

Hunkered down in the White House as the events of 6 January unfolded, Donald Trump in the early stages was apparently pleased with his handiwork, and was in no mood to call off his dogs of war.

One tweet attacked Mike Pence for not having the courage to do what he should have done. Soon afterwards the mob that had violently stormed the Capitol were chanting, 'Hang Mike Pence.' And moments later CCTV captures dramatic footage of Pence's Secret Service detail bundling him down a staircase to a secure location. Congressmen and women are cowering in their offices with tables and wardrobes rammed against doors to stop the mob. It was touch and go.

Donald Trump then put out a video on Twitter that called for the protestors to go home, but he says to the mob that have sacked the Capitol and injured dozens of policemen, 'We love you, you're very special.' And he would follow that up a little later with a tweet that seemed to justify the violence; certainly it was not a repudiation of the behaviour that the world was watching with rapt and appalled fascination: 'These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly treated for so long.'

It would be one of Donald Trump's last tweets. In the wake of these astonishing events the social media platforms finally lost patience and he was kicked off Twitter and Facebook. And Democrats started the process of impeaching the president—again.

In the immediate aftermath of 6 January the president did make a statement condemning the rioters and making clear that they were not acting at his behest—which is odd, because that is exactly what it looked like. And indeed, many of the rioters who were arrested in the massive FBI operation that unfolded afterwards have given witness statements making plain that they thought they were obeying the president's instructions when they invaded the Capitol.

The impeachment trial would take place after Donald Trump had left office. On 20 January the inauguration of Joe Biden took place and the peaceful transfer of power took place as the constitution prescribes, with the Democratic Party victor taking the reins of power at midday.

He took the oath of office on the West front of the Capitol; there was poetry (fabulous poetry from a prodigiously talented young African American woman, Amanda Gorman), there was music—but it was as abnormal an inauguration as you could imagine. The pandemic meant the numbers invited to attend were dramatically curtailed. And then there was the legacy of 6 January. There were no crowds on the Mall. None. The Capitol resembled a garrison town. Fencing, razor wire, armoured personnel carriers and heavily armed soldiers everywhere.

At the crack of dawn I cycled along deserted streets to Congress. Only the national guard were to be seen. A celebration of Democracy? Up to a point. But it was also democracy in a defensive, fearful crouch.

And one person in particular was missing. Donald Trump announced he wouldn't be attending—the great tradition where the outgoing president met-aphorically passes on the baton to his successor was dispensed with. For Trump to attend would have been public acknowledgement that he'd lost; so he stayed away. And instead demanded that he be given a red-carpet farewell from Joint Base Andrews. A stage was erected, but it was a sparsely attended affair. And as Air Force One taxied onto the runway to take him to Mar-a-Lago, Frank Sinatra's 'My Way' was belting out on the PA. Yep, no one could deny that he had done it his way.

Donald Trump stayed hidden out of view in Mar-a-Lago while his second impeachment trial unfolded. It did not lead to a 'conviction' that would have seen Donald Trump disbarred from holding public office again, but it was the most bipartisan vote to convict in American history. Seven Republicans broke with the leadership to find Trump guilty of 'incitement of insurrection.' The Republican leader of the Senate, Mitch McConnell, was not one of those who voted to convict. He argued that constitutionally you could not use the weapon of impeachment when someone has left office (someone did wryly suggest that this was the same as saying to the traffic cop when you're pulled over for speed-ing, yes I might have been travelling at 20 mph above the speed limit then, but now I'm stationery, so you can't convict me). Nevertheless he was unsparing in his attack on Trump's behaviour. He was practically and morally responsible for what had happened. 'They [the mob] did this because they'd been fed wild false-hoods by the most powerful man on Earth because he was angry he lost an election,' McConnell said.

Joe Biden stayed away from offering a commentary on the Trump impeach-ment while it was going on—he was certain the result would see Trump acquit-ted. And he was right. Instead Joe Biden wanted to get on with governing.

But as he notched up 100 days in office I struggled to think of a single great soundbite from the preceding three months. The daily White House briefings are a snoozefest. There are no fights, no name calling. President Biden has not called me 'another beauty,' he hasn't declared the media the enemy of the people, he hasn't fired his National Security Advisor for lying to the vice presi-dent over a call to the Russian ambassador, he hasn't sought to introduce a chaotic ban on Muslims from entering the country, resulting in mayhem at the border. No middle of the night Twitter storms, no payments to porn stars, no rollicking MAGA rallies.

Dull. Dull. Dull.

With Donald Trump I was live outside the White House nearly every night. It was a TV journalist's version of a daily blow-out meal. The main nightly news running order more or less had me written into the template Trump/Sopel. With Biden? I'd be surprised if the producers in London remember how to spell my name.

So, is this the most boring president ever? Well no. Absolutely not. This is a far more interesting presidency—so far—than I think any of us could have imagined. The sad thing, from a purely selfish point of view, is that what it isn't is a made-for-TV spectacular, which is what I have feasted on these past four years. Donald Trump always had an eye for the visual and outrageous. He knew how to make himself the centre of attention; Biden seems to relish the lack of histrionics, and seems to think it is important for people to focus on what he delivers, rather than what he says. Most strange.

We reported that Joe Biden—all 78 years of him—would be a transitional president. He would be there to lower the political temperature; try to heal a divided nation. Take the absurd politics out of the response to Covid. Improve vaccine roll-out. But that aside not do too much. He appointed a largely technocratic cabinet, presumably to perform managerial functions. Maybe make the trains run on time a bit better, but not change all the rolling stock, let alone alter the gauge of the railway. A fitting ambition for Amtrak Joe.

But maybe we got that all wrong. Is it possible that far from being transitional, he's transformational? And that word is not freighted with a positive or negative connotation—it is merely a statement based on the ambition of what we've seen so far. And voters will soon decide whether it's for better or worse.

Let's start with the $1.9 trillion stimulus package. The headline from the passing of this humungous piece of legislation was that nearly all adult Americans would receive a cheque for $1400 to help them cope with the hardships brought about by the pandemic. It was cash in hand to a lot of Americans, and won massive approval—from Democrat and Republican voters alike—although not a single GOP lawmaker would back the proposal.

But look beyond the headline and lift the lid on this policy a little further. There is a lot to see. Perhaps most significant is the extension of child tax credits. Poorer families could soon be receiving up to $3000 per child per annum. It is estimated this one measure will lift literally millions of youngsters out of poverty. As things stand, this measure is for 2021 only—but it is clear within the White House that Joe Biden wants to make it permanent. It is a major piece of social policy. It is big potatoes.

With the passing of the stimulus package—or the American Rescue Package as it is more properly called—Biden wanted to correct something he felt that Barack Obama had got wrong when he came to power and inherited the mess of the financial crisis in 2009. Yes, Obama passed a variety of measures—but with hindsight it was seen as too cautious; not ambitious enough.

He's planning something similar for America's infrastructure. Again, the price tag will be in the trillions. Again, the ambition will be immense—not just the staid repairing of bridges and roads (important and vital though that is); it is about making digital access more equitable—but it goes wider than that. Way wider. 'It is not a plan that tinkers around the edges,' the president told an audience outside Pittsburgh. 'It is a once-in-a-generation investment in America.'

The wishlist of what it will achieve goes on and on. The infrastructure plan will create millions of jobs in the short term and strengthen American competitiveness in the long. It will lead to greater racial equality. The focus on new, cleaner energy sources will help the nation fight climate change.

Now there is an element of motherhood and apple pie in this shopping list, but the statement of intent is big, and this is what makes boring old Joe Biden so interesting. Arguably the dominant idea in American politics for the past forty years has been the low taxing, economy deregulating, budget balancing, competition encouraging, union limiting small government of Ronald Reagan. The same is true of the influence of Thatcherism in the UK—yes, there have been 13 years of Labour government since Maggie's demise, just as here there have been the Clinton and Obama terms since Reagan. But arguably they operated within, and were defined by, the orthodoxy of the monetarist economists who held such intellectual sway on both sides of the Atlantic.

After the morale-sapping defeats of the 1980s—both for Labour in the UK and Democrats in the US—the head scratching was intense on what they needed to do to win, and both Bill Clinton and Tony Blair came to believe that tax raising, big government pledges would just ensure that history repeated itself and the cycle of defeat would go on.

But Biden—for better or worse—wants to use the pandemic and woeful state of America's infrastructure to say unapologetically to the American people, 'Yep, big government is back.' It is territory that Republican opponents—still trying to sort out their post-Trumpian identity—will be keen to fight on. Joe Biden, though, seems to be relishing the battle; making the case for higher taxes on corporations and the wealthiest.

This is a big break with the past and a mighty gamble. So far, his approval ratings on the ground where he has chosen to fight—handling of coronavirus, the economic stimulus, his plans for infrastructure—have been positive. Less so the chaos there has been at the Southern border; something the president now acknowledges is a crisis. And the perennial issue of gun control is going to lead to a lot of huffing and puffing, but it's hard to see what he will be able to achieve through legislation, given the fine balance of the Senate.

Around 60 days into his presidency, Biden brought together an interesting group of people at the White House. The presidential historian, Jon Meacham, was asked to assemble a number of his most eminent colleagues for a sit-down that Joe Biden was anxious to host. He is already thinking about his legacy and what he needs to do to secure it: what was the limit of presidential power; what lessons could he learn from his predecessors. At one point he turns to—perhaps—the most revered of these presidential scholars, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and says 'I'm no FDR, but ….' Perhaps Joe Biden is eyeing this as his moment to deliver a New Deal à la Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or the Great Society, with its war on poverty and fight against racial inequality that was championed in the 1960s by Lyndon B. Johnson.

The taunt of Donald Trump during the campaign was that Biden may have been in politics for over four decades, but what did he have to show for it.

Looks like in power he is trying to give a mighty clear answer to that question—even if it doesn't make for great theatre.

In the months after Donald Trump left office, he didn't leave Florida. With the Twitter and Facebook bans remaining in place we are not given that hour by hour, blow by blow update on Trump's mood swings. He's set up an office and there is a steady stream of emails updating journalists on who he wants to settle scores with. But through one relationship, we can see the power that the president still exerts. That relationship is with the House of Representatives minority Republican leader, Kevin McCarthy.

But let me spool back very quickly. McCarthy had been a cheer-leader for Donald Trump when he was in the House. Always supportive; always riding to his side. But then, after the storming of the Capitol on 6 January, the most senior Republican congressman went his own way and said this: 'The President bears responsibility for Wednesday's attack on Congress by mob rioters. He should have immediately denounced the mob when he saw what was unfolding.'

So far so brave. But then McCarthy feels the icy blowback from the Trump base, and from the former president himself, who was enraged. McCarthy then says Donald Trump can't be blamed, and his fast-changing analysis settles on the slightly ludicrous take—*all* Americans were responsible for the riot that left five dead. Which is pretty much the same, if you think about it, as saying no one was responsible.

And to heal this breech, Congressman McCarthy flew to Mar-a-Lago to kiss the ring, seeking forgiveness and absolution for the momentary lapse. But more importantly, if you read the statement put out by Donald Trump's office afterwards it shows that the former president still believes he is the Republican Party's kingmaker; the powerhouse that ambitious GOP wannabes need to bend the knee to. And it feels reassuringly familiar in tone. The first paragraph of the statement issued by Trump's office says this:

> The meeting between President Donald J. Trump and House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida, was a very good and cordial one. They discussed many topics, number one of which was taking back the House in 2022. President Trump's popularity has never been stronger than it is today, and his endorsement means more than perhaps any endorsement at any time.

Do you see what I mean about the tone being reassuringly familiar? I mean, close your eyes and you could almost imagine it was written by Mr Trump himself—even though it is in the third person singular. And as for the claim that his popularity has never been stronger—can anyone point me to the polling evidence that substantiates that?

The ex-president may have lost power, but he is determined to maintain his grip on the Republican Party. In essence he's saying, if you want to win back the House from Democratic control in November 2022, you need me on side. Because I can create hell if I'm not. And the defenestration of the third most

senior Republican in the House, Liz Cheney, is proof of that. She voted to impeach Trump and has been unsparing in her criticism of the president's repeated election fraud claims. Trump called on McCarthy to move against her. And he did. She's been removed from office.

For the past few months Donald Trump has not been seen much.

There have been occasional TV appearances. But do not think he has gone away. His grip on the American public may have loosened, and the political temperature may have dropped a few degrees, but his hold on the Republican Party is vice-like. Donald Trump is casting a long shadow, and will continue to do so for a long time to come.

The Agenda-Setting Power of Fake News

Fran Yeoman and Kate Morris

The concept of fake news has become a prominent issue in the UK, US and elsewhere, entering the popular lexicon particularly since the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the British Brexit referendum. Researchers argue that the term itself is unhelpful, preferring to break down information disorder into categories like disinformation (deliberately false information shared to cause harm); misinformation (false information shared without that intent); and mal-information (true information shared to cause trouble) (Wardle, 2020). Tandoc et al. (2018) developed a typology of fake news that broke it down into news satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, propaganda and advertising. However, 'fake news' is still widely used as an umbrella definition and, more substantively, has entered the media and popular consciousness.

If the politics of 2016 focussed attention on the power of mis- and disinformation to potentially sway voting intentions, it was the Covid pandemic that appeared to show how mis- and disinformation could be a matter of life and death.

Research has shown exposure to misinformation around Covid lowers individuals' intent to vaccinate to protect themselves (Loomba et al., 2021). Recent official figures in the UK showed that adults living in the most deprived areas of England were more likely to report vaccine hesitancy (8%) than adults living in the least deprived areas (2%) (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

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In the UK, efforts have been focused on halting the spread of potentially harmful information online. Suggestions for how to do this range from a top-down approach that would see far tighter regulation for digital platforms to a bottom-up response—teaching the UK's population how to be more media literate (DCMS, 2021a).

This chapter will focus on the bottom-up process of taking lessons in how to spot mis- and disinformation to the communities that are perceived to be most vulnerable to the agenda-setting power of fake news, drawing on research by the authors scrutinising news literacy initiatives for children in the UK.

Agenda-setting Theory in an Age of 'Fake News'

Agenda-setting is the well-established theory which holds that the media has great power to determine the salience of particular issues within a society. Scholars have long researched and debated whether traditional news outlets continue to play an important role in 'shaping political reality' (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) or at least determine what the public has opinions about. As long ago as 1963, Bernard Cohen concluded pithily that while the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think…it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963). In an era when those traditional 'legacy' outlets have comprehensively lost their exclusive ability to reach large audiences quickly, and must now compete not only with well-meaning digital native start-ups but with a vast array of sources of information online some of which are propagating mis- and disinformation, fresh questions around agenda-setting are emerging. Most pressingly, to what extent does this so-called fake news possess its own agenda-setting power either without our societies as a whole or within particular communities? Furthermore, to the extent that it does, what can be done about that problematic fact?

Fake news undoubtedly has agenda-setting capacity. More than half (58%) of respondents to a major global survey in 2021 said that they had concerns about misinformation, and in Brazil this figure is as high as 82% (Newman et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, other researchers have set out to examine what McCombs and others have termed the inter-media agenda-setting capacity (e.g. McCombs & Funk, 2011) of fake news. Here, the emerging picture is nuanced. A study of 'fake news websites' within the US media landscape found a complex and reciprocal relationship between those sites and partisan news outlets particularly, with each influencing the agenda of the other to a limited degree (Vargo et al., 2018). A second study found that rather than having a "unique agenda-setting role" in coverage of the 2016 US election, fake news sites "added some noise to an already sensationalised news environment" (Guo & Vargo, 2020). It indicated that it was the misinformation sites that borrowed ideas from the 'fact-based media' rather than the other way around.

Trust in News

The picture then is unclear, and the research above suggests that journalists are not necessarily following agendas set by fake news. Yet growing concern about mis- and disinformation is having some impact on news media practices, in that organisations have diverted resources to set up fact-checking units such as Channel 4 News' FactCheck or to employ specialist disinformation reporters, such as the BBC's Marianna Spring. 'Fake news' has itself become a feature on news lists. Following McCombs and Shaw's logic, the very fact that the mainstream media is giving time and prominence to fake news as an issue is likely to promote it as being important and troublesome in the minds of news consumers (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This, along with the widespread public concern about misinformation in general highlighted above and relatively low levels of trust in media (Newman et al., 2021), raises questions about whether citizens feel they can rely on any form of information. Confusion about where to get information in a fragmented landscape and cynicism even about trustworthy sources lead, according to the London School of Economics' Truth, Trust and Technology Commission, to apathy and disengagement (2018). On a more positive note, there is evidence that in at least some markets, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a relative rebounding of trust in news media, while a growing 'trust gap' between attitudes to news overall and greater scepticism about news on social media suggests that audiences do distinguish at least to an extent between sources (Newman et al., 2021).

The impact of this is not equally spread. A citizen's media dependence—the extent to which they rely on mediated information to form ideas about political and civic issues—depends on factors including education (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). There is evidence that their propensity and ability to sift through a complex media landscape to find reliable information are in turn impacted by their socio-economic status. Having analysed news consumption in 18 countries, Kennedy and Prat found that low-income, low-education individuals use fewer news sources and that high-income inequality at a national level was linked to information inequality (2017). An international study of computer and information literacy (CIL) found links between higher socio-economic status and greater CIL (Fraillon et al., 2014). There is also evidence that media literate individuals are more resistant to conspiracy theories and so-called fake news online (Craft et al., 2017).

Polly Curtis has written in a UK context of the 'great unnewsed' who struggle to engage fully with democratic society, drawing on research that shows greater socio-economic inequality in news consumption habits online than off (Curtis, 2019). Raising the question of whether the 'unnewsed' are more vulnerable to mis- and disinformation, she says: "Poor information for poor people; richer sources for the rest. This digital divide has serious ramifications for every element of our democracy and society."

The implication of this is that if news and information literacy levels reflect socio-economic inequalities within society, then the likelihood of a person or

community being convinced by false information, with consequences for their beliefs or behaviours, is also unequal. Research that has found links between education and decreased propensity to believe fake news or conspiracy theories supports such a position (e.g. Van Prooijen, 2016).

AN UNEQUAL DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT?

For Giusti and Piras, the digital ecosystem as currently constructed creates a further power imbalance; that between the ease of creating and spreading false information and the challenges of identifying it (Giusti & Piras, 2020). Barriers to generating fake news have never been lower, they point out, given the ease with which one can publish digitally and promote via social media. Meanwhile, "the activity of recognising and interpreting fake news requires knowledge, expertise and the capacity to use technological instruments. There is a clear imbalance between the accession and detection phase, producing a situation of inequality" (Giusti & Piras, 2020). There is evidence that mis- and disinformation could have particular power to set agendas or influence behaviour within some sections of society rather than others. Research by the Reuters Institute across six countries found that despite concern about Covid misinformation being centred around social media and messaging applications, people with low levels of formal education were far less likely to say that they relied on news organisations for information about the pandemic, and more likely to rely on those same social media and messaging applications (Nielsen et al., 2020).

When considering how and why misinformation shapes agendas within particular communities, First Draft's 2021 report on the influence of false information about the Covid vaccine within the USA's black communities, where vaccine take-up was below the national average, provides a useful case study. Pointing out the "nuance and complexity of vaccine-related narratives surrounding Black communities on social media," the researchers highlight the inter-relationship between offline factors such as unequal access to vaccines, long-standing issues such as mistrust of health authorities that stem from systemic racism and the influence of anti-vaccine misinformation that spreads via social media having originated in both black and non-black spaces (Dodson et al., 2021). In understanding the influence of those anti-vaccine messages among black communities, they say, we should not forget the wider context in which they are being received: "While misinformation can fuel mistrust, the relationship isn't one-way; mistrust also makes people more receptive to misinformation." As an additional dimension to this, it is worth noting evidence that some minority communities are more likely to use non-traditional platforms to obtain information, particularly where language could be a barrier to accessing mainstream media. For example, two-thirds of Latino adults in the USA see YouTube as a primary source for their political news (Valencia, 2021). At the same time, Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen testified in 2021 that while only 9% of that platform's users were English speakers, 87% of misinformation spending was on addressing problems with English-language content

(NBC, 2021). As Facebook expands into different countries and languages, the *Washington Post* reported her as saying, "the economics just doesn't make sense for Facebook to be safe in a lot of these parts of the world" (Valencia, 2021). If the social media giants are focused on problems in English, while non-English speaking nations and minorities are using their platforms to get their news, this presents further potential for the 'fake news' to go unchallenged and set agendas in an unequal and differentiated way.

News Literacy as 'Inoculation' Against Misinformation

In terms of what is being and could be done to diminish the '"fake news" epidemic,' Rubin proposes a 'misinformation and disinformation triangle' as a conceptual model in which efforts are directed at three key components. These are the pathogen (fake news including clickbait and falsifications); the host (audiences with limited capacity to critically analyse information); and the environment (platforms that create a context conducive to the spread of mis- and disinformation) (Rubin, 2019).

To deal with the 'host,' news audiences, with their unequal access to information and unequal vulnerability to the agenda-setting power of fake news, Rubin advocates "proactive educational campaigns" to 'inoculate' the public and create "more informed citizens and critical thinkers" (Rubin, ibid.).

This approach has critics, who point out that news and media literacy cannot be considered a panacea to all the multi-faceted challenges of information disorder. Wallis and Buckingham, for example, have suggested that too great a focus on empowering consumers through media literacy risks 'responsibilising' audiences (Wallis & Buckingham, 2019); in this context essentially passing the buck on to audiences by training them to spot fake news rather than addressing the problems that allow it to flourish.

And yet, news and media literacy education have risen up the political agendas in many countries including the USA and UK as a potential response to the perceived impact of false and misleading information on democratic debate.

The Rise of News Literacy in the UK

In the UK, news literacy initiatives began to appear, fuelled by the divisive Brexit campaign of 2016 and later, the Covid pandemic and the associated concerns about the power of mis- and disinformation to influence populations. These included projects set up by news organisations, charities, teaching associations, tech companies and others, which attracted the attention of parliamentary committees and the government-commissioned Cairncross Review into a sustainable future for journalism (Cairncross, 2019). A number of these projects came together under the umbrella of a News Literacy Network, a loose coalition founded in 2018 with the aims of sharing best practice, signposting teachers to relevant resources for teaching news literacy and promoting the importance of this kind of education (National Literacy Trust, 2018b).

Some of them attracted international attention; the Guardian Foundation's Education Centre and NewsWise programme won a Europe-wide award around the same time from the World Association of News Publishers (World Association of News Publishers, 2021), while Shout Out UK, a social enterprise teaching political and media literacy, worked in partnership with the US embassy to deliver resources on COVID-19 misinformation (Shout Out UK, 2020).

The manner in which this nascent movement initially developed, however, with multiple actors developing news or media literacy interventions more or less independently of each other, meant that the landscape was left somewhat fragmented. Research published by the UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to underpin its media literacy strategy in summer 2021 found 170 media literacy initiatives, albeit using wide parameters, of which 51% incorporated "recognising disinformation, misinformation, hoaxes, fake news, and use of technology for deception" (DCMS, 2021b). Establishing which social groups are engaging with many of these initiatives, or indeed the depth of that engagement, is difficult given that the most common delivery method among the 170 was the provision of online resources (85% of the 170). There is also a lack of robust evaluation (DCMS, 2021a). Yet the DCMS report noted on the one hand that particular user groups within UK society might be particularly vulnerable to low media literacy levels (e.g. older adults and those from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds) and on the other the relative lack of specific media literacy provision for such groups (DCMS, 2021a, 2021b). This again points to at least a differential agenda-setting *potential* for mis- and disinformation between different sections of UK society.

Reaching the Most Vulnerable Users

Research conducted by the authors in the spring and summer of 2021 indicated that this differential potential was not lost on those working in the UK's news literacy sector, where a number of projects looked to address it by targeting their efforts at vulnerable groups. From its inception in 2016, NewsWise focused its work on schools with above-average percentages of children eligible for pupil premium (additional government funding for disadvantaged children in England).

- **NewsWise: A Case Study**

  NewsWise—a partnership between the Guardian Foundation, the National Literacy Trust (NLT) and the PSHE Association—is a free, cross-curricular news literacy project for 7-to-11-year-olds across the UK that provides teachers with curriculum-based lesson plans, online resources and school workshops.

When it was established in the spring of 2018, the NewsWise news literacy programme had at its heart an aim of targeting children from less advantaged backgrounds, taking as its lead its own research which showed they were less

able to correctly identify real and fake news than more advantaged peers (National Literacy Trust, 2018a).

It did this through a blend of teacher-led sessions using NewsWise lesson plans and in-school workshops led by trained facilitators from the charity. They worked in schools across the whole of the UK, targeting areas of need using markers including low levels of literacy and free-school meal take-up.

Since its inception, the programme has reached 8069 children, 152 schools, 2242 teachers and 107 parents or carers across the UK. In 2021 the average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals across the 35 primary schools that participated in NewsWise was 25.3%, in contrast to the national average of 17.3% (Picton et al., 2021).

This remit to serve those from less advantaged backgrounds has only deepened in the intervening years as concerns have grown about how mis- and disinformation disproportionately affect people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Curtis, 2019), with the Covid pandemic shining a spotlight on this intersection.

Hence NewsWise shifted its criteria for in-person delivery in 2022, using what it described as a 'regionally focused approach' that pinpointed places where it felt its work would have the most impact, including COVID-19 rates as a factor. Elli Narewska, NewsWise's programme manager, said that by linking the programme content to the childrens' lives where they lived, the hope was that they would connect better with the programmes' learning outcomes.

"The plan is to tailor the programme to address the specific issues and concerns of the communities we work with, making our work more meaningful and increasing the potential positive impact," she said.

Working with NLT, NewsWise used four criteria to decide where to work; these were:

- National Literacy Trust hub area (identified as an area with low literacy levels)
- Identified via the English Indices of Deprivation (National Statistics, 2019)
- Areas or communities under-represented by mainstream media
- Areas worst affected by COVID-19; associated with negative impact on educational outcomes

These criteria generated a loose profile for an area's population that could include, but was not limited to, people from BAME backgrounds, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and people living in areas of the country that do not receive much attention from national news organisations.

Narewska said that Birmingham, with its diverse but fragmented communities who don't necessarily interact, would be where the NewsWise tailored programme would first be implemented with other regions to follow. The charity would continue its other work online, as it did during the Covid lockdowns in 2020/2021.

"It is one of the locations most severely impacted by Covid, with a high proportion of the population who come from a BAME background (where there is evidence of higher risk of diagnosis and of dying from Covid), one of the highest rates of workers on the Coronavirus job retention scheme, and the highest percentage of Universal Credit claimants in the UK," she said.

Another important theme underlying the selection process was that of seeking out areas or communities underrepresented by mainstream media—so-called news deserts. Research has found that between 2007 and 2017, the number of local newspapers dropped from 1303 to 982 (Cairncross, 2019).

In community consultations carried out by NewsWise people in Birmingham spoke of Muslim and other minority communities being misrepresented in the news. Research in 2018 found a third of a 10,000 sample of articles in the UK press misrepresented, or generalised, about Muslims (Hanif, 2018).

Coupled with issues around underrepresentation and misrepresentation were those of an awareness of a lack of diversity in the UK media—something partner organisation The Guardian Foundation is committed to reversing.

Research published by the National Council for the Training of Journalists in 2021 found that 92% of the journalism workforce came from white ethnic groups against a national average of 88% across all UK workers (Spilsbury, 2021).

Narewska said this was borne out by community consultation results from Birmingham. "They [told us] they do not feel represented by journalists in national media and there need to be more journalists who the local community can identify with," she said.

NewsWise was not alone in this focus on the less advantaged. The Student View worked predominantly in state schools, and asked that at least 50% of the children selected to attend their workshops were in receipt of the pupil premium.

NewsWise also used research commissioned by its partner organisation the National Literacy Trust to help it identify suitable locations where its news literacy workshops would have most impact. The Family News Literacy Report found that parents from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to never watch, listen to or read news with their children (45% vs 37%) and to believe their children don't have the skills to spot fake news (52% vs 39%) than parents from more advantaged backgrounds (Picton, 2019). A senior NewsWise manager said: "The importance of our policy is further underlined by our experience of visiting schools. A common theme in many of the institutions we visit, is of school being a safe place for children whose home lives may lack stability. I meet teachers who talk about generations of poverty, unemployment and low literacy in families."

Indeed, evidence from interviews with those involved in news literacy projects indicated low levels of news consumption for many of the children—and by extension their families—attending workshops. Several spoke of the importance of parents in the process, and how their habits inevitably inflected the views of their children.

One teacher whose school worked with NewsWise spoke of low levels of engagement with news amongst the school community. "The sorts of socio-economic backgrounds we have … I worry because I think parents are getting their news off Facebook. They [the children] don't know anything really, their parents don't, and they don't have a hunger to know."

The Scope of News Literacy Education

Forced by the pandemic to pivot to online delivery of their workshops, our research found that projects including NewsWise but also BBC Real News and Shout Out UK and The Student View could deliver to more schools, including in geographically remote parts of the UK that were previously challenging to reach. Yet notwithstanding the move to online, the proportion of the UK school population that received any actual tuition from an external initiative in the summer of 2021 remained small; a generous estimate would be 50,000 pupils across the UK compared to an English total of 8.9 million pupils (age 4–18) attending 24,400 schools in 2020/2021. NewsWise, for example, reached 3715 pupils between May 2019 and July 2020 (Picton et al., 2020) and 1878 in the Covid-hit 12 months from then (Picton et al., 2021; (Department for Education, 2021). The breadth and depth of these interventions even for the pupils who did participate were limited, due to multiple factors including the challenges of finding classroom time for non-curricular subjects and the scale and funding challenges of the relevant projects. During the pandemic the BBC Real News workshop became a one-hour online session; Student View scaled back its offer from 12 in-person hours over a few weeks to a single, three-hour online session.

This means that despite the work being done by the news literacy initiatives in this space, at the time of writing millions of young people at risk from the agenda-setting powers of mis- and disinformation were not being reached by these targeted efforts, even with the efficiencies of online delivery.

Media Involvement in News Literacy

Meanwhile, the UK's news and media literacy landscape includes the involvement of the news industry itself. According to DCMS, 19% of its 170 media literacy initiatives are provided by media organisations (DCMS, 2021a). Prominent examples of this kind of involvement in the sector are the BBC's Real News strand, the *Economist*'s close involvement in Topical Talk (formerly the Burnett News Club) through its Educational Foundation and the *Guardian's* connection through its own Foundation with NewsWise. Other news providers including News UK and *The Telegraph* have media literacy programmes that involve the provision of online resources such as lesson plans.

While independent or long-term evaluation of the educational effectiveness of news literacy programmes is scarce (DCMS, 2021b) there are some who see benefits in using journalists to do news literacy work. As Buckingham (2019)

writes, "what's not to like?" about media companies sharing expertise and resources, for free. Others argue that some quarters of the news industry regard media literacy projects as a means of investing in education and creating news literate citizens (Brites & Pinto, 2017). Brand-building and audience creation are recognised, too, as motivating factors behind the involvement of news platforms in news literacy. In her paper on Finnish initiatives, Jaakkola coined the phrase 'journalism literacy' and argues that one of its goals is that of ensuring audiences know how to appreciate news, as opposed to other online content. When seen as audience development, it becomes easier, she writes, to promote media literacy programmes within media organisations (Jaakkola, 2020).

However, given the challenges of trust in and engagement with the professional news media outlined above, particularly from those communities where the evidence would indicate that misinformation has the greatest agenda-setting potential, the involvement of new outlets in multiple different—even competing—media literacy projects raises several questions. The first is about whether a news literacy project that identifies with particular brands risks linking what should be a universal skill set to the wider political and socio-economic agendas of those brands. The second is whether a version of news literacy, across the various industry-linked projects, that seeks to frame the misinformation challenge as one of 'us' (the unproblematic professional media) versus 'them' (other information sources) risks alienating the very people who might most benefit from the learning on offer. If a community draws heavily, for various reasons, on non-mainstream information sources, how helpful are resources and sessions that model 'big brand' journalism and consumption of it as best practice?

An Uneven Response to an Unequal Problem?

More broadly, the news literacy landscape within UK schools as of early 2022 operated on an 'opt-in' basis. For a pupil to study misinformation within citizenship lessons, for example, they would have needed to attend a school that substantively taught citizenship, with a teacher who chose to look at misinformation. Participation in a scheme run by external providers required in many cases sustained commitment from an engaged teacher with the agency within the school to arrange that participation, as well as in some cases the budget to pay for it.

Outside of the formal school setting, provision of media and news literacy education and resources was similarly patchy. For example, despite evidence that smartphone-only internet access is linked to more limited media literacy, and that this is significantly more common within lower socio-economic groups (Ofcom, 2021), little of the UK's media literacy activity was targeted specifically at these groups or at others who might have particular vulnerabilities or needs, such as people for whom English is not a first language (DCMS, 2021b).

Up to and during the coronavirus pandemic, then, news and media literacy in a UK context at least presented an unevenly distributed solution to an

unequal problem. Research indicates that media literacy levels are linked to democratic factors including socio-economic advantage, implying that certain communities are more vulnerable to the agenda-setting power of fake news. Yet educational provision in this area was not organised in such a way as to ensure that these social groups received widespread access to it.

This is a landscape that has evolved quickly, first in response to the political turmoil of 2016 and then to the huge information and public health challenges of the pandemic. Despite numerous initiatives, the question of how to combat the agenda-setting power of so-called fake news, particularly among citizens who are most vulnerable to it, remains unanswered.

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Can We Rebuild Broken Relationships? Examining Journalism, Social Media, and Trust in a Fractured Media Environment

Patrick R. Johnson and Melissa Tully

Journalists' ability to produce work for and connect with their audiences through social media has contributed to the blurring of boundaries around professional journalism (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). Research has considered questions of who or what is a journalist in this new environment, who comprises the audience, and the ways that social media influences relationships between journalists, news, and audiences (Hermida, 2014, 2020; Singer et al., 2011). In this messy media environment, in which professional journalists compete with everyday users—some with bad intentions—to produce and circulate news and to get their content in front of audiences, issues of (mis)trust have become so pervasive that scholars and pundits alike have raised alarms over this crisis (Coddington & Lewis, 2020; Fink, 2019; Lewis, 2020). Collaborations, organisations, and initiatives around the world are working to rebuild audiences' trust in the news and in journalists and are attempting to leverage the same social media tools and platforms that have played a role in the diminishment of trust in journalists and journalism.

The issue of trust is central to this on-going crisis and proposed solutions (Lewis, 2020). Therefore, in this chapter we first conceptualise trust and then turn to current research about journalism, social media, and trust. This includes

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research about news industries and audiences. We then transition to a case study about the Trusting News Project, a non-profit education and training initiative that focuses on trust-building strategies for journalists and newsrooms.[1] In this section we examine how the organisation defines trust, the frameworks it employs to help journalists develop relationships built on trust with their audiences, and how social media plays a role in building these relationships. We conclude by discussing future economic, political, social, and practical challenges. We also highlight opportunities to rethink several longstanding assumptions about journalism that could promote relationships built on trust between journalists and audiences, including rethinking news values, journalistic practice, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in journalism.

Context

As we entered 2021, Americans trusted news at alarming low rates. According to the Reuters Digital News Report 2021, only 29% of Americans agreed with the statement, "I think you can trust most news most of the time," the lowest percentage in the 40 countries surveyed (Newman et al., 2021). These low levels of trust persist around the world. Finland ranks highest in trust in news at 65%, a percentage that still means 35% of Finns do not have a lot of trust in journalism. In France, only 30% of respondents agreed that "you can trust most news most of the time" with similar numbers in Greece (32%), Taiwan (31%), and Argentina (35%), among other countries (Newman et al., 2021).

When trust was measured slightly differently, Toff et al. (2021a) found that 66% of Americans "trust information from the news media in the United States 'completely' (15%) or 'somewhat'" (51%). The percentage was even higher (78%) for trust in news, "that you choose to use." However, the United States still showed the lowest trust across these two measures when compared to the other countries in the study, Brazil, India, and the UK. Gallup data also show that trust is low in the United States with 36% of participants having a "great deal" or "fair amount" of trust in the news (Brenan, 2021).

In the United States, trust in news differs along demographic and political lines (Newman et al., 2021). For example, The Pew Research Center found that eight in ten Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents have "a lot" or "some" trust in the news compared to only three in ten Republicans (Gottfried & Liedke, 2021). This gap is the most significant partisan gap since 2016. A Gallup poll shows a similar divide with 68% of Democrats trusting the news and only 11% of Republicans (Brenan, 2021). Regarding social media and the news, Americans tend to trust social media and the news they get from it even less. For example, only 35% of Americans either trust news "somewhat" or "completely" on Facebook, 29% on Twitter, and 22% on YouTube (Toff et al., 2021a). Republican trust in social media is at 19% compared to 34% of Democrats and Democrat-leaning independents.

[1] https://trustingnews.org/about-us/

These low levels of trust reflect a key challenge for journalists and newsrooms. As Fink (2019) puts it, lack of trust is the "single biggest challenge" for journalism (p. 40). So how do journalists contend with this? How do they respond to their audiences not trusting them or what they produce (news)? Could journalists' use of social media contribute to building or rebuilding trust? Journalists have engaged more with their audiences over social media during the last two decades. Despite this, journalists and newsrooms still struggle to understand their audiences and to deliver the kind of news and information audiences need and want (Nelson, 2021). Journalists also share and produce their work through social channels, including using social media and crowdsourcing to gauge public opinion (McGregor, 2019). But this engagement and use of social media for myriad professional and personal reasons has blurred the boundaries of journalism even further (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). This blurring contributes to the challenges of addressing issues of trust. Given this context, the next section examines trust as a concept and considers its key elements to better understand how to address the "trust crisis" from a standpoint that is grounded in research and practice.

Trust and Related Concepts

Trust is a complex, multidimensional construct (Ardévol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017; Toff et al., 2021a). As such, its definition and measurement are often debated. It captures a relationship that includes both "different dimensions of trust as well as different objects of trust" (Toff et al., 2021a, p. 10). The dimensions include cues, preconceptions, and experiences with the news. Cues emerge from deliberate public discourse that focuses on claims about the news itself. Preconceptions are normative beliefs. And experiences are related to journalists' performance, usually resulting from commonly associated terms such as fairness, bias, accuracy, transparency, among others (Strömbäck et al., 2020; Toff et al., 2021a). Objects of trust include news brands, journalists, and content (Strömbäck et al., 2020). By thinking about different levels of trust, we can better interrogate how audiences are perceiving and receiving the news. Trust is closely tied to audiences' abilities to traverse information, critically think about sources, and build a healthy dose of scepticism (Toff et al., 2021b). Toff et al. (2021a) found that "those who trust news the least also tend to be the most dissatisfied with democracy" (p. 23) highlighting the link between the democratic role of the press and perceptions of the public. Despite the disagreements, a few key concepts consistently emerge as the building blocks of trust. These include objectivity, transparency, credibility, and accuracy. The next sections briefly explore these concepts as they relate to trust broadly and their implications on social media and journalism specifically.

Objectivity

Walter Lippmann contended that the role of journalism in a democracy was to help citizens understand world affairs. This was done through journalists' authority to question political figures and demand involvement in political discourse (Lippmann, 1920), and was essential for a democratic society and a free press to exist (Pickard, 2020). Journalism's relationship with public figures was important for maintaining integrity and credibility (Ryfe, 2012), and therefore objectivity would serve as an essential norm in journalism—creating an image of a responsible but detached press able to cover key issues of the day (Ward, 2004). Journalistic objectivity became a part of professionalism and was enculturated in newsrooms (Evenson, 2002; Maras, 2013). The normative roles that were established as part of the institution of journalism (Schudson, 2001; Tandoc et al., 2013) meant that journalists increasingly became aware of their potential to contribute "truth" in service of democracy (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). This also meant that these norms were shared among journalists (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003) and are often considered ritualistic opportunities of socialisation (Schudson, 2001), and position institutional identity at the forefront of value construction (Zelizer, 1993). Objectivity is also valued by audiences who connect it to trustworthiness and reliability and consider it in assessments of journalistic performance (McQuail, 1992).

For the concept of journalistic objectivity to remain powerful, journalists must enact and perform this value so that audiences continue to accept it as part of the journalistic process (Tucher, 2004). Yet, for some, journalistic objectivity is not only an unattainable standard, but also closely attached to a status-quo in journalism that excludes marginalised voices and continues to perpetuate social inequality. This critique hits the entire premise of objectivity and questions if it was ever even possible. These critiques emerge from analysing coverage and journalism institutions, which have continually shown the exclusion of marginalised populations. Varma (2019, 2020) contends that journalism must bring the experiences of the marginalised into focus. In doing so, journalism contributes to heightened awareness of social justice, something traditional conceptions of objectivity would advocate against. In their research on Black news audiences in the United States, Brown et al. (2021) show that Black people are "not overly pleased with the performance of the news media coverage of protests" (p. 7) for Black Lives Matter. Increased stereotypical coverage of Black communities and an erasure of Black life in the news "further erode Black people's trust of news organisations and others in their community" (Brown et al., 2021, p. 8). How the news frames images of Black and brown people has the ability to influence social movements, civil unrest, and at-risk and marginalised audiences' emotions. A conflation of events in favour of objectivity can "delegitimize social actors and obscure their issues" (Stamp & Mastro, 2020, p. 619). The critiques of journalism and objectivity emphasise its problematic connection to trust as "being objective" is purely in the eye of the beholder.

The concept of objectivity, despite journalism's century-old subscription to it, is problematic if we are in search of a more diverse journalism and a return of trust in the institution. Shifting from objectivity is "seen as a threat to the standards and normative ideals of journalism" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020, p. 176). Shifts are necessary to attempt to win back the trust of all, rather than maintain the status-quo. From this, three other concepts related to trust emerge—transparency, credibility, and accuracy. Each addresses a key facet of trust, while also departing from the problematic, privileged, and white history of objectivity (Callison & Young, 2019). In fact, rethinking objectivity and moving away from its current usage in journalism may be essential to rebuilding trust between journalists and audiences, particularly among communities who have been least served and even harmed by journalism (Usher, 2021).

Credibility

The concept of credibility emerges vis-à-vis discussions of honesty and authenticity. Perceptions of media trust are directly linked to perceptions of media credibility (Strömbäck et al., 2020; Enli & Rosenberg, 2018; Kiousis, 2001). Credibility emerges and is signalled in three ways: message credibility, source credibility, and media credibility (Fisher, 2018; Metzger et al., 2003; Schiffrin, 2019). The use of social media by journalists has slowly dissolved the boundaries among these three categories. Because it is harder to separate these categories, how audiences perceive journalists' biases becomes increasingly more difficult to understand or measure. In essence, social media complicates journalists' perceived credibility and therefore if and how audiences trust them (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018). Credibility is linked to the presentation of self to others and how this presentation is then rewarded or punished (Benet-Weiser, 2021). Because of their use and presence on social media, journalists are increasingly vulnerable to audience reactions, which can lead to increased transparency in their process and accuracy in their work as a way to build credibility, and perhaps, trust.

Transparency

Transparency has been considered as a possible replacement for objectivity (Vos & Craft, 2017) as a norm in journalism (Karlsson, 2010). The value is enshrined in the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics as their fourth pillar. It is an attempt to mitigate perceived bias in coverage or process and a way in which news outlets can increase their credibility with audiences (Masullo et al., 2021). Transparency is seen in the journalistic process when reporters discuss the work that led to production of "the news." The concept helps journalists to shed light on motives and actions, both their own and those of others (Balkin, 1999). In doing so, transparency becomes part of truth telling and building trust inside and outside of newsrooms. The desire to be transparent lends itself to reducing uncertainty in relationships (Cotterrell, 1999).

As a form of truth-telling (Singer, 2007), transparency can lead to more trust-worthy journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

Conceptually, transparency is seen as an element of disclosure, or one's ability to be open, honest, and up-front about the process and practice of their actions. The desire to disclose is considered responsible and ethical, and a chance to reduce bias in one's work and activity (Granados & Gupta, 2013). The advent of social media and journalists' place in and on it shifted the role of transparency in news making. Journalists' capability to present themselves on Twitter, for example, allows for audiences to be invited into the processes and provides a different level of involvement in news production (Revers, 2014). The heightened level of accessibility lends itself to more opportunities for transparency and correction (Karlsson et al., 2017), thus shifting journalists' ability to maintain their professional authority and autonomy (Singer, 2007). Yet, unlike objectivity, transparency relies on openness and situates journalists in a place of visibility, which could contribute to building trust.

Accuracy

Journalists' obligation is to report the truth and to do so accurately. Accuracy arguably is one of the most significant concepts to journalists' ability to develop and maintain trust. However, Mitchell Charnley's (1936) study of accuracy in the news showed that nearly half of news articles contained errors. Work like Charnley's continues nearly a century later (e.g., Maier, 2005; Porlezza et al., 2012). Accuracy is also elevated by the Society of Professional Journalists in their Code of Ethics where it is linked to transparency in the Code's fourth pillar.

Kohring and Matthes (2007) identify accuracy of depiction as one of the four dimensions to measure media trust, and accurate depictions are directly linked to the credibility of the journalist. Accuracy's role is connected to both transparency and credibility. In the age of social media, the ability to report accurately is often in contention with the desire to report quickly as journalists and newsrooms chase clicks and shares. The need to produce correct information and to do so openly and honestly necessitates a careful and deliberate respect for information and people, which is challenging in a social media environment that does not often prioritise either (Chambers, 2021).

Trust, Journalism, and Social Media

Social media has played an evolving role within journalism; as such, the implications of it on public trust in journalism have also evolved. Early uses of social media assisted in the shaping of editorial decision-making in newsrooms (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). The inclusion of social media provided opportunities for resources to be allocated differently thus prompting newsrooms to change hiring practices, resource allocation, and interactions with audiences (Neilson & Gibson, 2021). Early work for social media producers and editors in newsrooms included increasing readership and traffic, and the role was usually

reserved for a more tech-savvy journalist (Wasike, 2013). The BBC used social media to push the newsroom to emphasise values of truth and accuracy and made transparent impartiality a part of trust-building with their audience (Bélair-Gagnon, 2013). But this early social media adoption in newsrooms also meant the line between the editorial and advertising departments would decline, which in turn led to the role of social media in journalism evolving.

As new social media platforms emerged and established newsrooms declined, social media became an opportunity for newsrooms to market themselves and their content to audiences. The gradual erosion of economic capital in journalism pushed newsroom leadership to rely on social media for more innovative needs (Tandoc & Vos, 2016), and did so at a rapid pace (Assman & Diakopoulos, 2017). Audience engagement would become a core tenet of social media jobs in journalism. Now, journalists would be using social media metrics to change their news gathering and editorial practices (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018), or chase clicks to determine what content will be published (Petre, 2021). Journalists would now use social media to gauge and write about public opinion and polling in real time (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; McGregor, 2019), and be able to build audience insights to increase revenue (Neilson & Gibson, 2021). Changing newsroom practices meant news content could spread more widely and quickly, but that also meant the audience's trust in the content being produced began to face increased scepticism. Journalists would now need to think more about how information is shared via social media, technology changes professional roles, and relationships are built in order to develop and sustain trust with their audiences.

When the media system relies on professional journalists to convey information, trust goes up; however, the use of social media means other actors, including citizen journalists and individuals with "bad" intentions, can share news. The need to maintain trust in the profession of journalism is a primary driver of journalists *not* using social media (Heravi et al., 2014). The level of trust isn't linked to a journalist's scepticism, but instead reflects concerns about the medium itself (Heravi & Harrower, 2016). The diffusion of information through social media channels, especially from actors who aren't professional journalists, complicates public trust, with audiences becoming more distrustful given exposure to a wide variety of information (Ceron, 2015; Hermida, 2010). Audiences are increasingly needing to rely on news literacy behaviours (Vraga et al., 2021) to navigate the social media ecosystem; and journalists are having to contend with misinformation (Benkler et al., 2018) and attacks on their integrity to build trust with their audiences.

The lack of trust in social media doesn't deter journalists from using it. Rather, journalists have a high adoption rate of social media (Heravi & Harrower, 2016) and the technologies are pushing them to modify their professional norms and practices. This shift has also meant journalists moved to social media to market their own content and interact with their audiences (Mellado & Hermida, 2021). The blurring of personal and professional on social media has led audiences to question how and if journalists are engaging in ethical

journalism in their use of social media (Crilley & Gillespie, 2019). Journalists can now be seen as a promoter, a celebrity, or a joker (Mellado & Hermida, 2021). Social media helps journalists to be humanised and their emotions to become important in building and maintaining relationships with their audiences, which is both an opportunity and a challenge for trust-building.

Some scholars claim that professional journalists should be enhancing interpersonal relationships with their audiences in an attempt to build both trust and credibility. When interpersonal relationships are emphasised, audiences are more likely to trust the news being shared with them (Toff et al., 2021a). These interpersonal relationships allowed social networks to move beyond newsrooms sharing information (Turcotte et al., 2015). Journalists' ability to personally interact with one another and their audiences (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018), as well as orienting audiences to political news and public affairs (Kreiss & McGregor, 2017) leads to tangential impacts such as political decision-making and trust in other institutions like politics (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018) and science (Huber et al., 2019). It also has implications for both trust and democracy (Crilley & Gillespie, 2019). Creating these relationships may just be what journalists can do to bolster their trustworthiness.

Newsrooms and journalists have the potential to utilise social media for purposes of truth telling and trust-building. Social media offers an opportunity for newsrooms and journalists to engage with and for their audiences differently. Serving audiences becomes a form of accountability; it forces a form of honesty. Journalists must navigate, negotiate, and defend their credibility, and do so championing transparency as a form of trust. The immediacy of social media reporting affords a heightened need to get facts right, and to correct misinformation when possible. It also means that newsrooms must situate themselves within a framework that is open to commentary and critique. In doing so, and by using social media as a trust-building mechanism, journalists and newsrooms may find themselves being able to rebuild the trust they've lost through deliberate journalistic practices.

CASE STUDY: THE TRUSTING NEWS PROJECT

Several government and non-profit organisations are working to rebuild trust in the news. For example, in the United States, the government is seeking to invest in local journalism through the Local Journalism Sustainability Act (United States Congress, June 16, 2021). In 2019, the Knight Foundation announced it would provide $6 million in funding to rebuild trust in media (Knight Foundation, March 31, 2019). CNN recently launched an educational programme called CNN 10 to bring news into the classroom (CNN, 2021). The American Press Institute and Knight-Lenfest Newsroom Initiative's Better News project attempts to solve the crisis of declining trust in journalism by providing resources to newsrooms around the country. One module, "Building Trust," offers guidance to understanding the issue, while also giving newsrooms different strategies and tactics they can use. These vary in complexity, something the

Better News project identifies for each strategy, and purpose (Griggs, 2017). The Trust Project also houses resources that emerged from trust indicators they developed from speaking directly with people about what they value in their news. The Trust Project is a global initiative and positions their 8 "Trust Indicators" as having global reach and impact. These indicators for a trustworthy news outlet include best practices, journalist expertise, type of work, citations and references, methods, locally sourced, diverse voices, and actionable feedback—as having global reach and impact (The Trust Project, 2021). The Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin consistently makes trust a key component of research. In 2019, they found that balance and transparency are critical to newsrooms increasing public trust in their content (Chen et al., 2019). The research and subsequent report were done in partnership with the Trusting News Project, the case study presented below.

Trusting News is a joint project with the Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) and the American Press Institute (API), two organisations whose missions include "strengthening journalism in the service of democracy."[2] and advancing "an innovative and sustainable news industry by helping publishers understand and engage audiences, grow revenue, improve public-service journalism, and succeed at organisational change."[3] Relatedly, the purpose of Trusting News is to "demystify trust in news and empower journalists to take responsibility for actively demonstrating credibility and earning trust."[4] Together, the staff, led by 20-year professional journalist and educator, Joy Mayer, promotes ethical journalistic practices through coaching, research, and partnerships. Each area contributes to how the organisation understands, defines, and builds trust; this includes how they utilise objectivity, transparency, credibility, and accuracy in their work. This section focuses on the trust-building work promoted by the organisation, as well as how social media mitigates trust between newsrooms and audiences.

Trusting News blends research and professional training to lead newsroom partnerships into more trusting relationships with their audience. From the opening newsletter, known as "Trust Tips," Mayer presents trust as a human act that takes time, "Then show up and listen. Respond to questions. Thank people for sharing their observations. Delete comments that violate your comment policy. Defend your work, but don't be defensive. Be human. Be accessible. That earns trust."[5] There are now over 150 "Trust Tips" that build on each other and extend the work. Beyond the newsletters, Trusting News offers different training modules that focus on how to respond to credibility attacks by centring accuracy and transparency. To Trusting News, rebuilding relationships is possible if newsrooms are willing to listen and adapt. This

[2] https://rjionline.org/about-rji/
[3] https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/about/about-us/
[4] https://trustingnews.org/about-us/
[5] Trust Tips 1, https://mailchi.mp/2c81eb173569/trust-tips-1-ask-how-you-could-better-earn-trust?e=%5BUNIQID%5D

includes being intentional, accessible, and accountable.[6] Trust requires audiences to invest into and buy into the credibility of the newsrooms; it also requires newsrooms to invest in accuracy of information and transparency about processes that are shared with audiences. To model "accuracy," Trusting News suggests that newsrooms must learn to tell their own story and to consider the impact and scope of the information they are presenting.[7] Transparency involves sharing financial disclosures, ethics statements, and comment policies.[8]

Attention to ethics is a core responsibility of building a trusting relationship between newsrooms and audiences. Part of the training of journalists includes asking questions associated with the ethical guidelines outlined by the newsroom. For example, "what sources of data and officials do you trust?" While this asks journalists to think about their practice, Trusting News wants newsrooms to take that one step further by making audiences aware of that process. They again engage a reflection of accuracy and transparency to address concerns of neutrality and distrust. Trusting News found that feelings of distrust are linked to perceptions of bias and fairness because "people are susceptible to misinformation that comports with a partisan identity."[9]

Trusting News presents a cogent vision of trust and distrust with the goal of improving journalism. Moving forward, Trusting News sees a need for "A Road to Pluralism," which focuses on the lack of trust coming from conservative audiences of mainstream journalism. This programming relies on similar strategies as the rest of Trusting News' training materials with a focus on specific audiences. The research behind this initiative shows that newsrooms need to navigate conservatives' lack of trust in institutions broadly in order to address the lack of trust in the news they produce (Duchovnay & Masullo, 2021). To do this, journalists and newsrooms must acknowledge their generalisations, polarisations, perception, and bias (Duchovnay & Masullo, 2021). This means drawing from the box of trust-building tools they already created and focusing on accuracy and fairness in their coverage. These two values are critical regardless of political leaning, but their research shows that accuracy and fairness are even more important with conservative audiences (Duchovnay & Masullo, 2021). Although in its early stages, Trusting News' focus on political divides and newsroom distrust is needed if journalism is to move forward in its trust-building endeavour in highly polarised political environments, like the one that exists in the United States.

Trusting News sees social media as a means to build trust, despite its role in undermining trust in journalism, as long as newsrooms and journalists change

[6] https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OXWxG3_BNm-fAYIydpGDONH ddXzxcLmcrbzdU-9_vvk/edit#slide=id.g9791c77fb6_0_74
[7] https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WAR0P53Pv1L65h4qUSYQqkVL ZncATaPPHd4PLMloTiQ/edit#slide=id.g91be4942df_0_1319
[8] https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WAR0P53Pv1L65h4qUSYQqkVLZncATaPPHd4 PLMloTiQ/edit#slide=id.g91be4942df_0_1319
[9] https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JwQNGHUqVqqS4nXbTmBWCE_ N0Fm-3gx_cp4KV8dOyHs/edit#slide=id.g88226bfe38_0_18

their practices. Trusting News suggests that social media can be used to add details and context to a story,[10] as a form of outreach and connection,[11] as an opportunity to present wire content accurately,[12] as a means of building subscriptions and getting to know the staff,[13] as an acknowledgement of error and correction,[14] and as part of outreach to enhance relationships with audiences of colour.[15] The link between trust and social media has been central to Trusting News since its first "Trust Tips." For example, Trusting News encourages newsrooms to post on their social media prompts such as "We'd love to hear from you: How could we better be worthy of your trust? What questions can we answer about how our newsroom operates?"[16] Trusting News' commitment to trust-building through engagement with audiences and dedication to accuracy, credibility, and transparency is evidenced in the way social media is presented as an avenue for building trusting relationships with audiences.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

More recent research advocates for a deeper understanding of the audiences journalism serves (Nelson, 2021) and those it leaves out (Usher, 2021) and a deeper interrogation of identities and diversity in newsrooms (Callison & Young, 2019; Usher, 2021) to build credibility and to serve audiences who are often, rightly distrustful of the broader institution of journalism. Others posit that work needs to be done to increase news literacy behaviours of audiences to strengthen their ability to decipher the information coming across on their social media feeds and to act upon news and information in ways that are meaningful (Tully et al. 2021; Vraga et al., 2021). We believe rethinking institutions and audiences is imperative to the future of developing relationships built on trust. For example, Robinson (2019), offers four responses from journalism to address distrust: (1) reclaiming the journalism narrative; (2) reminding citizens that journalists are individuals, too; (3) enabling citizens with solution-based journalism; and (4) developing alternative revenue streams.

Journalists can also address long-held assumptions and norms of their practice. For example, news values[17] are a bedrock of journalism education and

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[10] Trust Tips 142, https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=70780b5b20
[11] Trust Tips 139, https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=e9dbefa747
[12] Trust Tips 134, https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=d12b900a2a
[13] Trust Tips: Talk about the cost of journalism, https://mailchi.mp/26b6f80d1e32/trust-tips-talk-about-the-cost-of-journalism?e=%5BUNIQID%5D
[14] Trust Tips 144, https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=c6575b83f9
[15] Trust Tips 147, https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=7d5362603b
[16] Trust Tips 1, https://mailchi.mp/2c81eb173569/trust-tips-1-ask-how-you-could-better-earn-trust?e=%5BUNIQID%5D
[17] Most commonly held news values include timeliness, proximity, prominence, conflict, impact, and human interest.

practice. Harcup and O'Neill (2017) believe news values to be subjective judgements to help justify stories in the news cycle. They become the way in which we understand the newsworthiness of an event. Counter to the breadth of work in journalism-constructed news values, Edgerly and Vraga (2020) foresee audiences as being critical to the development of news values, something they see as "news-ness." The audience-centred shift means accepting that defining what is newsworthy is no longer as clear-cut as the values imply. It also means reframing the relationship between audiences and newsrooms to accept this co-creation of news values. This evolving concept of news-ness is directly tied to the trustworthiness of a newsroom and social media. These values are ingrained through different socialisation and professionalisation opportunities, and then enhanced and solidified in professional newsrooms worldwide. Two of the most common—timeliness and conflict—are elevated in the social media era. The desire to be first, and to break news on social media, and not always to be right, calls into question the role timeliness plays in trust-building through social media moving forward. The public vitriol and political contention on social media also highlight the challenge of seeing "conflict" as a bedrock news value. We believe that building or rebuilding trust and using social media to do so requires reframing values and approaches to journalism. Trusting News does just this by finding ways for newsrooms to reposition their coverage to enhance audience's trust. By encouraging newsrooms to use their social media platforms to engage with audiences and as an opportunity to be more transparent in their work, Trusting News believes that newsrooms will build their credibility as a starting point for relationships built on trust.

The relationship between newsrooms and audiences must be maintained. We contend that a care-based approach is necessary. If journalism takes an ethic of care approach to their practices, relationships will become central to the work they do. *Bothsidesism* would become an approach of the past. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice would become core to the missions, practices, and assumptions of journalism. We see this playing out in how journalists use social media to engage with their audiences. To start, it is shifting from a conflict- or timeliness-driven approach to producing content. It becomes about interacting with audiences about their concerns and reporting on issues that matter in audiences' lives. Coverage on social media would emphasise personhood, communities, and consequences. A care-based approach would also translate to how journalists interact with their audiences. Saldana and Vu (2022) found that when journalists reply to comments directly and civilly, the comments that follow are more civil. Journalists, in a sense, are modelling behaviour and engaging in dialogue in meaningful ways. Centring audiences, considering emotion, elevating equity and justice as institutional needs, and using social media as a means of connection to and with audiences will offer a way forward to journalism that is premised on earning, building, and maintaining trust.

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Images, Fakery and Verification

Susan Moeller and Stephen Jukes

Introduction

For roughly 100 years, *The New Yorker* has been famed for its extraordinary writing. It still is. But in its 2021 annual self-review, the weekly magazine surprisingly noted: "Visual and immersive techniques opened up new worlds and deepened our coverage of a variety of subjects, from human-rights crises to the art of the Hollywood memoir" (2021).

As Norwegian journalist, Ståle Grut tells us: "We need to prepare for a new normal, where scrutinizing online images and videos is as natural as being fascinated by them" (Nieman Lab, 2021). Whereas once words dominated, today images—digital images—do. And tech is supplying the tools we use to take images, as well as the platforms on which they appear. A photographer with a handheld iPhone—"the most popular camera in the world"[1]—'takes' a photo by pressing a spot on a flat sheet of glass toughened with embedded ceramic nanocrystals.[2] That touch activates the iPhone's "image processing, depth/disparity estimation, optical flow, object tracking, image registration, alpha

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[1] See: https://jobs.apple.com/en-us/details/200269963/camera-and-photos-camerasw-sr-machine-learning-research-engineer?team=MLAI

[2] See: https://www.techradar.com/news/what-is-apples-ceramic-shield-the-iphone-protection-tech-explained

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matting, Bayesian statistics, generative models, deep learning."[3] Today, a photo is no longer a product of chemistry, but of mathematics.

We live in an ecosystem of computing, storage and networking. The ways textual, aural and visual bits of information are found, saved, translated, shared, manipulated and understood are increasingly, inexorably digital. "Google's software engineers develop the next-generation technologies that change how billions of users connect, explore, and interact with information and one another," celebrated a Google job advertisement.[4]

"Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," the company declared in another job ad. "Whether finding new ways to capture and sense the world around us, advancing form factors, or improving interaction methods, the Devices and Services team is making people's lives better through technology."[5]

Google celebrates its "magical images that astonish people."[6] Apple engineering says, "We're creating something magical for the person who uses it."[7] Tech "magic" makes it possible for the roughly five billion of us online out of eight billion on the planet to take and share our virtual images wherever we go.[8] But the shift to digital images has implications for civic democracy. The images that are taken can be astonishing. We see more and further. Maybe even deeper. But not (necessarily) more wisely. Our privacy is gone. Our images are in the cloud. We have lost much—some might argue most—of our control over our own information. And we do not know—we are actually really bad at determining—which images that we see are fake.

The Inexorable Rise of the Image in Journalism

What does this mean when it comes to journalism? It is one of the profession's best-known clichés that a picture is worth 1000 words. And as the effusive rhetoric of Apple and Google shows, never has it been truer than in today's social media landscape in which still and moving images play an increasingly

[3] See: https://jobs.apple.com/en-us/details/200269963/camera-and-photos-camerasw-sr-machine-learning-research-engineer?team=MLAI
[4] See: https://careers.google.com/jobs/results/112729607477568198-senior-software-developer-camera-augmented-reality/?company=Google&degree=BACHELORS&degree=DOCTORATE&degree=MASTERS&distance=50&employment_type=FULL_TIME&hl=en_US&jlo=en_US&q=image%20search&sort_by=relevance
[5] See: https://careers.google.com/jobs/results/112729607477568198-senior-software-developer-camera-augmented-reality/?company=Google&degree=BACHELORS&degree=DOCTORATE&degree=MASTERS&distance=50&employment_type=FULL_TIME&hl=en_US&jlo=en_US&q=image%20search&sort_by=relevance
[6] See: https://careers.google.com/jobs/results/110478999919960774-research-scientist-computational-photography-and-machine-learning/?company=Google&degree=BACHELORS&degree=DOCTORATE&degree=MASTERS&distance=50&employment_type=FULL_TIME&hl=en_US&jlo=en_US&q=image%20search&sort_by=relevance
[7] See: https://www.apple.com/careers/us/hardware.html
[8] See: https://datareportal.com/global-digital-overview

prominent role in journalism and in the competition for attention. The proliferation of the iPhone and the multitude of Android competitors has created an unprecedented landslide of visual information in the online public sphere (Mortensen, 2015, p. 536). And that in turn has posed one of the greatest challenges for journalism to date as editors attempt to distinguish between what is genuine and what is fake. While newsrooms across the world have invested increasingly in verification teams to counter the threats of misinformation and disinformation, the technology to manipulate or generate digital images has far outpaced the ability to detect such fakes (Shen et al., 2019, p. 439). This matters: even if an image is revealed to be a fake, research suggests that the impact of misinformation on a person's perception, memory, emotions and attitude towards a past news event may remain after its detection (Sacchi et al., 2007).

The image has, of course, always been central to the profession of journalism. The first American and British newspaper barons of the nineteenth century quickly realised the importance of pictures in attracting new readers, enabling them to reap the profits made possible by mass printing and wide distribution across growing rail networks. At the same time, as journalists established norms of objective, fact-based reporting, the emergence of photography played into the ethos of being an eyewitness to events. Ideas of photographic verisimilitude fitted perfectly into the rationalist, positivist ethos that was becoming established in Anglo-American journalism from the mid-nineteenth century and that would hold sway, though increasingly challenged, for more than 150 years. Images have been popularly seen as evidence and a core component of journalism. As Zelizer observes, journalists value an image precisely because it conveys the message of 'having been there' and the idea of 'we were there and you were not' (2005, p. 171).

But in reality, there are several popular and false assumptions about images that continue to be prevalent today. Still photographs are at best a snapshot in time, freezing an event, and in fact involve all sorts of choices—from camera angle, exposure, framing and cropping to how they might be used within a story. Just like other forms of journalism, news photos are the work of selection and construction (ibid., p. 169). Images can come to symbolise events and accrue meaning, becoming 'iconic' and markers of popular and taken-for granted beliefs (Griffin, 2018, p. 325). But here too, lurk myths about the influence of such pictures. Associated Press photographer Nick Ut's 1972 image of the naked nine-year-old Vietnamese girl Kim Phuc fleeing a napalm attack has widely been seen as the defining image of the Vietnam War. But it is by no means clear that such images were responsible for turning public opinion in the United States against the conflict. Daniel Hallin's *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (1989) showed that US media coverage only turned negative long after the mood had shifted against the war (potentially as early as 1966). The view that vivid images drive public opinion is over-simplistic. Rather, it is argued, images most often react with individuals' existing

understandings of the world to shape information processing and judgements (Domke et al., 2002, p. 136).

That is not to say that images are devoid of impact or cannot be extremely powerful and emotive. Indeed, the emergence of social media over the past two decades and its intrinsically image-driven dynamic has been a major factor fuelling a rise of emotional content and affect in journalism and media generally. This is partly the result of technology and what Thompson (2005) has called a 'new visibility,' as unedited footage of violence and human grief finds its way into mainstream news outlets through user-generated content provided by citizens caught up in events. But these changes have their roots in wider cultural phenomena and the impact of the broader 'turns' of the past 50 years. What technology has done is to accelerate and exaggerate these influences (Jukes, 2020, p. 37). Plummer has argued that in a post-modern or late modern turn, we are part of an auto/biographical society dominated by 'life stories' (2001, p. 78); Furedi talks of a 'therapy culture' (2003); part of this broader cultural shift was also captured in the 'turn to affect' in the 1990s, a phrase generally credited to Patricia Clough who defined it as "a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory" (Clough & Halley, 2007); Wahl-Jorgensen has developed the notion of an 'emotional turn' in journalism studies (2020, p. 176). Together these trends have helped break journalism's taboo against emotion and undermine norms of objectivity at the very time that trust in traditional or 'legacy' news organisations has been on the decline. Polarised and opinionated discourse has become increasingly established through social media, and the role of the image has been caught up in the torrent of fake news, disinformation and conspiracy theories. Digital images can be created, manipulated or simply faked in a way that was inconceivable in an analogue world.

How Images Are Driving Editorial Choice in the Attention Economy

As media organisations struggle to find a business model that works in today's social media environment, still images and video footage have become essential tools in the fight for financial survival. Today's editors know that a story without images or video will not generate the clicks to trigger online advertising revenue streams. Visual material has, of course, always generated attention, and examples of 'accidental' footage of major events are well known. The Abraham Zapruder frames of the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, captured on 8 mm Kodachrome safety film, are widely cited (e.g. Allan, 2013) as the first example of citizen journalism. George Holliday's Sony Handycam footage in 1991 of white policemen from the Los Angeles Police Department beating a black 25-year-old, Rodney King, created waves across the United States. But such incidents are isolated. The intensity and volume of what today is called 'user-generated content' has grown exponentially over the past two

decades of social media. It started on a relatively small scale, with holidaymakers' footage of the 2004 Asian tsunami and grainy pictures the next year of the July 7 London transport bombings when commuters trapped in underground carriages uploaded mobile phone pictures to the BBC and other major news outlets. By the time of the Boston marathon bombing in 2013, a story without the inclusion of 'citizen witnessing' images was unthinkable. That attack has been called the first fully interactive American national tragedy of the social media age (Kakutani, 2013).

There are sound business reasons behind this trend as news media are increasingly distributed and consumed on mobile devices and apps. The 'attention economy' has devised numerous ways to maintain engagement as we 'subscribe' to social media channels, 'follow' personalities or 'like' and 'share' content. And part of that competition for attention depends on the use of still images and video, the latter often formatted to play automatically as consumers scroll down material in an app. A study on the use of social media images on Twitter and Instagram found they markedly increased retweets and likes, in some cases more than doubling the number (Li & Xie, 2020, p. 2).[9] By contrast, linking to an image actually reduced engagement (ibid.). In a study of the *New York Times* content, Berger and Milkman found that news articles that are higher in emotional intensity and arousal are more likely to go viral (2012). The combination of emotive images, news journalism and mobile platforms also has unintentional consequences. In a 2018 report, the UK regulator Ofcom found that news distribution via social media platforms is taking on characteristics of entertainment, with traditional lines becoming blurred (2018, p. 39). Ofcom noted how the primary source of news for many people is now the mobile phone and that this engenders a 'social media mindset' (2018, p. 39).

From Livestreamed Violence to Covid-19 Disinformation

The unprecedented volume of user-generated images and video now incorporated into mainstream news reporting allows us to witness events we would otherwise have never seen. And that material has a specific quality that makes it particularly valuable to news organisations—it is often raw, edgy, perhaps even grainy or slightly out of focus. The very fact that these images do not display the same high quality as those produced by professional news photographers or cameramen can heighten the impact and make them appear more authentic (Anden-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2011, p. 12). The fact that such images are not edited or digitally enhanced can make the impersonal detachment of mainstream news photography and journalism's preferred framing seem outmoded (Allan, 2014, p. 146). But what started as an enhancement to the news filed in the first decade of the twenty-first century soon developed a darker side as grisly images of Middle East captors standing over Western hostages were circulated online in what have been labelled "terrorist selfies" (Linfield, 2015).

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[9] The study focused on airline travel images and sports utility vehicles.

Video of killings were often posted online after the event (e.g. those of the journalists Daniel Pearl and James Foley). But in 2019, a 28-year-old Australian gunman went one step further and livestreamed over Facebook his deadly attack on Muslims at Friday prayers in Christchurch, New Zealand.

The underlying ethical dilemmas facing mainstream news organisations have not entirely changed as a result of this explosion of social media content. Two factors are, however, different and make the task of responsible journalism more difficult. Firstly, the sheer speed and scale of images flooding into newsrooms and flowing directly, unfiltered and raw, onto social media often requires journalists to make split-second decisions on whether to use material. Secondly, the potential to alter digital images and the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and 'deep fakes' have left newsrooms vulnerable and exposed to manipulation in ways unimaginable two decades ago. The focus on 'fake news' grew exponentially as President Donald Trump popularised the term and as it was subsequently picked up around the world; since then, the Covid-19 pandemic has seen a further explosion of fake images and video footage propagated by 'anti-vaxxer' campaigns. Online posts and memes suggesting that vaccines are part of a sinister plot to implant microchips into people or of videos suggesting vaccines cause cancer and infertility have become common on social media platforms. Astonishingly, the non-profit Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) has traced up to 65% of anti-vaccine content on Facebook and Twitter to just 12 people (dubbed the 'disinformation dozen') (2021).[10] Today, the potential for ill-intentioned players to inflict emotional distress or to purposefully influence opinions, attitudes and actions through visual misinformation poses a severe and growing societal risk (Shen et al., 2019, p. 440).

Concerns and Interventions

This risk places increasing responsibility on news organisations to invest in verification, to commit both journalists and technology to the task. It is tempting to think of verification as binary. Is it fake or isn't it? But there are many kinds of fakes, and different tools of verification are needed. For example, deepfakes, pictures of people who are entirely figments of artificial intelligence processing, pose verification challenges different than do 'real' photographs and videos that have fake captions appended or that have been manipulated in some way: people are deleted, elements are added, surroundings are altered, clips are edited out of order, excerpts are sped up or slowed down.

By rough measure, there are two types of images that need to be verified: photos and videos that the news media themselves (and others such as the courts) take or acquire and hope to publish as part of their own reporting or truth-finding, and photos and videos circulating 'out there' in social media,

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[10] Its analysis was based on a sample of anti-vaccine content that was shared or posted on Facebook or Twitter a total of 812,000 times between February 1 and March 16, 2021.

separate from the news media's accounts, but often shared by those who purport "to advance the truth" (Reddy, 2020).

Verification of the former kind of images has always been with us. It is called 'fact-checking', although in today's news climate, journalists are concerned about how to convince their audiences that their published news images *do* represent the world accurately and fairly. That is one reason (branding is another) why news media, if they have a choice, prefer to use images taken by their own vetted photographers, especially on international stories or on any stories where what is happening cannot be verified on the ground by editors (or their audiences). It is also a reason for the interest by media and tech start-ups in visual provenance certification via such interventions as blockchain and embedded QR codes. In autumn 2021, for instance, an alliance of Adobe, Arm, Intel, Microsoft, and Truepic announced technical standards for certifying the source and history of media content through The Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA), a Joint Development Foundation project.[11]

Image integrity certification can help journalists, as well as human rights, legal and other institutions, that need to verify what is in essence a chain of custody of photographic information. As Kathryn Harrison and Amelia Leopold wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*, blockchain and other forms of certification intrinsic to the original digital data of images when taken can offer news media "a decentralized, trusted mechanism for verifying the provenance and other important metadata for online content," a neutral way to establish the credibility of their images "independent of any publication or institution," and a technology that may be able to "financially incentivize the creation and distribution of content that meets community-driven standards for accuracy and integrity" (Harrison & Leopold, 2021). But such certification of images, while perhaps an instrument to restore some fraction of the news media's public reputation, is a long way from solving the problem of exponentially increasing disinformation. Blockchain does not solve the fraud, misinformation and manipulation via images shared on social media, or for that matter, false images shared on dating apps, or on real estate, insurance adjuster, and e-commerce websites (Schwab, 2021).

Two case studies in the following pages explore some of the practical difficulties in trying to establish if images are true, are fake or have been manipulated (and even whether we actually understand these terms), together with sensitive issues of privacy and data protection.

Case Study I: Evidentiary Photographs "Are digital images a manufactured construct? Does the act of zooming fundamentally alter a file's essence? Those are some of the unexpected, and at times inelegant, questions posed," wrote tech magazine *Gizmodo*, about the evidence submitted during the trial of

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[11] See: https://c2pa.org/public-draft/ and https://contentauthenticity.org/blog/announcing-the-c2pa-draft-specification

17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse who fatally shot two men and wounded another during civil rights protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in the United States on August 25, 2020 (De Guerin, 2021). The high-profile murder case came to trial in November 2021, and as the Associated Press reported, it "highlighted the US legal system's constant debate over forensic technologies, even fundamental ideas taken for granted outside the courtroom."[12] Mark Richards, the lead defence attorney, objected to the prosecution's request to play drone video of the killing and "use the pinch-and-zoom feature on the iPad to zoom in on the area." "I don't know what the state's going to do next," stated the defence attorney, "but I suspect that it's something along the lines of … they're going to use the iPad, and Mr. Binger was talking about pinching the screen. iPads, which are made by Apple, have artificial intelligence in them that allow things to be viewed through three dimensions and logarithms." As tech website Ars Technica glossed, "Richards was apparently trying to say 'algorithms.' When asked to repeat himself, he called them 'alogarithms' and added, 'I don't understand it all, either.'"[13] The trial, presided over by a 75-year-old judge who himself admitted "I know less than anyone in the room about all of this stuff," provided insights into two dicta: firstly, photographs are still being used almost two centuries after their invention as proof that something has transpired (the classic eyewitness argument of journalism's objectivity paradigm), and secondly, even those who daily take and use photographs personally do not understand the technology of digital images sufficiently well to confirm whether the photographs are accurate or fake.

There is an entire industry that has sprung up to verify others' images, new at least in scale. Attention has been prompted by two growing categories of actors: political and economic players who intentionally falsify images and set them loose on the world to gain money and/or acquire power (or limit others' power) and members of the public who for various reasons find common ground with those fake images and proactively share them on social media, with the effect that the images are massively disseminated and their corrosive messages are massively multiplied (Ye & Wu, 2010). Those two groups of actors together initiate a domino effect: personal sharing of the faked images lends an imprimatur to both the images and their messages—in essence one individual's sharing nudges friends and fellow travellers to share the fakes further.

Tracking the propagation of fake news in real-time is critical to stopping its spread. Modelling common user characteristics for detection (Liu & Wu, 2018) as well as incentivising users to flag fake news (a feature that Facebook introduced) are two methods that have shown some level of success

[12] See: https://apnews.com/article/kyle-rittenhouse-technology-wisconsin-kenosha-homicide-b561bef68dc6aadaadc9b45a1bd93a19
[13] See: https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2021/11/rittenhouse-trial-judge-disallows-ipad-pinch-to-zoom-read-the-bizarre-transcript/

(Tschiatschek et al., 2018). But study after study has also highlighted the limits of many methods. Flagging, for instance, is minimally effective for the simple reason that the general public is really poor at detecting manipulated photos (Nightingale et al., 2017). And trying to identify the bad actors within the public who are passing on the fakes is also only minimally effective. According to MIT Professor David Rand, "It's not like most people are just saying, 'I know this is false and I don't care.'" As a study he co-authored and published in *Nature* discovered (Pennycook et al., 2021): half of those who share false information online "do so because of inattention, related to the hasty way people use social media," a third share false information because they (incorrectly) believe it to be true, and only one in six knowingly share false news (Dizikes, 2021). "Whatever changes platform companies make, and whatever innovations fact checkers and other journalists put in place, those who want to deceive will adapt to them," noted University of Maryland Professor Tom Rosenstiel, former director of the American Press Institute. "Misinformation is not like a plumbing problem you fix. It is a social condition, like crime, that you must constantly monitor and adjust to" (cited in Anderson & Rainie, 2017).

Then there are partisan quote-unquote 'verification' sites, such as AIM or Media Matters, or corporate-affiliated ones such as Twitter's Birdwatch. These purport to catch "fake news" but are hardly helpful as forensic tools; they are often more part of the problem than part of the solution.[14] There are useful sites: those independent and relatively independent verification outlets such as IMPRESS, Snopes, FactCheck.org, Politifact, and Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network. And there are reporters at mainstream news outlets, including such stalwarts as *The Washington Post* and Reuters, who have jobs dedicated to fact-checking images—often photos and videos intentionally

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[14] Site links include:

- Snopes—https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/category/photos/
- Poynter—https://www.poynter.org/news/fact-checking/
- PolitiFact—https://www.politifact.com/
- FactCheck.org—https://www.factcheck.org/
- Washington Post—https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/
- New York Times—https://www.nytimes.com/spotlight/fact-checks

  - https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/insider/meet-the-washington-bureaus-fact-checkers.html
  - https://www.nytimes.com/by/linda-qiu

- Reuters—https://www.reuters.com/news/archive/factCheckNew
- Facebook—https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking
- International Fact-Checking Network—https://www.ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/
- Impress.press: https://www.impress.press/news/impress-investigates-accuracy-complaint-on-covid-19-and-vitamin-d.html and https://www.trustinjournalism.co.uk/
- Media Matters—https://www.mediamatters.org/
- Accuracy in Media (AIM)—https://www.aim.org/
- Twitter's Birdwatch—https://twitter.com/i/birdwatch

disseminated to undermine the integrity of elected officials and democratic institutions.

But despite these multiple efforts, mis- and disinformation cannot be stopped. Consequently, the fact-checking industry emphasises forensic identification, verification and, when possible, control. Each of those three approaches has itself become a multi-level and multi-disciplinary subspecialty across academia, media and tech. Identification, for instance, is central to many operations in the media verification ecosystem. Before fake images can be verified as fake and then controlled via tagging or by being censured, of course they must be detected. The dilemma is doing so at scale and in real-time, as became painfully apparent during the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom and the 2016 election in the United States that brought President Trump into office. Humans, even in teams, cannot effectively evaluate the oceans of image data that pour through social media every second.

The pipeline problem has given rise to efforts that pair humans, and their judgement capabilities, with algorithms, which have the advantage of computational speed. Jigsaw at Google in partnership with Google Research has been in the forefront of trying to counter visual disinformation by collaborating on "ways to provide fact-checkers with better tools to debunk image manipulation" (Project Assembler, 2021). Another reason to bring people and AI together is that neither alone is sufficient to reliably detect disinformation that appropriates factual images, for instance, as when accurate anatomical or medical images are appropriated for COVID-19 disinformation (Brennen et al., 2021). A teaming up of people and tools is also needed to identify disinformation that occurs via social media posts (often memes) that "work" by reassigning political meaning to images typically understood to be unrelated to political commentary—as historically occurred, for instance, when a picture of a pear in nineteenth century France or of Winnie the Pooh in twenty-first century China became understood to be critical references to French king Louis-Philippe (Mainardi, 2020) or Chinese president Xi Jinping respectively (Haas, 2018).

Case Study II: Privacy, Facial Recognition and Disinformation AI/machine learning (ML) can make sense of vast image datasets, such as Google's industry standard Cloud Vision API.[15] Others too have tapped into vast image datasets for purposes of facial identification, such as the software launched by Facebook in 2010 that made it possible for users to automatically identify those who appeared in their photo albums. However, as face-recognition technology has advanced, so too has public anger over the technology's abuse. Corporations and countries, democratic as well as authoritarian, have used databases of faces to serve disinformation agendas, at times in what amounts to campaigns of oppression against minorities. Some in big tech[16] (e.g. Amazon,[17] Microsoft,

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[15] See:https://cloud.google.com/visionandhttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BN8aO0LULyw
[16] See: https://www.g2.com/products/google-cloud-vision-api/competitors/alternatives
[17] See: https://docs.aws.amazon.com/rekognition/latest/dg/faces.html

IBM) have responded to the concerns about privacy and algorithmic bias by limiting who they sell their facial recognition products to. Others have made system-wide changes, such as Facebook: in November 2021, for instance, Facebook shut down its facial recognition system, saying it would delete the face-scan data of more than one billion users—although it did not say that its recognition system would not return (Hill & Mac, 2021). Still other companies, such as Clearview AI,[18] that train their facial recognition systems by scraping images from social media, including Facebook and Instagram,[19] have been given formal notice to cease their "unlawful processing" of faces, a violation it has been charged with under Europe's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).[20]

Although the European Union has put in place data protection regulations, facial recognition capabilities have been widely deployed. While mainstream independent media are expected to adhere to internationally recognised standards of accuracy, the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) upholds the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights stipulating that EU citizens have the right to protection of their personal data online.[21]

There are additional mis- and disinformation threats. Of course, verification is, by definition, reactive, and if fake images are disseminated, harm is effectively immediate and inevitable, even when not actively intentional, say when a third party unknowingly passes fake images on. Another challenge that arises is that AI is often trained to fit an image into one category or another—for example, is the picture fake or not?—and deliver an answer. The truth may be, actually, that the AI does not truly 'know' (Vincent, 2017). AI/ML will return responses from its hunt for fake images much faster than humans, but will make mistakes (as will the humans). Neither will be aware of their mistakes. Computational approaches to verification *can* identify certain factual information, but are challenged to counter malicious disinformation generated at speed by bots, Cyborgs, spam, camouflaged content polluters, clickbait and the like.

All falsified-image detectors have strengths and weaknesses: detectors will typically identify only certain kinds of manipulations.[22] As Jigsaw's Assembler experiment noted: "During Alpha testing, we found that fact-checkers and journalists are often tasked with debunking images that are underrepresented in our training sets and therefore the detectors aren't always able to accurately identify manipulations in these types of images. Some of the tricky cases we've observed include images that are screenshots of other screenshots and images

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[18] See: https://www.clearview.ai/
[19] See: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/technology/clearview-ai-test.html and https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/21/technology/clearview-ai-valuation.html
[20] See: https://petapixel.com/2021/12/17/france-orders-clearview-ai-to-delete-its-scraped-selfie-photo-database/
[21] See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/data-protection-eu_en
[22] See: https://jigsaw.google.com/the-current/disinformation/dataviz/

that have been severely downsampled (taking a high-definition, large image and making it small) or reformatted (for example, changing the image format from JPEG to PNG)."[23]

Artificial intelligence and machine learning are behind the Internet's software, such as browsers' search and spam filters in email. Over the last decades AI/ML researchers have further automated what are in essence those 'pattern-finding' exercises with deep neural networks (DNN). DNN are so-called because they are structured a bit like the human brain: the computing of the data is decentralised, processed and layered across thousands of equations (the 'neurons'). The 'learning' of the DNN mimics how human learn: AI algorithms are shown thousands or millions of images with labels attached to associate specific images with specific labels—a particular ECG line with a particular heart condition, for instance, or pictures of an animal with a trunk and large ears with an elephant (Gershgorn, 2016). The neural networks that power deep learning seem to learn almost effortlessly: feed them enough data and they can outperform humans (Martineau, 2018).

But AI 'learning' is a bit of a black box, with even researchers uncertain about how certain DNN learn. As MIT professor Aleksander Madry, a faculty member of the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab's Trustworthy AI initiative, reminded, "This goes back to the nature of guarantees and the underlying assumptions that we build into our models. We often assume that our training datasets are representative of the real-world data we test our models on—an assumption that tends to be too optimistic" (cited in Martineau, 2018). The effect? AI-trained systems can fail: the labels attached to the training data can be flawed, a catastrophe if one is training self-driving cars to "see" people crossing a street, for instance, but the AI does not recognise people with darker skin (Hern, 2019). There has been a history of unseen race gaps in the data fed to neural networks as occurred in 2015, for instance, when Google surfaced photos of gorillas when its image search was queried to find Black Americans. As *USA Today* succinctly noted in its lead story at the time: "Google has apologized after its new Photos application identified black people as 'gorillas.'" (Guynn, 2015) Google 'solved' that disaster by reporting 'no results' at all for the queries of the terms 'gorilla,' 'chimp,' 'chimpanzee' and 'monkey' (Simonite, 2018)—a laughably binary stop-gap measure that persisted for years.

There are other ways AI/ML training sets can be flawed. Challenges have arisen when adversarial examples are intentionally introduced, an insertion that affects AI's ability to correctly identify what it is seeing. A certain kind of adversarial image, called a 'perturbation', is essentially invisible to humans. But an algorithm trained with sets that include perturbed images mistakenly reads those perturbed images as other than what they appear to be. It does not take much manipulation to introduce errors. By misclassifying only 4% of images in one study, a DNN incorrectly identified images 97% of the time (Vincent, 2017).

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[23] See: https://projectassembler.org/learnings/

Problems with faked images of course go back centuries. For all that photography has historically been hailed as an inherently truthful medium, almost from its start individuals saw benefits in manipulating images. Photographers with Mathew Brady's studio staged photos and invented captions for battlefield scenes from the American Civil War in the 1860s.[24] Photographs of 'real' ghosts populated spiritualists' photos in the Victorian era.[25] Stalin in the mid-twentieth century became notorious for deleting political figures who he had purged out of official pictures (Blakemore, 2020). Decades later, graphics software such as Photoshop (developed in 1987), brought sophisticated editing to photography, making it easier—and less obvious—to alter image content. And by the 2010s, the popularity of video platforms increasingly prompted bad actors to tamper with videos, for example, in 2019 when opponents of US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi disseminated a video that purported to show her drunk, while in reality her adversaries had just slowed down the speed of the video so that her speech appeared slurred (Harwell, 2019).

Then came deepfakes, the term for AI-generated synthetic media created via Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), a term coined in 2017.[26] Tools that heretofore could detect fake images were ineffective in assessing deepfakes generated via GANs and image synthesis. Traditional verification tools "cannot sufficiently contribute to the detection of such manipulation trails, because they exploit different inconsistency inspection mechanisms," as researchers at Aristotle University in Greece noted (Katsaounidou et al., 2020). "In the past, digitally manipulated imagery has normally used photographs as its basis—an advanced form of cut-and-paste; you would take one bit of a photograph and cleverly insert it into another," explained Magnum photographer Jonas Bendiksen (2019). "But today, new all-digital technologies … are a different breed of manipulated imagery because they bypass the camera itself—everything is just generated by the computer chip."[27] These scenarios have necessitated new tactics to combat fakes. When it becomes nearly technologically impossible to detect fakes—and there is time to commit to discovery—external knowledge of a situation (e.g. triangulating to find another video of Speaker Pelosi's talk) may be one of the few useful tools.

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[24] The US Library of Congress reflects on the civil war images of photographer Alexander Gardner. See: https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-war-glass-negatives/articles-and-essays/does-the-camera-ever-lie/the-case-of-the-moved-body/

[25] See: https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20150629-the-intriguing-history-of-ghost-photography

[26] As Matt Groh at MIT's Media Lab observed, computer-generated (CGI) movies also are "technically examples of something that's been modified." See: https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/deepfakes-explained

[27] Bendiksen created what he called a "visual Turing test" for the photography world. He fabricated images of the town of Veles, North Macedonia, and gathered them together in a 'documentary' photo book. He then waited for the global photography community to expose his photos as the fakes they were. But his photos did not get outed … until he himself created a fake Twitter bot to provoke a conversation over the authenticity of his images.

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, the concerns about deepfakes are many. The technical barriers for non-experts to create AI-generated synthetic photos and videos are so low that almost anyone who wants to can create deepfakes. And while deepfakes can be used for relatively benign purposes such as retail marketing, they can also be deployed for defamation, to smear political opponents, to manipulate stocks and to undermine trust in democratic institutions (Hasen, 2019). Deepfake videos offer a particularly powerful public threat because, as the success of YouTube and TikTok have demonstrated, videos are perceived to be credible … and they spread easily. Law professors Danielle Citron and Robert Chesney observed, "A variety of cognitive heuristics help fuel these dynamics. Three phenomena in particular—the 'information cascade' dynamic, human attraction to negative and novel information, and filter bubbles—help explain why deep fakes may be especially prone to going viral" (2018). In short? As Halsey Burgund at MIT's Open Documentary Lab bluntly observed, "It's an arms race" (cited in Somers, 2020).

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Broad access to the Internet via handheld devices in everyone's pockets has not led to a utopian age of fair and accurate news, freedom of information and civic engagement. The cascade of effects of the digital age has included a loss of trust in news media and a global rise in authoritarian leaders shouting 'fake news' in response to news stories with which they disagree. (*The New York Times*, 2019). Authoritarian leaders and radical groups profit from flooding social media with false news and fake images. Mis- and disinformation are calculated tools for them to deploy; falsified news and fake images are used to stoke bigoted values and disenfranchise citizens. Misinformation, disinformation, deepfakes and their like have destabilised democracies. Their impact has been even worse in authoritarian countries. As Prof. Hany Farid, Dean of UC Berkeley School of Information, bitterly noted (2019): "Fake images and videos have led to horrific violence around the globe, manipulation of democratic elections and civil unrest."

Considering how to educate the global audience about mis- and disinformation is a second category of challenge. Teaching media literacy—including teaching audiences to have a sceptical mindset about accepting visuals on face value, especially those images that may be "confirming" a controversial stance—is already essential. Media literacy is today a core civic skill. Too many in the public dismiss even accurate news and information as relayed by experts who in past years were trusted: doctors, scientists, educators, photographers, documentarians. According to the US-based Pew Research Center, in 2021 only 12% of Americans trusted the media "a lot." The percentage of Republicans who had at least some trust in national news dropped by half in five years, from 70 to 35%. The percentage of Democrats who responded they had at least some trust in national news remained roughly constant over that same period, at around 80% (Pew Research Center, 2021). Determining how to address

what has come to be known as the 'disinformation crisis' must also take very stark partisan distinctions into account.

Then there are the technical challenges. There are the technical challenges in countering visual mis- and disinformation: for example, managing the unfathomable quantity of visual data to be assessed, designing and accurately labelling AI/ML training data sets and identifying real-time ways to detect falsified and entirely fictitious images. And there are the concomitant technical challenges of keeping audiences abreast of how image technology works. "I am very doubtful of whether all this technology and information is making us any smarter or wiser," said photographer Bendiksen (2019). "I mean, just look around the world, how easily everyone is manipulated either this or that direction. There is just too much information, it is too easy to spread it everywhere, and everyone gets to pick and choose which small fragment of it they want to relate to. Our powers of analysis are not getting better, and we aren't adept at sorting good data from bad."

It is a truism: control of the spread of fake news and fake images is a necessity. The consequences of not doing so are dire. But there is not a solution. Only stop-gap measures. Indeed, it may be too late to keep fake news from overwhelming us. Perhaps given our technological—now digital—world, where we find ourselves was always inevitable. In the words of the Old Testament prophet Hosea: "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

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Media Literacy (Response)

PART V INTRODUCTION: KAREN FOWLER-WATT AND JULIAN MCDOUGALL

Media literacy has been declared a human right by UNESCO for so long now that we might reasonably have expected it to be established in educational criteria and national politics, with a stable framework and consistent evaluation criteria. Instead, it is the subject of rapid, reactive 'solutionist' rhetoric as every new technology spawns another moral panic or global crisis brings with it another layer of information disorder. Voices from the field move in new, vital directions, such as indigenous media literacies and Global South perspectives, towards media edu-cologies. Media literacy, combined with activism for social justice through g/local application, is in these richer spaces responding to misinformation in a more holistic sense, as we saw in the previous parts, this intersects with algorithmic cultures, and the representation of nature, race, ethnicity, indigeneity and various forms of difference.

In these ways, the media literacy field is both growing into these 'other', diverse cartographies, increasingly concerned with how media literacy relates to feminism, critical race theory, social class, post-colonial and intersectional approaches and how these perspectives, political objectives and international contexts can 'decenter' the field. All this is very far away from the binary logics of the kind of solutionism that sees it as regulatory, to do with reigning in platforms, or instrumentally educational, to do with skills and competences that in themselves are assumed to foster resilience to fake news, responsible media use or online safety.

And so we arrive at this part having worked through the complexity of media misinformation and research-informed recommendations from where media literacy, with regard to misinformation, specifically, should start out from, which we seek to combine with these more interesting and politically charged visions of where it might be going.

This final part begins with Chap. 21 by Habib M. Sayah. This chapter presents a case study on the Tunisian youth-led alternative media platform Boubli

as a situated site of civic media literacy for social action. This chapter explores the ways in which Boubli has addressed information disorder in what may seem unconventional and rather indirect ways which are consonant with civic media literacy and practice and hold the promise of deep, yet non-obvious, effects on key drivers such as polarisation and homophily. The assessment of Boubli as a media platform and community relates to the theory of change we outlined in the introduction to this book, whereby converting media literacy into sustainable capability for positive consequences requires the kind of persistence Boubli exhibits through continued engagement with the community, frequency of activity and long-term, problem-driven, and serial youth-led content which explores social, cultural, political, and economic issues. Next, we move from Tunisia to Hong Kong, where Iain Williamson offers another case study, his media education teaching strategy: Chap. 22. This case study explored examples of student learning from a Digital Media course and more specifically, a unit on news taught to approximately sixty elective students each year. Examples of the pedagogy used by South Island AFP Media teachers have been explored including a focus on fact checking skills informed using authentic examples provided via the expertise of news journalists working in Hong Kong. The application of student learning in the use of fact checking tools such as Trust Servista, Tin Eye etc. is presented through analysis of the video essays submitted as summative tasks in this unit. Although the critical thinking skills required to complete this task remain extremely challenging for 14- to 15-year-old students, most successfully harness the tools offered to identify misinformation in the news stories they select to explore.

Chapter 23 by Maria José Brites, Ana Filipa Oliveira and Carla Cerqueira shares the outcomes from a European Union project, SMaRT-EU, in which the discussions about disinformation and clickbait were facilitated through participatory workshops to actively engage participants in these subjects and hear their voices. The results are based on a Portuguese sample and data analysed in this chapter suggests that age is an important factor, with specific digital challenges for older people and educational-related variances among the participants. Both the Portuguese and Tunisian case studies in this part speak to the importance of media literacy practitioners being attentive to inter-generational aspects, whether conflictual (Boubli) or more to do with levels of capability (Smart-EU). Next, in Chap. 24, Monsak Chaiveeradech aims to clarify how *Sati* (mindfulness) can be combined with the concept of digital media literacy to enlarge the new approach of self-literacy in order to investigate and understand an individual's patterns of habituation in daily life. *Sati* (mindfulness) is the core component of digital media literacy, he argues, as it enables individuals to develop competencies in which they can observe their own automatic responses based on their experiences that cultivate their own perceptions, beliefs, and myths. In this way, we can g/localise *Sati* (mindfulness) into the universal concept of digital media literacy for redefining and reframing digital media literacy in 'diverse approaches', to foster a critical mindfulness at the moment of media and information consumption, before misinformation goes

viral. Finally, in our own contribution, Chap. 25, we offer a 'meta' review of reviews conducted into media literacy during the pandemic. In this final chapter, we assess the evidence of impactful media literacy for resilience to misinformation; the applicability of this pre-pandemic work to Covid health information and evidence emerging from new media literacy research undertaken during the crisis and specifically focused on media literacy in the context of Covid. This meta review seeks to assess the value of media literacy at the intersection of misinformation and public health challenges.

Civic Intentionality First: A Tunisian Attempt at Creating Social Infrastructure for Youth Representation

Habib M. Sayah

This chapter explores the ways in which Boubli, a Tunisian youth-led media, has addressed information disorder in what may seem unconventional and rather indirect ways which are consonant with civic media literacy and practice and hold the promise of deep, yet non-obvious, effects on key drivers such as polarisation and homophily.

Conventional Approaches to Information Disorder

Information and communication technologies, especially social media sites, have generated tremendous opportunities for citizens and civic organisations to become more impactful than they were in the offline space, notably by enabling what Manuel Castells (2013) has termed "mass self-communication," but also by enabling them to create long-range connections with like-minded individuals and organisations. Not only do people have access to new means of communication which allow them to reach audiences at scale—and thus rival with states, institutions, corporations in communication power—but their networking practices are no longer constrained by geographic proximity and

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traditional identities—two constraints which have, historically, strongly shaped human relations.

However, growing uses of these technologies for uncivil ends have dampened early optimism. The proliferation of online harms such as hate speech, disinformation, and extremist propaganda has contributed to the fragmentation of online communities, to the emergence of social divides, and to the amplification of distrust. These negative effects are increasingly irrupting into the offline world and affecting community relations and social cohesion across the globe.

While fully acknowledging the harmful effects of misinformation on our societies and the individuals that constitute them, it is rather difficult for me not to see in current conversations about information disorder and misinformation the hallmarks of a "moral panic" (Cohen, 2011), from chain reactions reminiscent of Cohen's stages of moral panic to the consensus mobilisation (Klandermans, 1984) efforts made by agents of moral panic—mass media, moral entrepreneurs, a culture of social control, and the public. This statement from the introductory chapter of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* is particularly resonant with a myriad publications reminding us that *fake news is nothing new* (Crane, 2017; Blewitt, 2017):

> Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself. (Cohen, 2011, p. 1)

Most importantly, it is difficult not to heed Cohen's warning that excessive media focus on and exaggeration of *deviant behaviour* is likely to lead to an amplification of such *deviance*.

Even with good intentions, responding to information disorder in a panicky atmosphere can be a slippery slope towards the erosion of freedom of expression and democracy. The risk is even stronger in the context of Tunisia's fragile democratic transition as many Tunisians and observers agree that—despite abundant attempts to erode it (Freedom House, 2021)—freedom of expression is the only lasting gain of the revolution which led to the collapse of Ben Ali's authoritarian regime in 2011 (Hammami, 2015).

These concerns are reinforced by the fact that the "infodemic" (WHO, 2020) moral panic has mostly been a catalyst for conventional or traditional responses to information disorder which are problematic on several levels. There is, indeed, something hegemonic about these approaches which seem underpinned, if not by a "desire to punish" (Connolly, 1995), then by a rather hygienistic *desire to control* "culturally marked constituencies whose very being threatens the self-certainty of established" narratives, to paraphrase Connolly (1995, p. xxv).

Coercive responses to information disorder, from deplatforming to content moderation and censorship, are back in vogue (Honingberg, 2021). Non-coercive approaches such as fact-checking and source-checking, which have been embraced by media development actors such as BBC Media Action (BBC Media Action, 2021), are not less problematic: not only are they underpinned by a false binary (McDougall, 2019), but they may be experienced as a form of epistemic violence (Brunner, 2021). Indeed, authoritative truth-setting, especially when it is done by elites and powerful institutions, is, arguably, quite a violent act which may be counter-productive in that it can further alienate subaltern audiences and thus strengthen the appeal of conspiracy theories, exacerbate partisan hatred, and fuel animosity-driven *fake news* distribution (Osmundsen et al., 2021).

Even approaches grounded in media literacy—protectionist and skills-focused approaches in particular—seem deficient. Mihailidis (2019, p. 107) notes that "media literacy practices often focus on the protection of young people from harmful media messages and designs, or focus on providing skills to empower individual media creation." According to him, they suffer from five important limitations: (1) they assume a critical distance from the media on the part of the reader, (2) they are often transactional in that they prioritise skill attainment, (3) they are deficit-focused and (4) content-focused, and (5) they prioritise individual responsibility (Mihailidis, 2018). Mihailidis (2019, p. 5) argues that interventions which are limited by these constraints may be of limited effectiveness as they are not suited to the current information environment. I would add that conventional media literacy approaches are potentially hegemonic, even when they seek to foster critical thinking for example, because they often rely on the vertical imposition of epistemological and value systems rather than horizontally negotiating the rules of the game (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 15–16). Moreover, even when their methods are not hegemonic, conventional media literacy approaches are sometimes driven by hegemonic aims of social control such as the suppression of dissent.

As for standard approaches to media development, they do not fare much better. Although their initiatives increasingly focus on supporting independent and community media, and their efforts to promote regulatory frameworks which are conducive to freedom of expression are valuable, media development organisations seem to struggle to adapt their intervention logics to contemporary information environments.

Despite the conclusions of some of the research that they commission (AWRAD, 2019), which point to the limited relevance and viability of mainstream and traditional media as avenues for positive change—especially with regard to youth representation and inclusion—media development organisations seem to struggle to adapt their intervention logics to contemporary information environments.

Specifically, even though some of their own research acknowledges young people's deeply seated dissatisfaction with and disengagement from mainstream and traditional media (AWRAD, 2019), their interventions (e.g.

capacity-building, funding) tend to focus excessively on this sector. Despite recent research pointing to the limited relevance and viability of mainstream and traditional media as avenues for positive change—especially with regard to youth representation and inclusion (Sayah, 2020)—many donors operating in the media development space tend to invest in reforming traditional media, notably by generating incentives to be more inclusive of youth—by creating youth-centric shows or by ensuring the inclusion of young voices in pre-existing programmes. These approaches are short-sighted and deliver limited impact: while they boost youth inclusion in the short-term, local media organisations often revert to youth exclusion as soon as donor-funded projects—and the associated incentives—come to an end. Youth disengagement from traditional media consumption also means that communications targeting youth via traditional media are unlikely to reach their target audience. As we will see later in this chapter, these approaches are rightly met with scepticism by Tunisian youth.

It is unclear whether such approaches are symptomatic of media development actors' inability to step out of their comfort zone—after all, they are often rooted in traditional media themselves—or if these are desperate but deliberate attempts at status quo maintenance. Fixing news institutions which are often resistant to change and may soon slip into obsolescence is, arguably, less of a worthwhile endeavour than supporting the emergence a youth-led alternative which are in tune with contemporary information paradigms.

Nonetheless, conventional approaches have some merits. As regards media literacy initiatives in particular, Mihailidis (2018, p. 11) notes that they "have been impactful, where they exist, to impart skills, knowledge, and competencies to critique and create media." But we should be cautious when engaging with these conventional approaches because they may have the "serious and long-lasting repercussions" on our societies Stanley Cohen (2011, p. 1) highlighted.

CIVIC MEDIA LITERACY AND PRACTICE RESPONSES

There is, however, an academic current that emphasises the civic dimension of media literacy and proposes alternative approaches which, unlike conventional approaches, "[translate] into civic or social impact" (Mihailidis, 2018, p. 11).

These do not only address deeper—and often neglected—drivers of information disorder such as polarisation, alienation, misrepresentation, and marginalisation, but they are also exempt from hegemonic aims as they are compatible with an *ethos of pluralisation* (Connolly, 1995). Moreover, these deliberately aim to "produce media reformers who are embracing the potential of our new media ecosystem" (Mihailidis, 2019, p. 45).

Paul Mihailidis (2019) offers a way forward for media literacies to prioritise civic intentionality:

> They help to envision media literacy pedagogies and practices as enabling agentive action-taking, evoking a caring ethic, inspiring critical consciousness, devel-

oping persistent engagement, and creating conditions for emancipatory communication, where people are able to work together to respond to social problems that prevent progress from taking place. These approaches do not start with media texts, platforms, or modalities. Instead, they ask how media can support civic outcomes that bring people together in support of a common good. (Mihailidis, 2018, p. 11)

In a report published in 2018, Eric Gordon and Gabriel Mugar (2018) propose a "normative model of media practice" (2018, p. 29):

[Civic media] is not a genre, suite of technologies or even set of best practices; it describes an approach to media making that sits in direct opposition to the logics and actions that have perpetuated deep-seeded distrust in institutions. (p. 29)

Interestingly, Gordon and Mugar stress the importance of acknowledging that the current information environment is marked by "civic institutions lacking legitimacy among the public or direct constituents" (2018, p. 29) as well as distrust of journalists—this is particularly relevant to the Tunisian context as we will see in this chapter. Their framework is also mindful of power dynamics and gives importance to pluralism and representation as remedies to exclusion and marginalisation (p. 10)—which are drivers of information disorder.

In *Digital Media, Culture and Education*, Potter and McDougall (2017) put forward the concept of *dynamic literacy* which supports a bridge between media literacy and civic action.

Although they rely on slightly different constructs, all of these authors belong to a common field.

Like Mihailidis in *Civic Media Literacies*, Gordon and Mugar identify caring and a focus on practice which is aimed at the common good and collective processes of innovation and reform as central to the approaches they put forward. And, not unlike Potter and McDougall (2017), both Mihailidis and Gordon and Mugar's frameworks emphasise dynamism as opposed to static approaches and understandings of media literacy and practice. Finally, they all seem to agree that practice should be central to media literacy.

In sum, if I were to synthesise the tenets of this school of thought—let's call it *Civic Media Literacy and Practice (CMLP)*, I would say that, for these authors, media literacy approaches in the contemporary information environment should be:

- Relational, experiential, and practice-oriented;
- Animated by a caring ethic and civic aims;
- Change-oriented; and
- Mindful of the media context (representation, networked structure of the public sphere, power dynamics, dynamics of exclusion, and marginalisation), beyond aspects of text and ownership.

Situating Boubli: An Instrument for Young People's Self-Representation

Launched in 2019 by the Tunisian Association for the Development of Electronic Culture (*Association Tunisienne de Développement de la Culture Electronique*, ATDCE), a non-profit civil society organisation (CSO), Boubli is a multi-modal, youth-led digital media operating on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Discord.

In Tunisian slang, *boubli* means a hubbub, a kerfuffle, or a bangarang—in other words, a commotion often caused by conflicting views. Among young people, the term has taken quite a positive connotation which encapsulates the spirit of the project: "to make a *boubli*" is to disrupt norms and conventions. Boubli's mission is to empower young people, especially the most marginalised, to disrupt the media landscape and to challenge dominant narratives and stereotypical representations of youth through innovative content.

Born from the convergence of ATDCE and the British Council, during its first year of existence, Boubli received material—seed-funding—and technical support from the UK's international organisation for cultural relations under a European Union grant aimed at fostering youth resilience. With over 750,000 followers across four social media channels and some videos surpassing 1 million views, this young media has now achieved financial autonomy from its initial donor and is making progress towards sustainability.

Having served as technical advisor and chair of Boubli's strategic board, I have been able to witness the inception and development of this media and the internal debates that have shaped its *modus operandi* and ethos and am now able to offer a participant observer account of its inner workings and emerging impact.

This chapter argues, retrospectively, that although it was born out of a visceral desire to carve a space for young people in the Tunisian mediascape—a sentiment shared by ATDCE and the British Council at the time of its creation—rather than a theoretically grounded vision, Boubli remarkably fits the frameworks of CMLP, notably the value system proposed by Mihailidis (2018, 2019) and civic media activities described by Gordon and Mugar (2018).

From ATDCE's perspective, Boubli was a milestone on a continuum which originated in *Best of Three (Bo3)*, a YouTube channel they created in 2017 which focused on gaming and entertainment. ATDCE's members aspired to turn Bo3 into a wider-spectrum media capable of competing with mainstream outlets but catering to a growing segment of Tunisian young people who were increasingly estranged from local media.

The creation or Boubli should also be understood in the context of growing inter-generational tensions. Whereas the uprising of 2011 which dealt a fatal blow to the Ben Ali regime was led by young people, youth was de facto largely excluded from the nation's new democratic(-ish) order (Chograni, 2021; World Bank, 2014). Ninety-three, the age of President Caid Essebsi when Boubli was launched, was symptomatic of this systematic marginalisation of

youth which did manifest not only on the political plane but also on the socio-economic and cultural levels. Hence Boubli's focus on better representing youth as well as challenging oppressive norms and generational narratives.

As for the British Council, its motivation to support Boubli partly stemmed from a conviction that resilience could not be achieved through the linear, top-down messaging which is the hallmark of classic strategic communications, but rather through young people's media empowerment. In other words, the notion that influencing young people—a standard aim of communications-for-development initiatives which often rely on counter- and alternative narratives—was much less ethical and impactful than providing them with the infrastructure and resources to self-represent and to own their narratives.

The British Council's decision to support the creation of Boubli was also informed by recent evidence, notably from the Deutsche Welle Akademie's Shabab Live project (AWRAD, 2019)—which was later reinforced by a second, more comprehensive study conducted through the Tunisian NGO I Watch under the same Shabab Live project (Sayah, 2020). Findings from the two Shabab Live studies suggested that young people were dissatisfied with and distrusted Tunisian mainstream media and that they were massively migrating to social media where they looked for alternative sources of information. One key driver of youth's disengagement from mainstream media consumption is systematic marginalisation and stereotypical and stigmatising misrepresentations of youth, combined with paternalistic and disempowering discourses about youth. Further, Tunisian young people perceive mainstream and traditional media as oppressive and complicit in a system of generational domination which comprises the state, institutions, and economic and cultural elites (AWRD, 2019, p. 17; Sayah, 2020).

Taking heed of these findings, the British Council concluded that traditional media reform was not a promising avenue to greater youth inclusion compared to directly empowering young people to create their own media alternatives. This conclusion was later confirmed by the second Shabab Live study: when asked whether they would invest in traditional media reform or in enabling the emergence of youth-led alternative media, most young people opted for the latter (Sayah, 2020, p. 68).

CMLP in Practice

In this section, I explore some of the ways in which Boubli has operationalised the frameworks of Civic Media Literacy and Practice, as well as their relevance and significance with regard to information disorder.

A Media-Transformative Approach

One of the most obvious ways in which the Boubli approach intersects with CMLP is their teleological aspect which is centred on taking action to change the media environment rather than merely deciphering it.

Boubli's self-positioning as an *alternative media* and its purpose of challenging the norms of youth media representation in Tunisia form, indeed, a transformative agenda. Boubli was also very consciously conceived of, *ex ante*, as a system-level intervention: introducing a disruptive agent animated by a *caring ethic* (Mihailidis, 2018, 2019) into a deeply oppressive national media ecosystem. This resonates with Stefania Milan's (2016) concept of *emancipatory communication practices* which "represent a challenge to dominant powers in the communications and media realm" (p. 108), seeking to "create alternatives to existing media and communication infrastructure" (p. 108). Drawing on Milan's work, Mihailidis (2018, p.11) identifies emancipation as one of the constructs which underpin civic media. But in what ways would Boubli challenge these dominant forces?

Interviews (Sayah, 2020, pp. 56–65) with Tunisian digital content creators and alternative media actors, including Boubli members, suggest that, in their perception, alternative media represent an existential threat to traditional media. One of the interviewees said that "young digital content creators are exerting a pressure on television standards which will gradually mirror digital norms." For him, the choice facing traditional media outlets was to either adopt the new norms emerging bottom-up, from the digital space, or risk accelerated obsolescence and extinction. A member of Boubli also stated that he "joined Boubli because I believe that the media landscape will change dramatically, and I saw the seeds of this change here at the Boubli Space." Whether these expectations are realistic or not, they clearly denote an aspiration to transform the media at the system-level through alternative practices.

Reclamation of control over participation and representation is also key to Boubli's emancipatory agenda. In Milan's words (2016, pp. 108–109):

> Up for grabs is the power of participation, which refers to the possibility of making informed contributions to democratic decision making and public life, but also to access to public communication more generally: in other words, the power of deciding who should speak, what messages should be transmitted, and on what conditions.

Milan's conception of the *power of participation* is closely related to Boubli's views on youth *representation* which are manifested in various ways.

Female members of Boubli were empowered by the platform to challenge gender norms on many occasions.

One of them became the first young woman running a show on rap music—a male-dominated space—and interviewing male singers, thus challenging gender roles in both the media and the rap scene. The show generated over 170 k views.

The female host of another show faced criticism and misogynistic comments from a vocal minority of viewers who requested her dismissal. This was not only because of her appearance and her social background (e.g. use of working class speaking patterns which are shunned or proscribed by mainstream media) but also because she used speaking patterns and slang—including curse

words—which are associated with men and are only tolerated when used by men. Despite some backlash, the Boubli production team was persistent in supporting and empowering her to challenge gender norms.

Amid youth riots in January 2021, an overwhelming majority of political parties and mainstream media relied on stigmatising narratives framing the protestors as criminals. Dominant discourse gave little to no recognition to the young people's legitimate grievances, and most political actors and elite opinion leaders, rather than suggesting that the underlying grievances should be addressed, proposed that youth should be "supervised and guided"—which is reminiscent of the paternalistic discourse of the previous authoritarian regime.

Partisan social media pages affiliated with the ruling coalition or with suspected ties to foreign powers such as Turkey (which is backing the ruling party) produced conspiracy theories and spread disinformation to stigmatise the protest movement, framing them as foreign agents. One leader of the ruling party Ennahdha even called upon his constituents to form vigilante groups to assist the security forces in repressing the protests. Meanwhile, youth voices were largely excluded from media debates about the protest movement. Young people were spoken about rather than listened to. These stigmatising and paternalistic dominant narratives further frustrated and polarised the protestors.

Boubli's journalists who were embedded in the protests offered stigmatised young people opportunity and encouragement to represent themselves in their own words and thus establish a more positive identity than that portrayed in mainstream media and dominant political discourses. Boubli communications offered an alternative to the negative frames of mainstream media by relaying young people's voices and increased their visibility by generating over 2 million views from protest-related content. Social media posts by protest leaders and youth voices recognise Boubli as a trusted media platform and the transformative role it played in foregrounding community narratives and grievances.

Recognising that Boubli was the only media outlet capable of reaching and meaningfully interacting with the protestors, the then prime minister reached out to Boubli with an interview proposal before withdrawing his request as he deemed Boubli's conditions—which contrast with the sterile, scripted, and controlled political interview environment offered by mainstream media—unacceptable: a live debate with members of the protest movement, without the possibility of agreeing in advance on the question.

Distribution of communication resources across a community of marginalised young people is another way for Boubli to challenge the rules of media participation and representation while pursuing a caring ethic. Indeed, Boubli is not merely a media but also an incubator and capacity-building hub for young talents excluded from mainstream media, giving them access to training, mentors, and other communication resources (studios, equipment, airtime).

Importantly, Boubli follows one of Gordon and Mugar's (2018) key civic media practice prescriptions: *persistent outputs.* A truly transformative civic media practice may not be built upon a constellation of one-off or ad hoc pieces of content. Rather, it requires the kind of persistence Boubli exhibits

through continued engagement with the community, frequency of publications, and long-term, problem-driven, and serial content which explores social, cultural, political, and economic issues.

Holding Space for Discussion and Distributed Ownership

Two of the activities of civic media practice identified by Gordon and Mugar (2018) are closely intertwined within Boubli's approach: *holding space for discussion* and *distributed ownership*. These involve *meaningful inefficiencies* (Gordon & Mugar, 2018) which are characteristic of civic media practice or, in Mihailidis' (2018, 2019) parlance, reflect a prioritisation of *civic intentionality* over efficiency considerations. In other words, going the extra mile to embed a caring ethic in the media's practices.

Boubli indeed "place[s] a premium on convening people as part of their practice" (Gordon & Mugar, 2018, p. 15). Whether by hosting them at the Boubli Space—the physical locus of the media, and a space for unmediated interaction with the community—or by engaging with them in interactive online fora, Boubli has built around itself vibrant *social infrastructure* (Gordon & Mugar, 2018, p. 13). It uses it to hold participatory deliberations with its community (audience and allies), leading to increased responsiveness and involving some relinquishment of ownership over the brand and its platform.

In addition to regularly polling its community via the YouTube page—often collecting over 30,000 responses—Boubli has developed an intimate relationship with its audience through constant interaction via a Discord server which gathers over 23,000 core members of its subscriber base. Within this forum, Boubli:

- Holds 3 to 4 fully interactive audio-shows. In these debates, the production staff and members of the audience discuss a variety of topics, sometimes with the participation of subject-matter experts, activists, and even politicians—who are placed on an equal footing with ordinary audience members. These debates are often an occasion to "identify critical mass" (Gordon & Mugar, 2018, p. 15) around issues of interest (including positioning vis-a-vis protest movements) and expose one another to diverse, often conflicting, views on controversial topics in a civil fashion;
- Collects stories from audience members across the country who are participating in the media's reporting efforts;
- Invites audience members (1) to provide feedback on show previews and accordingly revises its content to be more responsive to community preferences and priorities, and (2) to submit their own show concepts, with the possibility of joining the Boubli team and producing their own content via the platform;
- Involves community members in the governance of the media by assigning roles such as moderator roles;

- Gives priority to the community when recruiting volunteers, interns, freelancers, and staff members—who may also receive training upon recruitment.

Moreover, Boubli's social infrastructure includes a growing coalition of youth social movements, artist collectives, and civil society organisations with which Boubli shares its material resources and social capital. Boubli often amplifies their actions and ideas via its own dissemination channels to advance common causes. These have included feminist organisations, anti-corruption watchdogs, and a social movement pursuing the end of crony capitalism and the rent economy.

This social infrastructure and the participatory practices within it provide a unique experience in the Tunisian mediascape and serve to undercut distrust—if not in *the* media—in a media (Gordon & Mugar, 2018, p. 16).

Pluralisation and Inclusivity

Although it is rather distant from the literature on CMLP, William Connolly's *ethos of pluralisation* (2011) merits greater attention and, perhaps, stronger integration with CMLP frameworks. It could tie to Milan's notion of participation, but the ethos of pluralisation is worth exploring separately. Indeed, whereas Milan's concept focuses on the power to control the gateways to communication, pluralisation is normative: it does not tolerate arbitrarily deciding who speaks and what is spoke. Instead, this ethos prescribes an opening up of the communication space which necessarily results in diversity and which requires a great deal of epistemic humility. In this sense, an ethos of pluralisation represents a paramount form of caring ethic and certainly a meaningful super-inefficiency. Most importantly, I believe that an ethos of pluralisation is conducive to increased resilience in the face of information disorder—antagonism, intolerance, partisanship, and homophily being associated with susceptibility to information disorder and harmful communication practices (Osmundsen et al., 2021; Mihailidis, 2018, p. 1).

One of the ways in which Boubli's ethos of pluralisation manifests is its core focus on reverting marginalisation and, generally, its peculiar editorial policy which was negotiated between members through heated debates.

Boubli's editorial policy is built around the following principles:

- Boubli cannot be a paternalistic media;
- Boubli cannot serve as a vehicle to promote elite views and values, including those of the project team;
- Boubli's primary mission is to amplify the voice of marginalised young people—as opposed to "educating" them;
- Content creators should fight the urge to "lecture" the audience and should question their own legitimacy before making claims;
- Content creators should exercise empathy with the audience;

- Discussion of "first world problems" should be avoided—instead, focus should be on grievances of marginalised youth;
- Top-down discourse about the audience is proscribed—instead, the audience should be given the opportunity to self-represent and speak for itself;
- The target audience should be represented with honesty and respect;
- Any controversial issue can be discussed, including perspectives which challenge audience beliefs and frames of reference, as long as marginalised youth are given a "right of reply";
- Debate and confrontation of plural perspectives should always be preferred to unilateral lecturing.

Although its relationship with the older generations which dominate the socio-political order may be adversarial, Boubli strives to be maximally pluralistic and inclusive when it comes to youth. This involves a particular focus on correcting power imbalances which may hinder the representation of the most marginalised youth groups and sub-cultures. This concern is informed by the experiences of other Tunisian youth-focused media which have alienated or been unable to appeal to marginalised groups because they reproduce the domination hierarchies which characterise mainstream media—indeed, by virtue of their purchasing power, young economic elite audiences are more monetisable.

Boubli's ethos of pluralisation also involves empowering young people to challenge the socio-cultural norms imposed by and the roles assigned to them by elites, institutions, and older generations—and with which a number of young people are growing frustrated.

Practically, this means frequent and arduous negotiations balancing conflicting value and belief systems. When defining the editorial policy, some members and allies wished to position Boubli as a *progressive* media and considered that its mission was to *educate* segments of the public which they deemed ignorant and bigoted. However well-intentioned, such a positioning could have led Boubli to reproduce exclusionary logics which already dominate Tunisia's mediascape—which is marked by a strong social boundary opposing progressives to conservatives, two social sites which largely overlap with class. Instead, Boubli has opted for pluralism which, for certain team and audience members, has involved renouncing hegemonic desires, embracing humility, and developing a capability for dealing with conflicting views and uncomfortable conversations. This, however, does not prevent the Boubli community from self-policing under a policy banning harassment and bullying.

Although it may be criticised for its perceived relativism, this ethos of pluralisation makes Boubli a truly unique media in that it has been able to negotiate a space of mutual understanding bringing together people with antagonistic identities such as feminists and conservatives or policemen and Antifa activists, and exposing them to difference.

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South Island School—The *Agence France Presse* Affiliated News Unit

Iain Williamson

South Island School (SIS) in Hong Kong has a long history of engaging with media literacy. Offering 'Advanced' (A) Level and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Media Studies via the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC), it was not until 2016 that this long-running arrangement was disrupted when WJEC discontinued the opportunity for international centres such as SIS to enter for these two qualifications. Subsequently, the school had a choice: look to swap examination boards remaining connected to the UK curriculum or try to establish a separate qualification, designed from the ground up.

During this period, students constantly wanted to talk about the big issues of the day: the rise of Donald Trump in the two years preceding the 2016 US General Election; Brexit, the increasingly ubiquitous nature of technology, to name but a few. The worrying dissemination of misinformation via social media became increasingly apparent to us as practitioners and yet during a frustrating period between 2010 and 2015, the selection of topics provided by the examination boards only occasionally engaged with news. Given that we were an early adopter of the one-to-one laptop school back in 2008, our team felt strongly that there was more that we could and should be offering our students in equipping them in the battle to combat misinformation.

Ultimately, the media changes at such high speed that we had spoken for years of how imperative it was for us to respond to the fast-changing,

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exponential change of technologies, which surrounded us and which formed a core reason for why students were so keen to pursue Media Studies in the first place.

The importance of news as a topic has continued to interest our students throughout the time that I have lived in Hong Kong. We were very lucky to form some strong links with news organisations working here in Hong Kong including Agence France Presse (AFP), CNN and the *South China Morning Post*. All three offered valuable work experiences for several of our students and even careers for a handful of them. One key connection who would be instrumental in helping us to create a new course was Eric Wishart, a fellow resident of Discovery Bay, where I have lived for the last fifteen years, and the former Chief Editor of the AFP in Hong Kong. In 2015 we met to discuss a potential partnership between the AFP and South Island School, with the AFP operating as a substitute for an examination board, accrediting the course and providing a much needed name for the qualification itself. This was and remains important in Hong Kong, both for parents in seeing a recognisable name of a world famous news agency as the accrediting body and for students in feeling confident that the course itself was likely to have currency in their applications to universities in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Hong Kong etc.

From the very start of our collaboration, it was agreed that news and more specifically the skills required to fact-check information would be central to the course. It became the flagship unit with three months devoted to teaching the skills we felt had been missing in the GCSE Media Studies equivalent. Wishart set up several meetings with Philippe Massonet, the AFP Regional Director, based in Hong Kong, and in 2016, we signed an agreement, which enabled us to begin teaching in August 2016 to our first Year 10 cohort, consisting of students aged between fourteen and fifteen years of age.

One of the strengths of this course has been the ability to make immediate changes to the content, often with the support of some cutting-edge staff training. For instance, Wishart is also a key member of the Foreign Correspondents Club (FCC) in Hong Kong and heavily involved in setting up an annual News Conference, held in the remarkable FCC building, situated on Lower Albert Road in Central. The conference has given us the chance to hear exactly what kind of practices journalists engage with in their work and how this transforms from one year to the next. Wishart himself is an expert when it comes to explaining the phenomenon of fake news, having lectured on this topic at Hong Kong University, Baptist University and internationally. Through Wishart, I was able to meet other key exponents of fact-checking techniques, such as Iain Martin, who was then the Asia editor for Storyful: a news and intelligence agency. Martin, as with so many others I have met during the process of setting up the AFP Digital Media course, gave freely of his time coming into school to deliver a fascinating insight on the techniques used by journalists to verify news, back in 2017, the filmed resource still useful to this day. Martin stressed the conventional importance of the five W's: *who, where, why, when* and

what as well as *how*, but within the context of video sources and photography sourced online and often crowdsourced. As well as determining the importance of the source, Storyful also seeks to identify the date and location of the media used. Martin stressed the importance of checking for visual clues when verifying content, such as the weather conditions or shadows, as well as using Google Maps; Google Street View, Tencent or Baidu Maps and satellite imagery or geotagged social media.

In more recent years and particularly during the period of lengthy lockdowns, which have prevented the FCC from running the conferences of yesteryear, instead, we have been invited to join some highly informative online discussions including world leaders in their field, such as the Nobel Prize winner Maria Ressa, co-founder of Rappler; Craig Silverman, the media editor of Buzzfeed and more importantly the writer of the *Verification Handbook*, which we use for teaching and from which we have taken considerable inspiration over the years. For instance, when trying to verify the background information relating to a news source, several tools are suggested by Silverman et al.

> Sites like [Geofeedia](#) and [Echosec](#) allow you to find tweets, Facebook posts, YouTube videos, Flickr and Instagram photos that were sent from defined locations. Draw a box over a region or a building and reveal the social media activity. [Geosocialfootprint.com](#) will plot a Twitter user's activity onto a map (all assuming the users have enabled location for their accounts). (Silverman, [2020][1])

When we began to set up the course in 2015, one of the cornerstones was the importance of authenticity. I've found that this can be an overused term in education but as you can see from the aforementioned professional development opportunities, we wanted to ground the course in skills, which have relevance in the field today. The authentic content associated with this approach has underpinned all six of the units offered as part of the course.

Course Structure

The course units have remained consistent throughout the last five years, although the teaching resources have been developed over time and the pedagogy improved. The six units are as follows:

Exploring International Film Cultures: The Horror Genre

This is essentially a fun, practice unit which provides students with an opportunity to learn the working method important throughout the course: pre-production, production and post-production. Students work in teams creating short films, which demonstrate the conventions of specific, internationally

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[1] Silverman, C., 2020. *Verification Handbook For Disinformation And Media Manipulation*. 3rd ed. European Journalism Centre.

focused film sub-genres or historical film movements such as German Expressionism and J-Horror.

The Changing Relationship Between Technology and Television: Media Convergence

The second unit provides a theoretical base, which focuses on the changing nature of television from a discrete technology into the converged form we see today. Students participate in a whole school survey based on media consumption including social media forms as well as working in teams to produce a multi-camera studio shoot of a TV Make (5 mins or less). Students are also expected to submit a journal, which demonstrates their learning during the unit.

Learning to Fact-Check: The Video Essay Task

Our flagship unit attempts to teach students the skills they need to assess the accuracy of news reporting. More specifically, a series of fact-checking tools are explored as well as an understanding of political ideologies before students are tested by making video essays of five to six minutes, focused on a single news story. The task requires students to deconstruct the story from two to three different news publications, comparing the accuracy of the writing and photography via various fact-checking tools.

Authentic Learning and Real Clients: The Client Commission

This is an important and highly authentic unit in which students have the opportunity to produce promotional videos and short documentaries for real clients, working in groups or individually. One third of their grade relates to the pre-production process including scripts and research, and the remaining two thirds is assessed via the final production in which students are assessed on their selected role: editor, cinematographer, editor or sound designer.

Interactive Media, HTML, CSS and JavaScript: The Adventure Game

Students learn three coding languages: HTML, CSS and JavaScript before applying these skills to the process of creating an adventure game, using the Beyond Skin Deep (BSD) coding platform. Students are also tasked with making sure that the writing process is underpinned by a sense of morality whilst game assets are required such as appropriate fonts, colours, sound effects etc.

Representational Discourse in the Music Industry: Music Video Essay

In the final unit, students learn the history of Music Videos by studying the Music Industry and especially, issues of representation, equity and inclusion.

Working individually, they are tasked with deconstructing one contemporary video of their choice by applying subject specific terminology and media theory to the task.

CURRENT RESEARCH/PRACTICE OR INTERVENTIONS

The News Unit was always planned as the flagship learning experience of the course, essential for the accreditation provided by the AFP. Taught over twelve weeks, the pedagogy adopted has attempted to build the critical thinking skills necessary for students to gradually gain the confidence required to approach the learning process. This makes use of the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) Model as students ultimately become increasingly independent, culminating during the final month of the unit in student-led learning. This also includes some practical skills: assessing the veracity of news reporting including verification techniques such as identifying institutional bias, biographical information pertaining to the journalist, accuracy of captioned photos; where and when the story first appeared on the internet and the quality of reporting provided.

We begin by encouraging students to understand their own political persuasion by taking the Political Compass Test (© Pace News Ltd 2001–2021, 2021). This is not an easy process given that many of the variables listed in the test are frequently new to the students and need explanation. We ordinarily combine this with an overview of the political spectrum. Given that many students are most likely to encounter misinformation via their social media feeds, we feel it is essential to explore issues of political and institutional bias. A very helpful means of introducing these key contextual areas is via the Media Bias Chart (version 8.0). Students often use this resource, by noting the position of various news outlets selected for the final summative task.

The importance of news bias and ownership builds on our use of more traditional Media Studies skills, which also makes use of Stanley Cohen's work on Moral Panics. Most students opting for AFP Media have already completed a course in Digital Media offered as an elective option to students in Year 9: students ranging from thirteen to fourteen years of age. This also contains a News Unit taught over twelve weeks and provides students the opportunity to consider News Values (Galtung & Holmboe Ruge, 1965) and the role of investigative journalism, including the rise of the citizen journalist. Students are given the chance to investigate one local news related issue, whilst considering at least two perspectives, which they need to include in their news report. As an individually assessed submission, the summative task involves the construction of a short investigative news segment of no more than three minutes in length, which they anchor.

With a theoretical base in place, we are then able to concentrate on the introduction of skills necessary for the practical application process of critically evaluating news sources. A very useful tool offered to students in this process can be seen via Fig. 22.1. I sourced Trust Servista about five years ago, as a

fact-checking tool, which identifies a 'content quality report' on news sources based on context setting, sentiment, clickbait probability and relations to 'Patient Zero.' Patient Zero represents the original URL and date on the internet where the story first surfaced. This can be highly informative for students as they can then cross-reference how information from the original story can be selectively interpreted by other journalists, thereby indicating the possible presence of a biased perspective, motivated by the political stance of the reporting institution or individual journalist.

I made sure the instructions for using Trust Servista were housed on the school library website and not just on the Film/Media website of my own department because as the school Digital Literacy Coordinator, I wanted the tool to be used by other subjects. To this end, I have run staff training sessions on how to use Trust Servista, as the more subjects promoting the adoption of verification tools, the more likely that our students will use appropriate verification techniques as a standard approach both inside and outside of school.

Case Study

Figure 22.1 shows an example taken from a student (Justin Man, 2018) then studying in Year 10 as part of a Video Essay making use of Trust Servista, as he applied the tool to a story about Mark Zuckerberg from the same year. This is one of several fact-checking tools we teach to students including TinEye, InVid (a video-based verification resource provided by the AFP for use with YouTube, Twitter and Facebook), Snopes etc. In this case Man has successfully identified the date of the original photograph and the inaccurate use of the photo in relation to the story at hand, which was published more than a year later! TinEye and Trust Servista are routinely employed by students in their assessments and provide concrete tools with which to identify the misinformation, which circulates on the internet.

In addition to fact-checking tools, there are also a number of helpful protocols to help support students. Figure 22.2 shows some of the guidelines used by our department in supporting students to approach the task of verifying news sources. The Credibility, Accuracy, Reliability and Support (CARS) protocol (Brayman, 2013; Harris, 2020, 2021) in particular is useful in breaking down the process by asking relevant questions, which the students can apply to
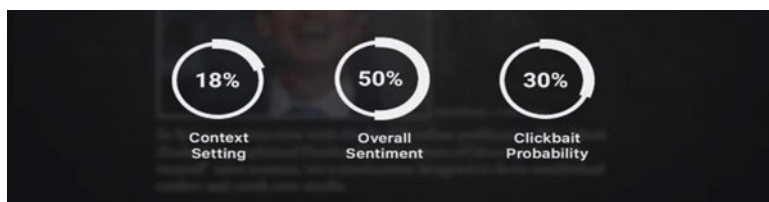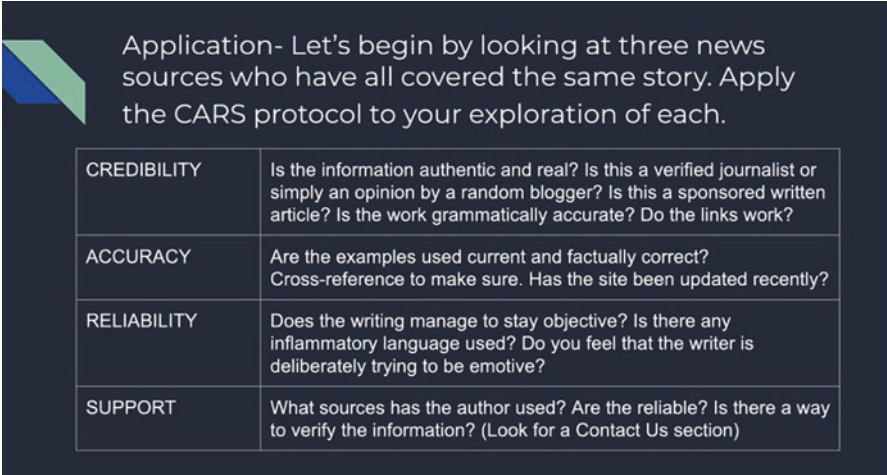
Fig. 22.1 A screenshot taken from Justin Man's video essay as part of the News Unit, which makes use of the fact-checking tool: Trust Servista

Fig. 22.2 Our own breakdown of the CARS acronym used with students to help support their work during the News Unit

any source. We also reverse engineer a piece of student work, and rather than showing only the final Video Essay, students are asked to go through the same investigative process used by Man. This is an excellent catalyst for discussion and quickly reveals where, specifically, students have misunderstood salient details of the process.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

For a task of this nature, students have been quick to note in the annual feedback questionnaires that we send out at the end of the course that the 6 minutes available for this task makes it very difficult to cover all of the information they would ideally like to include. The original rationale for the requirement of three news sources was based on our sense that students were likely to select institutions from across the political spectrum: left, right and centre from which to deconstruct their choice of news story. However, over time, we have increasingly felt that a reduction to two news sources is more likely to provide the space and time for students to provide more detailed content/textual analysis.

This is a relatively easy adjustment to the brief, which we intend to introduce for the first time in 2022. However, this doesn't resolve a second problem, which was evident in the submissions from June 2021. Many of the students fall into the trap of simply seeing the tasks as something of a dichotomy: sources from the left and right are both biased whilst those in the centre offer a more objective, factually evidenced outlook. Fact-checking tools such as Trust Servista rank articles via context setting, positive/negative sentiment and the likelihood that the source is clickbait. In other words, well-written articles which do not express too much sentiment are often ranked highly even when

the source, as any Media Studies teacher would be able to discern relatively quickly, may well have a clear political agenda. The *Daily Mail* is a point in case, as the Media Bias Chart places this source centrally. The same case could be made for the BBC, although the ideological values of such institutions and symbiotic connections to the political objectives of those in positions of ownership are far less obvious, particularly to students selecting from stories, which range from across many nations, given the eclectic mix of nationalities, which make up any given class in an international school. An average AFP Media class has between twenty and twenty-five students. Each student is encouraged to explore a news story, which interests them and usually leads to a highly diverse range of contexts to consider. Providing a meaningful, differentiated approach for an entire class is difficult, particularly given that each student enters the classroom with a vastly different skill set when it comes to a pre-existing knowledge of politics.

Ultimately, the adoption of tried and tested Media Studies pedagogy is still as important here as it ever has been. It is essential that students explore issues relating to media ownership or what the WJEC, Advanced level Media Studies course referred to as 'institutional determinants.' We do this to some extent via case studies exploring Breitbart and Buzzfeed, but the process of reflecting on our practice as part of writing this chapter has demonstrated that we need to encourage a more investigative, student-led process whereby news outlets are placed within an institutional context. Pedagogically, this process offers the opportunity for collaboration between students and even the sharing of resources. One way of achieving this is to create a Playlist: a format, in which teachers and students alike can share presentations through hyperlinks in a single page format. This provides a crucial starting place for students to place their news stories within both a political and economic context.

Another challenge associated with this multifaceted process and the critical thinking skills required to be successful is embedded in the choice of story itself. Many students waste a great deal of time trying to establish the context of their story, which takes up a sizable amount of their allotted video essay time. The focus can subsequently become the story itself, rather than the exploration of what constitutes a viable, trustworthy source. The fact-checking tools offer insights when photography is presented out of context or stories represent clickbait but ultimately the student, much like a scientist or historian, must aspire to be as objective as possible, making decisions informed by a holistic judgement given all the 'facts' taken from the entire investigative process.

In the five years we have offered this unit since the start of the AFP Digital Media course, the marking instrument has assessed the quality of the script: a conventional pre-production task; as well as the construction of the video essay and quality of critical thinking, textual analysis skills. The editing skills required to score full marks in the video essay task also merit some consideration. By this stage of the course, most students have been exposed to professional editing applications such as Adobe Premiere Pro or Da Vinci Resolve 17. Although not essential, it is helpful for students to adopt multilayered editing techniques,

which provides opportunities for annotative analysis. The inclusion of a full-time Film and Media technician is incredibly helpful in this process and allows teachers to spend more time in one-to-one facilitation, supporting students with a wide range of interests and potential news sources, rather than offering technical guidance too. Nevertheless, inevitably, for some of our students, the editing takes up a sizable amount of their time on this task, at the expense of investigating the news sources and considering the causes of misinformation. However, as we have grown in experience as facilitators of the process, we are able to provide interventions early in the process to try and make sure this happens as little as possible.

Ultimately, the objective of the AFP News unit is to arm students with sustainable critical thinking skills and tangible fact-checking tools, placed within a wide, holistic interdisciplinary context, which engages with politics, sociology, business and creative arts. The authenticity I have referenced throughout this case study extends into the wider society in which our students find themselves and engage with the increasingly ubiquitous role of technology and social media in spreading misinformation. We believe that our students are better equipped to make sense of the news they consume or multiply (McCracken, 2013), asking questions before sharing content. Many of the same students join our school Digital Leadership Council (DLC) and have been actively engaged in promoting this approach to the school community through several initiatives including Internet Safety Week, an annual event, which takes place in February to coincide with Internet Safety Week. For example, we are currently in the process of planning for February 2022, and in light of the Facebook Files, our students are very keen to support the work of the Center for Humane Technology and their #OneClickSafer campaign. This involves an advocacy campaign, urging students to sign a letter addressed to Mark Zuckerberg in which Facebook is being asked to reconsider how the reshare button of their application can be changed by removing this function after two levels of sharing.

Although the pedagogy of weaving interdisciplinary learning capable of offering students the analysis skills required to identify the spread of misinformation remains incredibly challenging, it is encouraging to consider that the AFP course is perhaps playing a role in helping inspire some students to join the Digital Leadership Council. In turn, it may also be sowing the seeds for action.

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Intergenerational Approaches to Disinformation and Clickbait: Participatory Workshops as Co-learning-Based Spaces

Maria José Brites, Ana Filipa Oliveira, and Carla Cerqueira

Citizens are often kept apart from processes of scientific meaning-making. In this chapter, we explore the results of an intergenerational research project, which used participatory workshops to discuss disinformation and clickbait, in order to actively involve participants and try to capture their voices, as well as balance the activities' co-learning process. In this course, conducting intergenerational activities was challenging, especially within groups that included older people. Intergenerational-planned interactions of groups of people of different ages and life stages promote relationships between several generations that contribute to communication, sharing, and better understanding between them, thus stimulating inclusion and solidarity (Nunes, 2009). Within the scope of digital and media literacy promotion, intergenerational approaches can contribute to lifelong education, especially when employed in the construction of a society that promotes harmonious coexistence between the various generations (Patrício & Osório, 2015). If we dwell on the importance that the internet and in particular social media have nowadays, and on the educational potential identified in intergenerational approaches, promoting the encounter between generations can make a valuable contribution to address the opportunities, dangers, and good practices to better enjoy the media in a responsible and conscious way.

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With the main goal of developing media literacy as a form of resilience against fake news and misinformation, the SMaRT-EU—Social Media Resilience Toolkit (LC-01563446) project promoted a set of participatory workshops in Croatia, Belgium, Estonia, Portugal, Spain and Wales. Privileging learning by doing, the activities focused on issues related to media education, digital citizenship, and information disorders, and involved young people, older people, and educators in a space of learning and sharing to engage participants in critical subjects and agentive media literacy.

In this chapter, we reflect particularly on the results of the workshops conducted in Portugal about *Disinformation and fake news* and *Clickbaits in social media*, bearing in mind the aim of trying to articulate the issues with the participatory research paradigm and the methodological options. The critical reflection considers the following dimensions: "participant-responsive, epistemologically informed flexibility in which qualitative interview researchers experiment with methods while seeking to maximize participant benefits and grapple with the theoretical implications of methods decision" (Wolgemuth et al., 2015, p. 19). These aspects evidence three main dimensions/themes: What were the most surprising aspects? What are the subjects that lead to more discussion? What were the participants' contributions to the discussion?

INFORMATION DISORDERS: FROM INFORMATION TO CLICKBAIT

Citizens surf through information disorder (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) in several spheres of their daily lives. This issue has become more evident in the last two years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The new "infodemic" (Guarino et al., 2021)—as it has been named—enhanced fears toward not making the best decisions, confusion in the face of the information disseminated, and the danger of risk-taking behaviors that can have health consequences. In a certain way, there was a move from the discussion around news and politics to the discussion around actual everyday needs and impacts of information.

One of the themes that became more obvious with the pandemic was the danger associated with clickbait on social media (Varshney & Vishwakarma, 2021). Clickbaits are often referred to as a linguistic strategy through which online content headlines are created, whose main purpose is to incite readers to click on a link to a story that often contains dubious or uninteresting content. In a recent study developed by Portuguese and Brazilian researchers, the term is characterized as a "stylistic and narrative configuration strategy of content in digital media in order to attract the user's attention to clicking a link" (Zamith, 2019, p. 24). Provocative content, scandals, fake news, and tragedies are some of the subjects that are often explored resorting to clickbait strategies, mainly on social media platforms, with the aim of responding to the demands of the current digital advertising model (Zamith, 2019, p. 25). Even though the origins of clickbait go back to the appearance of websites such as BuzzFeed (Tandoc, 2018), this strategy is now commonly identified in so-called credible

media providers (García Orosa et al., 2017), tabloids (Blom & Hansen, 2015), and others (Potthast et al., 2018; Braun & Eklund, 2019), implemented as a way to maximize click-through and visits to websites and, therefore, profitability (Potthast et al., 2018). This occurs due to the fact that revenues of media websites are mainly based on advertisements published on these pages and not on subscribers' fees, which causes a great deal of competition among online media and pushes newspapers and magazines' websites to strive for the largest number of clicks to improve income. As Lischka and Garz (2021) comment, while journalists consider traditional text norms and editing styles, social media editors' purpose is to optimize content for digital platforms and algorithms. Consequently, "clickbait headlines are typically characterised as being deceptive, misleading, or disappointing in some way" (Scott, 2021, p. 53). Taking advantage of this curiosity, readers click on the link to read more and collect further information—something that appeals to, as psychologist Loewenstein puts it, the curiosity gap, a cognitive-induced deprivation that derives from the perception of the existence of a gap between knowledge and understanding (1994). Loewenstein (1994) suggests that providing the individual with a small dose of information functions as an appetizer that significantly increases curiosity. Clickbait headlines then "generate but not fulfil readers' curiosity" (Lu & Pan, 2021, p. 24), resulting in an endless chain of clicks. As clickbait headlines lack precision and overstate arousal (Scacco & Muddiman, 2020), they may lead to disinformation, misinformation, and doubts about the content (Zamith, 2019).

Besides these identified problems, several concerns arise regarding the amount of information internet users are leaving behind. While participating privately in online media is an almost unrealistic idea—since a certain level of personal data is always shared—the notion of privacy and privacy assurance in these settings is a fundamental issue in the Digital Age and challenges users' digital and information literacy (Acquisti et al., 2015; Dinev, 2014; Hong & Thong, 2013). Some authors, such as Marwick & boyd (2014), suggest that the idea of privacy in digital worlds differs from the idea of untainted privacy, so its reconceptualization may be important. Alongside this, when thinking about the various generations, privacy and the digital footprint can pose different dangers for young and older people. O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) point out that in regard to younger people, future jobs or college applications can be called into question by inappropriate, irresponsible, or inexperienced use of the internet. When it comes to older people, dimensions related to low digital literacy levels and inexperience with digital devices can result in involvement in online scams or phishing, among others. Chakraborty et al. (2013) mention that the increase of internet use among older people highlighted problems related to intrusions or breaches of privacy—these citizens are among the most vulnerable groups.

The spread of disinformation and information disorders enhance the need to promote educational spaces where citizens can make their voices heard and learn through dialogue (Freire, 1967; Ravenscroft, 2011). If we consider that

"media literacy operates from three core assumptions; media literacy creates knowledgeable individuals, empowers communities, and encourages democratic participation" (Mihailidis et al., 2021, p. 1), we can find the inspiration to establish a relation between media education and effective work with the communities. As Mihailidis and others (2021) question, how can media literacy be considered to support positive social change for equitable and just democratic futures and avoid social, political, and economic divides? "Without frames of social justice and equity, media literacy education may be helping provide skills in media analysis and deconstruction without focusing on the inequities that are fracturing our media, civic, social, and political systems" (Mihailidis et al., 2021, p. 9). This interconnection of literacies and learning, cultural experiences and media uses is ideological (Potter & McDougall, 2017). Therefore, these dynamic literacies improve connections between pedagogy and formal and informal learning systems (Potter & McDougall, 2017).

Methodologies and Context-Based Approach

Participatory workshops are one of the most fruitful research methods to actively collect data in view of the audiences' fears, doubts, and suggestions to act socially. This method can highlight the participation of the research team and of the participants, as well as facilitate communication and iteration of ideas even in environments where it is not usual to talk about specific subjects or to promote interaction between groups that often don't talk to each other—such as different generations (Lamas et al., 2015). This methodological approach enables the collection of participants' responses (verbal and non-verbal) *in loco*, occasionally through activities that imply learning by doing (Brites et al., 2015; Ravenscroft et al., 2020). Within particular groups—that may include people with disabilities or older people—the staff can also play a major role (Northway et al., 2014).

One of the main characteristics of the SMaRT-EU project is this participatory dimension, which was challenged by the beginning of the pandemic. Among the most demanding tasks was the decision upon the participatory workshops. Conceived bearing in mind an in-person participatory approach, the research team had to adapt them to the online environment, not forgetting the participatory objectives and the intergenerational approach. As for the recruitment of the participants, it proved to be another challenge. The research team understood that the need to use digital environments, especially in regard to older people's institutions, caused doubts and fears following the invitation to participate in the project. Although the use of online platforms presented itself as a solution to pursue the research, this proved to be a discouraging factor for some of the participants—mainly those who are not used to it. However, the use of remote online platforms can be positive, and it provides a way to approach in the same workshop people located in different cities and that belong to heterogeneous groups (some with digital competencies and others with difficulties and doubts). Had we carried out the research project in the offline world, the likelihood of getting such heterogeneous groups together would have been lower. It should

also be noted that we faced more profound technical difficulties (i.e., unstable internet connections and availability of devices, among others) in the institutions that aggregated more children and young people from low-income areas.

Methodologically, the research team agreed to address six different subjects to be covered by the workshops, all associated with the confluence of media education, digital citizenship, and disinformation challenges. The initial templates were created in English by the Croatian team and afterward translated and adapted to national specificities, target groups, and contexts (in Portugal, individuals from low-income areas to educated groups). During the preparation of the workshops, we carefully tried to strike a balance between delivering information and promoting a learning context, and at the same time ensuring time for activities and the participants' interventions. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) emerged as the most appropriate approach for this critical reflection, enabling identifying, analyzing, and reporting major themes/dimensions within data from these workshops (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this chapter, we focus on the results of the Portuguese workshops.

The Portuguese team conducted nine workshops between May and June 2021 and two in September and in November (by request of one of the groups). The present analysis focuses specifically on four workshops about *Disinformation and fake news* and *Clickbaits in social media*. The workshops lasted between 1h30 and 2h30 and involved a total number of 32 participants (some of them attended more than one session). A partnership was established with three different institutions, aiming to deliver the workshops to differentiated individuals and also to capture multidimensional participants. In each one of the workshops, we ensured that all the participants were part of the tasks in an intergenerational form. This means that during the activities the research team interacted with children, young people, and older people and at the same time with the educators/staff that work with them on a daily basis at their respective institutions. It should also be noted that a group of journalism and communication sciences students was also involved in the process, both in the adaptation of the workshops' content to the Portuguese context and interacting as participants.[1] As for the research team, as it was often challenged by the participants, it tried as much as possible to interact actively with the groups. Promoted in educational settings, workshops can encourage dialogue and enriching co-learning-based spaces. Moreover, if they rely on different levels of participants (end-users, learning facilitators, youth workers, research team, and

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[1] The Portuguese team worked with journalism students that acted as young project researchers and at the same time as project participants. This was an interesting and fruitful approach. On the one hand, they started to work with the team adapting and reinforcing the workshops' contents. They were important specifically in the workshop on Influencers, also because one of them was an influencer himself and they brought refreshed knowledge to the team while they also improved their research skills. On the other hand, they were part of the team in the delivery of the workshops, acting at the same time as participants and actively engaging in the conversations. This allowed students to gain more knowledge about the topics covered, to acquire research skills, and also to test their ability to become actively involved in participatory action research projects. For more information, see http://smart-toolkit.eu/participatory-workshops/

students), they can be even more valuable, as they contribute to the dynamics and interaction with the different people who are part of the target communities (Brites et al., 2015). Namely in research that addresses digital literacy, opting by collaborative methods and teams can help to foster confidence and to improve media skills, enhancing creative energy, as stated by Hobbs and Coiro (2016). This collaborative approach results in even more success if it is implemented in contexts where citizens are not often invited to share their ideas and don't feel that they are allowed to make a valuable contribution.

Among the participants and partner institutions, the youth club is located in Greater Porto (Vila d'Este, Vila Nova de Gaia), in a low-income neighborhood with around 17,000 inhabitants. This youth club is co-financed by Programa Escolhas (Choices Program), a governmental program created in 2001 with the aim to promote social inclusion to support youth communities at risk. At this youth club, we worked mostly with children and young people, adults, but also with older people. This institution has an online radio station (http://pt.radioactive101.eu) and started to prepare a show related to the workshops. The social solidarity institution is also located in Greater Porto (Oliveira do Douro, Vila Nova de Gaia). The institution was established in 2011 and provides support to children and older people, including a day nursery, a nursing home, a day club for older people, and a home support service. The association on the defense and promotion of Human Rights is located in Braga and was founded in June 2003. It is associated with the Portuguese Human Rights League and is a member of the International Federation for Human Rights. The association aims at defending, deepening, and expanding Human Rights, considered as essential elements of the dignity of the Person and as a guarantee that, through freedom, each citizen can take responsibility for their own destiny. Thus, we held workshops with three very diverse partners, which allowed us to interact with heterogeneous groups of participants in terms of age and professional area/background.

Participatory Workshops and Co-sharing of Daily Life Experiences

In this section, we present the results of the thematic analysis. We start from the three major dimensions/themes identified: the most surprising aspects of the workshops, the subjects that led to a more lively discussion, and the participants' contributions to the discussion. More than relying on learning outcomes, we aim to reflect on the surprising factors of the workshops and also on the participants' inputs. By contributions we mean new insights into the workshops, either in relation to information that was not considered by the research team or regarding contextual aspects of the participants' digital routines in relation to the workshops' subjects.

During the workshops and in the phase of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that followed, we detected differences mostly between the institutions' participants rather than between the issues of the workshops. We

consider this occurred not only because of the differences in age groups but also because of the educational and professional contexts of the participants from each one of the institutions (*see* Table 23.1).

Starting with the workshop on *Clickbaits in social media* conducted at the youth club, one of the aspects that becomes immediately clear is that adults were more participative than younger people (this happened in all the

Table 23.1 List of participants in the workshops

Location	Name	Gender	Age	Profession	Workshop theme
Youth club	Diana[a]	Female (F)	12	Student	Clickbaits in social media
	Isabel	F	45	Psychologist	
	Hélder	Male (M)	16	Student	
	Ana	F	14	Student	
	Diogo	M	15	Student	
	Pedro	M	14	Student	
	Ângela	F	27	Youth worker	
	Figo	M	28	Youth worker	
	Jaime	M	14	Student	
	Marta	F	56	Housewife	
	Anita	F	20	University student	
	Júlia	F	20	University student	
Social solidarity institution	Lígia	F	92	Housewife	Disinformation and fake news
	Marta	F	92	Housewife	
	Maria	F	91	Housekeeper	
	Fábia	F	72	Seamstress	
	Ema	F	40	Sociocultural Animator	
	Carla	F	20	Sociocultural Animator (Intern)	
	Luís	M	61	(Never worked)	Clickbaits in social media
	Lígia	F	92	Housewife	
	Cátia	F	20	Sociocultural Animator (Intern)	
	Beta	F	20	Sociocultural Animator (Intern)	
	Maria	F	91	Housekeeper	
	Júlia	F	20	University student	
	Anita	F	20	University student	
Association on the defense and promotion of Human Rights	Lito	M	28	Project Manager and Digital Marketer	Disinformation and fake news
	Cristina	F	25	Designer	
	Fátima	F	28	Architect	
	José	M	58	Banker	
	Mira	F	24	Journalist	
	Julião	M	43	Digital strategist and activist	
	Manuela	F	35	Social Worker	

[a]Names have been anonymized and informed consent has been requested during the research process

workshops conducted with this community, except for the workshop about Influencers[2]). Though the children and young people were the majority of the participants, the three adults (including an older person) that took part in this session were much more active and presented several practical examples from their daily lives that they related to the workshops' subject. With respect to the surprising aspects, including some of the children's and young people's facial expressions toward the examples explored, it was apparent that the adults talked about their online behaviors and fears in a straightforward way. This happened for instance when Isabel, an adult with coordinating responsibilities at the youth club and a model for the young people, said that she would be willing "to clickbait" to snoop. She acknowledged some morbid curiosity toward some news, such as celebrity-related news. In this group, Isabel and Figo were the only ones who recognized examples of clickbait advertisements spread through cell phones and television. As for the young people, Jaime (aged 14) was the only one that admitted to consuming reference news through social networks, adding that he believed he found reliable information in *Expresso* (a reference newspaper in Portugal). This youngster also admitted he was surprised to see that some examples challenged the binary notion that reference news is always right and popular news might present some more problems from the point of view of disinformation. The older participants acknowledge that the existence of false news is nothing really new, but consider that now the situation is more complex and quickly reinforces some social problems as well.

The themes that generated more discussion were associated with negative feelings and a sense of outrage. Once again, adults were the ones that shared more insights regarding these aspects. They reflected on the reporting of false news on Facebook and discussed whether the reporting mechanisms exist or are only a façade to show that social media platforms care about the issue; it was also interesting to note that the only two participants that know the oldest fact-checking media in Portugal (*Polígrafo*) were Isabel and Figo. While discussing online contexts, the female adults were the only ones that identified print magazines (namely celebrity magazines) as a vehicle for clickbait, assuming [while laughing shamefacedly and sharing with the youngsters some fragility] that they sometimes buy or read them. It was also very interesting that, in a serious tone, Isabel discussed that at the youth club they are aware of the challenges that the online environment, politicians, and journalists present regarding intercultural dimensions and the need to avoid hate speech.

> We spend our lives working to integrate migrants and to support them, and then parties and news from everywhere flood the internet and all the social media and fill people with hatred (…) against this population. And deconstructing these myths when there are supposedly news stories that are true (…) and that reinforce

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[2] It should also be noted that the young people started to prepare a radio show devoted to this project and this workshop.

old hatreds that the Portuguese population even has (…) is very complicated. (Isabel, youth club)

The preliminary results from the social solidarity institution in regard to the *Clickbaits in social media* workshop show interesting and different directions, which are mainly associated with the age and the context of these institutionalized participants. At first, in this case, it was interesting to note that the older people were more eager to talk about their views even if most of the time they emphasized that they didn't know about the internet, *internetese*, and foreign languages.

This was the most challenging group for the research team. Even though it was necessary to explain some aspects to the group from the youth club, it was sometimes difficult to establish a common ground to talk and discuss the workshops' subjects with the older people from this institution, especially with those over 90 years of age. Because of that, it was fundamental to count on the participation of the young adults and adults that work at the institution in both workshops. This was one of the conceived strategies to ensure the participatory dimension of the workshops and it turned out to be of extreme importance. The older participants were keen to talk, but sometimes intermediation on both sides of the discussion was necessary, as some of them showed communication difficulties.

What was surprising was that expressions such as "algorithms" and "social media" referred to concepts that were not easy to explain—the older participants' mind was not articulated or set for the digital world and this is a reality that is not part of theirs. Another important aspect was that all the participants were able to identify specific news that turned out to be false. Luís (aged 61 and who had a few communication and physical disabilities) recognized that he had already spread fake news without knowing it; he only realized it later. This participant also admitted to having cried and felt angry toward fake news. Generally, participants linked false information with social media and the internet, and trustworthy information with television and evening news. Especially during the *Disinformation and fake news* workshop, the discussions were dominated by the idea that politicians are responsible for telling lies, and that they say one thing during the political campaigns and do another afterward.

We could say that for this group the barrier of the screen was sometimes an inhibitor, and that in-person sessions might have worked better. One of the most interesting aspects that arose during the sessions, and which became particularly evident during the first one (*Disinformation and fake news*), was that the participants frequently said that this was the first time they had been using the internet. However, they had talked with their relatives through different apps during lockdown and confinement periods. This also points to the fact that the internet is so embedded in our lives that we use it even when we are not aware of it. One of the staff members—Ema—explained that they used to have a computer in the meeting room, but it was only used by one of the residents, and since space in the room was needed, they opted to remove it. What

was really new was that, in the workshop's final activity, some of the participants had their very first internet search experience. The challenge was to find information on the internet to understand if two news items presented by the research team were true or false—one from a reference newspaper and another from a popular newspaper. Both news stories were false, but the participants only identified as false the news from the popular newspaper. At the end of the workshops, older people asked the staff participants to use the internet more. In addition, Lígia (aged 92) claimed that older people's voices should be more attentively heard and acknowledged.

The most distinctive group was the third one, from Braga's association. This was the only group that introduced new content to the workshops, apart from the novelties related to the participants' context that were evident during the sessions with the other two groups. Since the workshops had a participatory dimension, it was a really rewarding process to have the chance to engage in dialogue in a truly horizontal manner with the participants. One could say that, within this group, male participants were more active than female participants during the four workshops we conducted with them. It should also be stressed that these participants were so interested in the workshops that an extra session was scheduled for September 2021, after the regular calendar initially set for the workshops. This is also worth noting because at least two participants were quite knowledgeable about the area, as they worked on related themes. Thus, they brought new questions to the workshops and shared numerous insights.

As for the most surprising aspects, it can be highlighted that two siblings as well as a father and daughter were part of the group, and that almost all individuals already knew strategies to overcome disinformation, being very active and spontaneous in the discussion. Due to their interest and involvement in the discussions, it was necessary to use more than double the time used for the workshop conducted at the social solidarity institution. Julião, who works as a digital strategist and activist, was particularly involved with the subjects and José, a specialist in finance literacy, widely talked about those matters in light of the workshops' themes. The participants of this group were able to give detailed examples of the institutions, books, websites, and strategies in the field of disinformation and fake news. In addition, this was the only group—compared to the other two—that knew what deep fake news is.

Even though all the subjects led to discussion, it was interesting to find that participants who were knowledgeable about subjects in the field of Communication wanted to participate in several workshops to discuss and share their perspectives and opinions, approaching these spaces in a dialectic way—for them, this was an opportunity to share their knowledge and to be confronted with different views.

Summing up, we could identify the existence of different positions based on gender, both about the topics addressed and about the online methodology implemented. The results suggest that in the groups with greater knowledge about the subjects addressed there was a male predominance in terms of participation. In the groups coming from areas marked by social and economic

inequalities, female voices dominated the discussions, especially regarding the concerns with the risks and opportunities of social media, and in terms of curiosity toward topics they did not know or wanted to know more about. We also consider it relevant to note that the research team itself learned a lot from some of the participants and their contributions to the discussions, making this a truly transformative experience, based on learning by doing and exchange of experiences.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

This exploratory research has allowed us to reflect on the interactive processes between the research team and the workshop participants, and consequently opens the possibility of pointing to understudied issues. It became evident that the workshops constitute a seed for some groups and an opportunity to strengthen knowledge for others. First, we can point out the fact that age is a relevant matter. Even if the topics and the content developed for the participatory workshops can be used with different generations—an aspect that points to a common ground of possibilities—there are digital challenges specific to older people, particularly those aged over 70 and 90. They stated that they had never used the internet, even if they had actually done it before for talking with relatives during the pandemic period—which shows that the internet is everywhere and that we can use it without knowing and being aware of its dangers. Even so, they had their first experience of doing internet-related activities, such as searching on *Google* and contacting with internet-related words, which were completely new for them, and which implied a specific mindset that is also distant from the mass media environments they had known all their lives. Regarding the younger group, other technological (and pedagogical) proposals emerged from the workshops and the themes explored, such as the editing of a radio show. In this case, we can also say that in-person workshops would have promoted a more intense group dynamic.

In view of what the research tells us so far, we could identify differences among the groups which are related to educational levels. The group with higher education (including masters and Ph.D. degrees) was the one that demonstrated solid previous knowledge and also skills that allowed them to add valuable content to the sessions. These workshops also made it possible to understand that participants may be people with previous knowledge about the project' themes and who want to debate the issues in question. Aspects such as these may lead research teams to reconfigure the way of presenting contents, adapting them to different levels of knowledge. This was one of the particularities found in this research, and which may allow new challenges to be launched for new initiatives based on the same participatory methodology.

Even though we must emphasize that this is an exploratory project, we can also identify gender differences: more active participation of women from the youth club group and from men in the group from the association was visible, in the latter case in the line with traditional research (Lister et al., 2003;

Karpowitz et al., 2012). These results allow us to think about future research that includes a gender approach and tries to understand such unbalanced participation or how gender dynamics impacted women's and men's participation in group discussions. We consider this to be another interesting sphere of analysis, even more so if we cross it with the research team that conducted the workshops, which was composed mostly of women.

The fact that the workshops involved the participation of the research team members, students, and end-users (people associated with or participants in the institutions and also staff, such as youth workers and sociocultural animators) ensures lively discussions as well as more vivid and participative moments. The workshops were truly intergenerational spaces, allowing reflection on the need to incorporate these dynamics into other types of research on a wide range of topics. Despite all the challenges already pointed out, we consider the sharing moments provided extremely fruitful, which was visible in the balance of the research team, but also in the reflections of the participants. This also ensures that the workshops can be conducted without deep changes to the participants' common environments and daily routines, as was the case of the groups from the youth club and the social solidarity institution. Reinforced by previous research with similar approaches (Brites et al., 2015), these results can point to relevant dimensions to work in an active and context-based way with different communities. Indeed, this appears to be also pretty much related with another dimension: participants cherish research that ensures a space for their voices to be heard and that aims to make them visible and turn them into active agents in research processes.

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Digital Media Literacy with *Sati* (Mindfulness): The Combining Approach Underlying the Thai Contexts

Monsak Chaiveeradech

In the situation of internet usage in Thailand, the number of internet users has constantly increased by 3.4 million (+7.4%) and the number of social media users by 3 million (5.8%) between 2020 and 2021 (Kemp, 2021). Thailand is one of the fastest-growing emerging smartphone markets; in particular, the growing popularity of social media networks in Thailand has caused them to become a part of the daily lives of people who spend time communicating, sharing and interacting amongst their virtual communities. Furthermore, including the most recent report (Leesa-Nguansuk, 2021), online shopping has become the new normal habit and eCommerce has progressed into LIVECommerce, automated eCommerce, SuperApp and CryptoCommerce, which will be the major channel of business to engage directly with consumers (Pongvitayapanu, 2021). This transformation of internet usage growth could have either direct or indirect influences on individuals and society. Thai people are enabled to access and search for information in order to cultivate their knowledge and even to empower community participation. Consequently, social media platforms are becoming powerful tools for Thai people to express their perspectives. There are many delicate issues such as corruption, social inequality, social injustice and double standards in human rights that need to dig deeper into the roots of the problems because of blocking and filtering systems by the authorities.

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There are also other sides to the social media platforms; privacy is a key concern related to inappropriate or uninformed usage of technology that leaves evidences called a "digital footprint" for marketers and fraudsters to track personal data (O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, and Council of Communications and Media, 2011). In addition, Burns (2017) also points out that social media users are influenced by curated content, online content to which publishers have added some features so that users can easily see and explore what is presented. Relevant content is then tailored to consumers' needs because social media monitoring software and devices track every step of the consumer's behaviours and preferences (Amoit, 2017). All devices are designed to support strategic marketing for inducing consumers to have enough interest and trust to eventually purchase products and services for which they had not necessarily enquired. The method of creating brand opportunities is capturing the consumer's attention through the zero moment of truth in order to make a quick decision in every single moment. Digital platforms are used to support businesses replacing traditional media, which create engagement for individuals to access information better and communicate with others to serve their needs. Bawden and Robinson (2020) suggest that the best overcome approach is to seek a mindful balance in consuming information, which is a part of digital media literacy. Additionally, "Should we add to media and information literacy the issues of 'mindfulness' and 'digital wellness'?" (Berger, 2019, p. 26). This question was raised to discuss the existing literacies needed to be applied to new approaches in response to digital change. Looking through the concept of digital media literacy, the key objective is to encourage individuals in developing key competencies that can be integrated with *Sati* (mindfulness) in order to cultivate media awareness. Therefore, this research study aims to investigate how to bridge two principles of digital media literacy and *Sati* (mindfulness) and develop the conceptual framework to describe the relationship between those two philosophies.

Unpacking the Concept of Media, Information and Digital Literacy and *Sati* (Mindfulness)

Accordingly, UNESCO's long-term commitment is to encourage the process of empowerment and participation in terms of knowledge society, democracy and good governance (UNESCO, 2013a). In particular, UNESCO focuses on the value of the relationship between information and communication that can be strengthened through the development of the competencies. I visualise the overview of media literacy concept to clarify the global framework (see Fig. 24.1).

Tornero and Varis (2010) describe the process of human beings' development to operate '*human function*', in which individuals can develop, invent or generate an instrument to support and serve their multiple skills and capabilities. This is the process of an individual knowledge formation that Buckingham
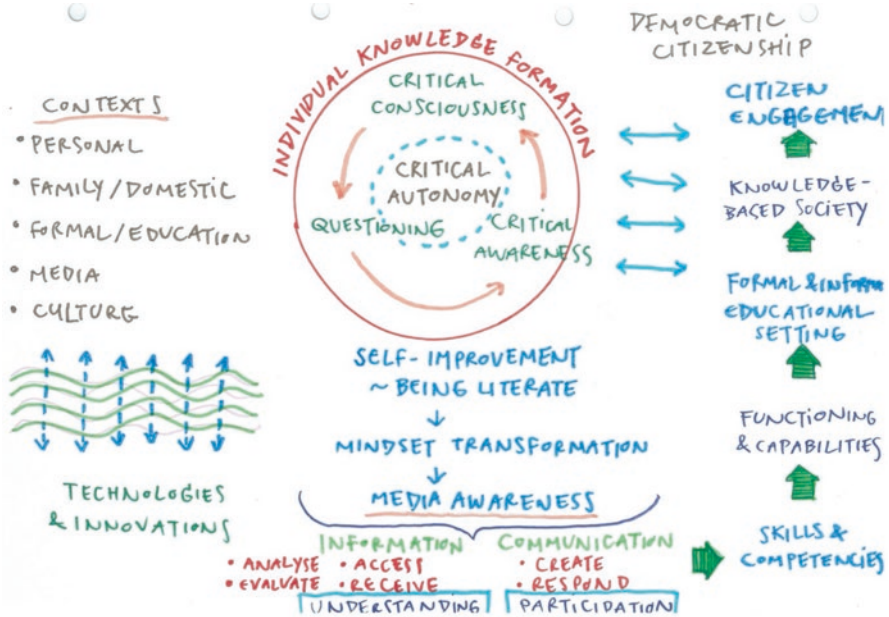
Fig. 24.1 The overview of media literacy concept

(2003) uses '*critical autonomy*' to describe the process of media education to develop 'critical abilities', which is the development of 'critical consciousness', which is utilised to empower and liberate individuals from the values and ideologies of the media, termed 'critical awareness', to establish citizen engagement that leads to democratic citizenship. The process of questioning and reflecting on technology development is defined as '*media awareness*' that Thoman (Robbgrieco, 2018) presented as the framework of 'conscientization' or critical-consciousness-raising, which was influenced by Paulo Freire to enable individuals to criticise and dissolve their own preconceptions and stereotypes that can harm an encounter with other cultures. Essentially, engaging with the media, which is the part of individuals' lived experience, those skills are needed to develop their competencies to understand their rights and enable their voice to reflect their freedom of expression. In particular, one aspect of the distinctive type of media literacy, '*being literate*', is important in that it addresses all literacies on a continuum, in which individuals are differently literate, demonstrating varying levels and uses of literacy competencies according to their environments, need and available resources (UNESCO, 2013b). This visual mapping above reflects the process of self-transformation to cultivate '*media awareness*', which is a part of capabilities and competencies development. UNESCO (2013a) refers to the value of the relationship between information and communication which can be strengthened through the development of the competencies that Buckingham (2003) indicates through

two keywords which are *'understanding'* and *'participation'* in cultivating a form of *'democratic citizenship'*. It can be seen that media awareness as aiming to encourage access to technologies and technologies underlying the appropriation of different layer of contexts that enable information to be received, created and disseminated which empowers individuals to actively participate in society.

On the other principle, the word *Sati* (mindfulness) is generally used in Thai daily life, in particular, to urge someone to return to awareness after they have been unaware of something or even the circumstances have already occurred. *Sati* (mindfulness) is described as the process of recollection (Payutto, 1995), which encourages an individual to return to his or her mind in order to interact with the present situation. It can also be a consolation word from good friends to exhort whatever is causing you to be troubled. The word *Sati* (mindfulness) can bring an individual to awareness of the interacted occurrence. Furthermore, *Sati* (mindfulness) functions as a gatekeeper to monitor the stimuli that individuals are engaging with (Payutto, 1995). The principle of philosophy firstly identified the origin of suffering or *Dukkha*, which is the first noble truth and relates to the five aggregates of existence and *Kamma* or intentional actions that indicate the interdependence of all things (see Fig. 24.2).

The key concept of five aggregates of existence process demonstrates the interrelationship between the components of internal responsiveness, where receiving a stimulus or an object then passes through five senses from external to internal senses. The sensation or feeling occurs while contacting external stimuli. This process classifies, identifies and recognises the data from outside and also codifies and labels the characteristics of the object that is the cause for remembering the object as a process of forming a perception. Thoughts and feelings are popped up with each individual background of experience that projects delusion in different ways from direct and indirect learning. Furthermore, when certain things are consumed, it can develop the desires to consume more and yet more. Payutto (1995) indicates that this kind of behaviour is "living without understanding the truth", interpreted as living with ignorance and against the law of nature. Therefore, wisdom is defined in the meaning of understanding *Dukkha*, in which things are impermanent and insubstantial (Payutto, 2019). Engaging with the principle of impermanence by using *Sati* (mindfulness) is to be aware of the circumstances that occur at every moment of our daily life and to have a free mind to know and understand all things according to the truth and not attach or cling to anything without craving. This process is termed "considering the truth without judgement", where it is needful to "liberate itself completely by letting it go of it" (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014). *Sati* (mindfulness) certainly supports the process by making individuals return to the present moment and focus on the present situation that they are confronting before reacting to an external stimulus. This process is like a careful consideration in which an internal reflection is a process of 'self-observation' and it leads them to the process of critical reflection in terms of the formation of wisdom (Payutto, 2019). Similarly, the core concept
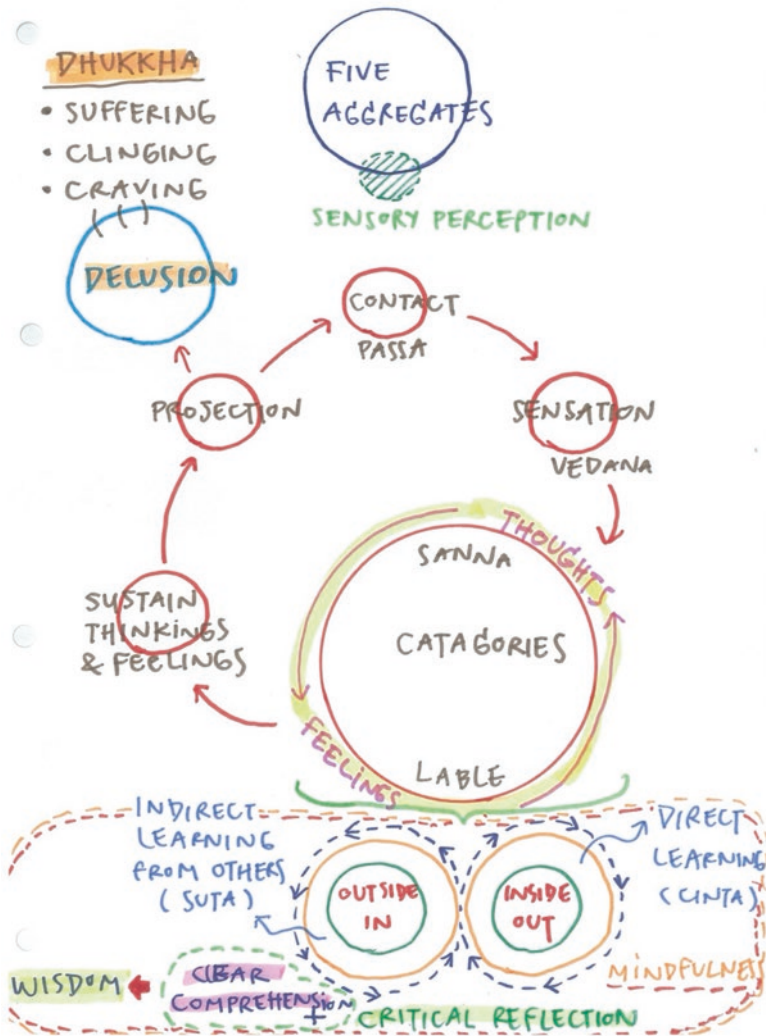
Fig. 24.2 The overview of the sense of a circumstance

of media literacy focuses on how individuals can access, analyse, communicate and evaluate the media in which they interact in order to realise both positive and negative impacts and liberate themselves to cultivate their potential for the capability to achieve their goals for participating in their community.

LOOKING THROUGH THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT'S FINDINGS

The overlapping of two concepts, *Sati* (mindfulness) and digital media literacy, is responsible for initiating the research hypothesis that '*Sati*' (mindfulness) is the core component of digital media literacy, for it enables Thai people to establish competencies. Accordingly, *Sati* (mindfulness) is an important context, which is profoundly ingrained in Thainess to function as a self-reminder to themselves. I propose, *Sati* (mindfulness) provides a space for self-reviewing, which underpins the process of critical reflection in terms of internal processing formation. This restructured conceptual framework was cyclically developed from participants' engagement to clarify the relationship between two concepts (see Fig. 24.3).

This conceptual framework is clarified into three layers to explain the overview of the relationship between *Sati* (mindfulness) and digital media literacy, in which how two concepts can be bridged to explain the individual knowledge formation: *the outer layer*, each individual has his or her own ideal set of perceptions, beliefs, values and norms. There are both positive and negative impacts in establishing their own mindsets and identities, in which their knowledge is accumulated in different ways, culminating in varying levels of understanding of digital media literacy. *The middle layer* is divided into three elements
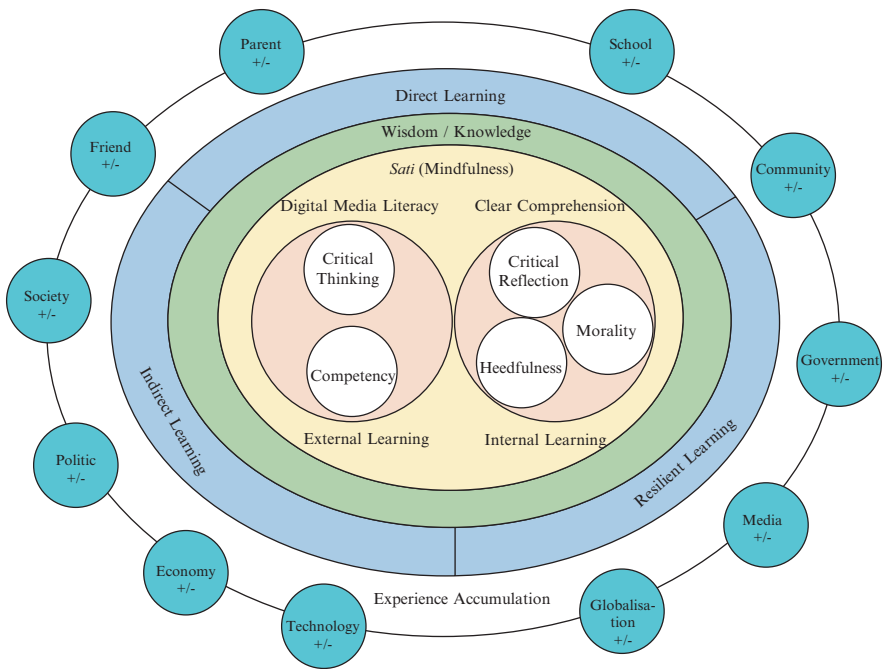
Fig. 24.3   The restructured conceptual framework (Chaiveeradech 2022)

of learning: *first*, the direct learning is the process of an individual's learning, in which they learn from the real and rich situations that they gain from the immediate experience when they participate with activities in their external factors. *Second*, the indirect learning is the process of learning, which gains experience from indirect ways, for example, reading books and studying from teachers; and *last*, resilient learning is the process of self-development from difficult situations, in which they are able to recover and develop the ability to be normal and adaptable. And, *the inmost layer*, the circle of *Sati* (mindfulness) covers the two circles of internal and external learning because *Sati* (mindfulness) is the key support to strengthen digital media literacy skills; therefore *Sati* (mindfulness) practicing makes an individual to cultivate digital media literacy. The two circles are dynamically integrated to formulate the circulation of the internal and external learning. The basis of an individual's beliefs has dynamic influences for developing *Sati* (mindfulness), critical thinking and digital media literacy. There are several dimensions of Thai context to establish an individual's knowledge; it depends on each individual to learn *Sati* (mindfulness) and digital media literacy (Chaiveeradech 2022).

The recent examples of online rumour cases in Thailand are *"The new coronavirus can be spread by mosquito bites and in Chinese food"*, *"Spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body can protect you against Covid-19 inflection"* (Thaiger, 2020), "*Standing in direct sunlight can kill the coronavirus*" and "*Drinking lemonade can kill coronavirus*" (Thaiger, 2021). The other source attempts to inform individuals to be aware of fake news: "*Eating garlic does not prevent Covid-19*" and "*Hand dryers and UV bulbs do not prevent or kill Covid-19 on our body*" (Satrusayang, 2020). Those news items illustrate how digital technology and social media easily spread fake news speedily to reach wider audiences far beyond the traditional media (Petchot, 2020). The consequences affect not only medical workers who need to inform the public about the facts but also local residents who were unaware of the fact and therefore protested at the field hospital for Coronavirus pandemic because they were frightened of infection (Thaitrakulpanich, 2021). In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed consumers' behaviour to shift to online shopping (Thailand Business News, 2020). The report from PwC Thailand also supports the statement that COVID-19 has accelerated Thai consumers to shift to online activities. Over a third of consumers (35%) have recently purchased products and services through online platforms (Kate, 2020). "*e-Commerce sales in this period are expected to double and drive the overall e-Commerce market in Thailand to reach more than two hundred billion Thai Baht this year.*" This statement represents that Thai consumers are ready for a cashless society by using online transactions not only for COVID-19 concerns but also for convenience and safety (Kate, 2020). Based on the current report of the digital 2021: Thailand of eCommerce activity, 88.1% of Thai internet users searched online for products and services to purchase and 84.9% visited online stores (Kemp, 2021). In particular, the eCommerce purchases are discernible through age group: 84.8% of 16–24 year olds and 83.3% of 25–34 year olds have purchased

products and services through eCommerce (Kemp, 2021). It can be observed that eCommerce has become a key component of Thai people's daily lives. Thai consumers can interact immediately, access real-time information and expand their opportunities to engage in an online marketplace and create peer-to-peer communities with both buyers and sellers. Therefore, the online shopping decision-making process can proceed faster than purchasing in a physical store.

Looking at the other side of the Thai context, the COVID-19 pandemic has enlarged the Thai cultural beliefs regarding religion and the supernatural, with the Thai government requiring monks nationwide to chant in order to combat COVID-19 and raise citizens' spirits (Thaitrakulpanich, 2020). Additionally, Thai online news publicised a little Thai boy dancing in front of the spirit house to get rid of COVID-19 (Kanchanabundhu, 2020). It reflects the Thai local belief that the function of soothing the feeling of anxiety during an unpredictable moment is a good crutch for emotional support to treat mental wellbeing, assisted by prayer chants and meditation. Belief and blind faith exist on the thin line between habituation and unfamiliarity, causing individuals to easily believe in phenomena without empirical evidence. Furthermore, some marketeers attempt to use this approach to persuade consumers of new products and services that serve mental wellbeing in terms of a 'superficial' in Buddhism, which is defined as a belief with an interpretation that is embedded in the combined cultural backgrounds of Buddhism, Brahmanism and Spiritualism. Thai Airways, for example, offers pilgrimage holy flights in which a celebrity astrologist leads all guests in chanting while flying over to visit 99 Buddhist sites throughout Thailand. Meals, a prayer book and an amulet are given as part of a pre-New Year trip to make good merit (Khaosod, 2020; BBC, 2020). Furthermore, holy face masks made of limited-edition muslin with a talisman are printed to protect against evil (Sereemongkolpol, 2020). It can be inferred that Thai 'superficial' beliefs in Buddhism and Spiritualism are used as an emotional strategy for commercial purposes. Thais are easily convinced when myths and beliefs are used, which cannot be proven scientifically but can insightfully influence them psychologically in their everyday lives.

LOOKING THROUGH THE CONSEQUENCES AND FURTHER DISCUSSION

From the reconstructed conceptual framework, digital media literacy with *Sati* (mindfulness) emphasises on the process of an individual's internal learning. I outline the term '*self-literacy*' as the process of self-observation and self-realisation with the additional skill of self-listening to understand what is happening in one's thoughts and emotions and then reflect them with self-awareness that make individuals to realise that every thought and emotion is arising, existing and then ending in every second. The key point of this realisation is to be mindful of their patterns of thoughts and emotions in order to clearly

comprehend their thoughts and emotions that Keller and Share (2019) term as 'normalcy', which constructs the oppressive ideologies, social norms and injustices in each community. Referring to Nussbaum's keywords for this process, "inequality reexamined" and "development as freedom" (Nussbaum, 2011), this process spotlights an internal practice, that can enable individuals to question and reconsider what media they are consuming to construct illusory of thoughts and emotions to them. This process associates with digital media literacy, in which individuals can manage themselves before handling with the external stimuli that they are receiving. This definition is merged between the definitions of *Sati* (mindfulness) and digital media literacy, which combine the internal process of thoughts and emotional self-awareness to establish skills and competencies and then to articulate knowledge for interacting with the external process by using critical thinking as an intellectual process (wisdom) that facilitates *Sati* (mindfulness) with clear comprehension to participate with the external stimuli.

Digital media literacy with *Sati* (mindfulness) enables me to reconsider McDougall's argument of "decolonising of the epistemology of digital media literacy" (McDougall, 2020, p. 79), which encourages me to return to the past of media literacy movement in Thailand. It can be the starting point for approaching the way of the Western conceptual framing of digital media literacy needs to be both 'glocalising' and itself, and *Sati* (mindfulness) to develop 'diverse approaches' to establish digital media literacy. Beginning with the basic question of "*Is UNESCO's digital media literacy framework appropriate for Thais to promote this issue in Thailand?*", we can criticise what we receive before we use it. Additionally, encouraging *Sati* (mindfulness) integrated into digital media literacy can play a role in reuniting social fields and providing a space for negotiated knowledge exchange in which all key sectors can share their own insights in order to figure out this question within the Thai context in terms of myths and beliefs that have influence in power relations between each sector.

One key finding of this research study illustrates the new version of digital media literacy definition as "*an ability to analyse, evaluate the real values of things*" to have '*self-literacy*' to observe and understand an individual's patterns of habituation in the daily life. *Sati* (mindfulness) and the internal process of critical reflection can be additionally defined as (1) '*listen to one's own voice*', that is to listen to one's own popped-up thoughts and emotions when individuals are engaging with the media. And the external process of critical thinking, which is (2) '*listen to others' voices*', that is to listen to all external stimuli that interact with both physical and psychological impacts on oneself. *Sati* (mindfulness) provides individuals the space to observe what is happening in their minds that they can cultivate their own self-literacy. According to the Thai Buddhist principle, the internal process is of importance that gives priority to the process of critical reflection or *Yonisomanasikara*, in which '*listen to one's own voice*' and '*listen to others' voices*' are the key skills to cultivate individuals' competency of digital media literacy. When an individual has his/her own self-literacy, they can clarify their real problems with regards to the familiarity of

cultural background. The key practice for the solution is '*accepting that we have the problem*', which means before we can solve a problem, we must accept that it is a problem, our problem. Accepting means setting down and taking responsibility for it, then we can transcend it. This practice allows us to observe the familiar patterns of power exercising, power being exercised, oppression, inclusion, exclusion, privilege, marginality and ignorance, which shape us to interact with others with self-awareness and reinforce our clear comprehension of the root cause of the problem.

Superiority is the one factor of Thai cultural contexts that inevitably influences the movement of digital media literacy in Thailand, which has been oppressed by the authoritarian patronage system that has caused Thais to be passive citizens for long time. Examples of Thai proverbs *Wa Non Sorn Ngai* (docility and obedience) and *Mai Mee Pak Mee Seang*' (Do not argue with a senior) that are taught in schools to visualise a good student who respects teachers, is well-behaved and follows the instructions. Thai students, in particular, should not raise their voices to challenge someone older than them, because this is considered aggressive behaviour that is embedded in Thai social norms. Prapasanobol (2021) shares crucial points from his study, in which Thai educational system does not provide students with an appropriate ecosystem for effective learning because the governmental sector emphasises on the aspects of nation, religion and monarchy to particularly cultivate a monarchical patriotism that restricts Thais to freely criticise sensitive issues. '*What is the real problem with this issue?*' and '*What is the target group's actual need for this digital media literacy movement?*' These questions should be asked to enable key stakeholders to first reconsider and reframe their mindset before setting policies, strategies and implementations to reassure that they understand the essence of digital media literacy concept both in terms of 'function' and in terms of 'capability'. As this research addressed, the process of participation is necessary to practice for all stakeholders in different fields of experience and to apply self-literacy in terms of digital media literacy with *Sati* (mindfulness) in action. All stakeholders need courage in '*accepting that we have the problem*' to liberate them to openly express the community's problems that will in turn allow all stakeholders to be part of this community for a positive change. Considerably, the pattern of the educational system is a rote learning approach that does not nurture the capability with the aim of understanding their right to freedom of expression and active participation. The next question is how to support individuals to establish capability in the protectionist approach under the authoritarian patronage system and realise the approach that governmental sectors attempt to formulate in their sense of beliefs.

Therefore, we can redefine a '*functional definition*' inspired by Western notions. It is not right or wrong to be influenced because this concept has been developed from the West and used widespread worldwide. The key point is that policymakers and academics should investigate and realise how to decolonise this concept for Thais in order to recreate "diverse approaches" based on the principle of literacy as social practice. These diverse and inventive approaches

originate from an understanding of social contexts, which are linked to institutions, systems, structures, and power relations in each society (UNESCO, 2017; McDougall, 2020). And what is the distinction between '*function*' and '*capability*' that individuals should be taught to understand in terms of digital media literacy. Additionally, each sector can reframed the social relationships from "power controlling" to "power sharing" in each society that finally, 'habitus clash' can become 'habitus merge' in which everyone from each sector can come across to learn from each other boundaries in terms of capabilities. With the aim of understanding the patterns of 'personal experience' of social structures and relations that intend to establish individuals within the oppressive system as familiar with this normalcy.

Additionally, focusing on discussing the 'truth' of knowledge, the beginning stage of digital media literacy with *Sati* (mindfulness), is to understand one's thoughts and emotions, which is the fundamental notion of causes and consequences, allowing individuals to progress to the further stage of understanding oneself and others. When they comprehend this simple law of causes and consequences, they can open their mind to embrace others' perspectives and observe the root of 'truth', which formulates to be the knowledge of each community. As Foucault stated, power is knowledge and power, therefore, can set the 'truth'; it can be seen that 'truth' is formulated to use for power negotiation. Therefore, defining the different meanings of the three keywords of each individual in the social sectors based on each experience and knowledge is the process of power exercising and being exercised to produce their own 'regimes of truth'. The significance of digital media literacy in relation to *Sati* (mindfulness) envisages how individuals can realise the patterns and functions of 'truth' that they are dealing with and enhance their understanding of their capability and responsibility to speak for themselves. The keyword 'active participation', therefore, relates to this process of 'self-literacy', in which individuals understand the inevitable reproduction of inequalities that are accumulated by their social structure.

Regarding Thai Buddhist teaching, the root of Buddhist canon derived from the Buddha oral tradition, which is described in Thai as *múk-kà-bpaa-tà*, was transmitted into text through memorising in early Buddhism. The phrase *evaṃ me sutaṃ* (thus have I heard) and 'from mouth to ear' (Analayo, 2007) is reflected in the process of oral transmission through monks who have the task to memorise for writing in the canon (Veidlinger, 2018). According to Analayo (2007), this oral literature of the Buddhist canon can be detected in some transmission errors. It can be considered that the teaching was written by memorisation and interpretation. As mentioned above, the definitions of the three keywords are established through the 'truth' of knowledge by people in each society who have recited, checked and accepted the knowledge. On the other hand, Thai Buddhist teaching has the guidance called *Kalama Sutta*, which educates individuals not to rely on a tradition only because it is a tradition, or because the sources seem reliable, or because it leads by the authority, or because he or she is a teacher, rather it should be experienced, questioned

and validated by one's own experience (Fernando, 2016). It clearly demonstrates that the 'truth' of knowledge has its own objectives to encourage people to believe underneath their social norms structure. Although, the Thai Buddhist teaching, in particular *Sati* (mindfulness), is becoming widely used in a range of contexts and being applied to many ranges of approaches. This challenge is not the practice or the technique of *Sati* (mindfulness) itself, but rather how to understand critically what it has taught us, since individuals should have the capabilities to question and realise the patterns and functions of knowledge formulation among their cultural contexts.

And the last point is how to glocalise *Sati* (mindfulness) into the universal concept of digital media literacy. This other question is rising to redefine and reconceptualise digital media literacy in 'diverse approaches', where the essence of digital media literacy still remains because it is not an instant approach to ensuring the archetype of achievement for any country. Cultural differences are the crucial point, in particular, to influence the formulation of digital media literacy. McDougall's statement, "'Teaching to fish' approach rather than 'giving a fish'" (McDougall, 2020, p. 129), encourages me to reconsider the argument of this research study. *'Self-listening'*, which was defined as '*listen to one's own voice'* and '*listen to others' voices'*, is the new key skill to develop digital media literacy. It can be seen that digital media literacy with *Sati* (mindfulness) is not a single-based responsibility on one sector but it is the collaborative process from all key stakeholders to observe and understand one's voice in relation to others' voices that allow an individual to be aware of the causes and consequences, where one action can influence both physical and psychological impacts on an individual and others.

'Self-literacy' in terms of digital media literacy with *Sati* (mindfulness) enables individuals to clarify the structure of self-habituation and the structure of relationship of social dominant power that oppresses them in the community system; in particular, *Sati* (mindfulness) in this research study emphasises how individuals cultivate self-awareness to be aware of the media messages, which convince them to consume and purchase promptly when they interact through digital platforms. Self-literacy provides the practice of self-realisation for questioning oneself and listening to how thoughts and emotions function in the mind in order to determine the appropriate actions to respond to those media messages. This internal process eventually leads them to achieve the goal of liberating themselves to become an active citizen. From this starting point it envisages further the key question, that is how key stakeholders in each community, in particular in Thailand, can reexamine their normalcy in order to cultivate self-literacy and question how each person can be aware of each belief and perception in terms of the cultural background underlying Thai contexts. Consequently, digital media literacy is reframed to be tailor-made to Thais in order to establish the capability in practical approaches by engaging all stakeholders to participate in the process of digital media literacy development.

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Media Literacy in the Infodemic

Julian McDougall and Karen Fowler-Watt

During the coronavirus pandemic, conspiracy theories and health misinformation converged and brought the importance of media literacy to prominence in the urgent clamour for responses and solutions. Whilst the international media literacy community of practice has much to offer in this space, it is also wary of short-term, reactive solutionism, as the evidence demonstrates the importance of critical media literacy being developed over time as a sustainable mindset for both resilience to misinformation and critical awareness of the representational dynamics of all media through a robust theory of change.

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, in June 2020, reported their findings that public trust in both news media reporting and government briefings about the pandemic were in decline. Later in the same critical year for the pandemic, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and Tow Center at Columbia University conducted a survey of 1400 English-speaking journalists worldwide and reported just under half of respondents citing politicians and elected officials as frequent sources of disinformation. Eighteen months into the pandemic, Steensen (2021) reported interim findings on 'News from the Desert', an actor-network and auto-ethnographic study of how Covid disinformation has thrived in communities left behind by journalism. These included opportunities for 'unexpected actors' to take charge of local public discourse in the absence of trust in regional journalism, for example Facebook group administrators.

The potential for media literacy to offer a response to misinformation had been established by Hobbs (2017), who provided applied research into

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teaching responsiveness to conspiracy theories, whilst in our previous work, we reviewed the international field of media literacy to assess its capacity to oppose fake news (Fowler-Watt & McDougall, 2019). This range of work has now been applied with renewed urgency to Covid conspiracies whilst new studies investigated media literacy in times of Covid alongside industry initiatives seeking to restore trust and engage marginalised communities (e.g., by BBCs Media Action, whose work is featured elsewhere in this collection and who we worked with on their media literacy intervention).

In this chapter, we collate a 'meta review' of (a) the evidence of impactful media literacy for resilience to misinformation; (b) the applicability of this pre-pandemic work to Covid health information and (c) the evidence emerging from new media literacy research undertaken during the crisis and specifically focused on media literacy in the context of Covid. This meta review seeks to assess the value of media literacy at the intersection of misinformation and public health challenges.

Methods

For a review conducted for the European Commission (McDougall et al., 2018), secondary data was derived from peer-reviewed academic literature, international policy reports, verified comparative studies and disseminated research projects with proof of concept or evidence of impact. Systematic searches were conducted using the search terms 'media education', 'media literacy', 'digital literacy', 'media studies' combined with, 'secondary education', 'teaching practices', 'disinformation', 'misinformation' and 'fake news'. 'Snowball' methods were used to gather additional research data.

For a US Embassy-funded project (Fowler-Watt & McDougall, 2019), a narrative review was collated by the research team and evaluated with stakeholders (teachers, students, journalists and information professionals), but was not subject to systematic scoping or parameters.

A mapping exercise in the UK commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (RSM/CEMP, 2020) provided a review of online media literacy initiatives for UK users to feed into the government's *Online Harms* White Paper towards the development of a media literacy strategy for online safety. The scoping parameters employed included target user group; provider type; scale, reach and longevity; focus of approach; delivery method and the sub-sets of media literacy skills and capabilities involved.

Another UK review, commissioned by the UK regulator OFCOM (Edwards et al., 2021), consisted of a rapid evidence assessment, scoping grey literature and conducting expert interviews identified existing media literacy practices designed to address misinformation, technical interventions and audience responses to interventions.

In this chapter, we review the findings of these four broader projects that speak directly to media literacy as a response to, or for, preventative resilience-building for misinformation in general. We then present the rapid review of

evidence for media literacy as a specific intervention with regard to the problem of COVID-19 misinformation conducted here as a narrative review of published evidence in the public domain, peer reviewed and published and/or disseminated and curated through recognised, international media literacy and media education networks and events. The findings from the first group of studies are then reviewed in light of the results of the additional rapid evidence review.

The European Commission review of effective media literacy practice in secondary schools for responding to information disorder provided a set of key findings. There was clear evidence that the spread of disinformation and 'fake news' was having a negative impact on students and their learning. The consequences of disinformation campaigns have also presented significant challenges to teachers who seek to convey the value of evidence to their students, especially in subject areas that are prone to propaganda such as science, history and citizenship education. Media literacy initiatives were shown to lessen the vulnerability of children to disinformation as the development of critical thinking and the analytical competences specifically targeted at media are key components of a successful educational intervention. There was clear evidence that students who reported high levels of media literacy learning opportunities were more likely to identify misinformation and such learning contexts often involved professional journalists helping to teach students how to check the authenticity of information and to understand how students' personal data is a factor in attempts to influence them. Successful implementation of media literacy education at the school level was often facilitated by approaches to pedagogy that combined and/or crossed boundaries between spaces and roles—the classroom and the extended 'third space', teachers and students working in partnership to co-create learning and professional development in hybrid combinations of physical and virtual networks. There was credible, empirical evidence of more formal, funded, partnership engagements between media literacy educators and media industries, literacy organisations, NGOs and other stakeholders at the level of resource production and single events.

The US Embassy review concluded that media literacy is best achieved through knowledge exchange between academic perspectives on critical thinking about media and students' 'lifeworld' engagements with collective civic media literacies, such as they already exist. This research found that stakeholders perceive the problem to be not only about information disorder but also about the failure of education to create resilient, critical thinkers. There was also a shared view that the lack of a civil, debating culture in state education is part of the problem. The study drew three key recommendations. First, rather than producing competence frameworks for media literacy, as though it is a neutral set of skills for citizens, media literacy needs to enable students to apply critical, *dynamic* approaches to media. Second, media literacy should further enable experiential, reflexive aspects of media *practice*, with reciprocal transfer between critical rhetoric and creative practice in order to respond academically to media as, primarily, a question of representation. In other words, resilience

to representation is enhanced by expertise *in* representing. Third, media literacy also, and urgently, needs to include the critical exploration of social media, algorithms and big data, accompanied by applied practical learning in the *uses* of them.

The mapping exercise for the DCMS found that children were the most common media literacy activity target whilst vulnerable groups were the least included, with under 5% of initiatives intending to reach them. Three per cent of activity only intended to support the media literacy needs of people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Evidence of the impact of media literacy initiatives was impeded by the lack of a common evaluation framework, but generally initiatives reviewed were categorised with regard to more critical engagement with media, with over half of the evidence relating to the ability to recognise misinformation of various kinds and also to be resilient to deceptive use of technology. This critical media engagement was understood to mean the ability to assess media content for truthfulness and reliability, to be critically aware of the motivations of content producers and therefore to make more informed decisions access and engagement.

The Ofcom study (Edwards et al., 2021) found clear evidence that media literacy interventions, whether integrated into classroom activities or as part of a technology-based initiative, do have a positive effect on the ability to critically engage with misinformation. Critical thinking, evaluation strategies and knowledge of the operation of news and media industries are consistently found to improve the ability to deal with misinformation. Media literacy interventions that use critical, enquiry-based thinking were consistently found to be more effective than interventions relying on instinctive, rapid engagement with information that requires much less cognitive engagement, such as fact-checking or verification activities. This review also identified gaps in current research and challenges associated with the implementation and measurement of media literacy as a tool for tackling misinformation. First, evidence of interventions that can produce long-term behaviour change was scarce or inconclusive. Second, the same inclusion biases as in the DCMS review were evident and, third, frameworks for assessing media literacy vary across studies, so that accurate comparisons or aggregations of results are difficult. Information and news literacy are more commonly investigated than broader forms of media ecosystem literacy and the civic dimensions of media literacy tend to be neglected.

Synthesis

From the data and findings summarised above, we identify four key evidence points to take forward into the review of Covid-specific media literacy work:

1. There is more evidence of the success of media literacy as a form of critical, reflexive thinking in building resilience to misinformation than of the acquisition of skills and competences;

2. Pedagogic strategies with evidence of impact include partnerships with nonformal actors and journalists, gamified learning contexts and 'third space' knowledge exchanges between learners' existing knowledge repertoires from their media engagements and the development of critical thinking with media theories and source verification;

3. Media literacy initiatives are currently skewed towards more easily reached groups and these can exclude marginalised and vulnerable cohorts who may be at greater risk from misinformation;

4. There is an urgent need for consistent evaluation criteria—in the form of a theory of change—for how media literacy increases resilience to misinformation.

Such a theory of change, which has the combined benefits of establishing a consistent set of more ambitious and longer-term, more sustainable success criteria for media literacy, has since been developed for our work with BBC Media Action (2022) and applied to activist digital arts, refugee engagement and youth-led media literacy projects with the Global Challenges Research Fund and British Council. This body of research has applied the theory of change in a range of countries and regions where an 'unhealthy' media ecosystem creates fertile ground for misinformation, marginalised communities and polarised discourse:

> People with media literacy can demonstrate: Full and safe ACCESS to digital technology and media, Critical AWARENESS of media representations and what content and information can be trusted, The CAPABILITY to use their media literacy actively, rather than as passive consumers and the critical understanding of the CONSEQUENCES of their actions in the media ecosystem and how to use their capabilities for positive consequences. (BBC Media Action Digital and Media Literacy Training Guide, 2022)

This framework, if consistently applied for media literacy work in the future to measure its impact on misinformation, would first look for evidence of media literacy raising people's expectations for access to a trustworthy and diverse media ecosystem. It would then assess the extent to which media literacy developments increase trust in media and how mediated societal engagement increases, with benefits to some, several or all of public health, equality and diversity, climate literacy and with aligned reductions in polarised discourse. The ultimate assessment criteria for impactful media literacy, through this theory of change, are evidence of more media-literate citizens displaying, and acting positively with—as capability—increased awareness of all conditions in which all media, information and data are produced and circulated. This would be seen as entirely successful with evidence of capabilities being enacted for good consequences, so that information disorder is reduced through the media-literate behaviour change.

MEDIA LITERACY IN COVID TIMES

In reviewing evidence of the efficacy of media literacy as a response to misinformation specifically about the pandemic, our scope included peer-reviewed work, projects and interventions disseminated across media literacy networks and communities of practice. As such, this data set is less systematic than the pre-Covid reviews due to the 'real time' methodology.

Since 2020, research that specifically investigates media literacy and COVID-19 misinformation mainly applies existing knowledge about media literacy to the context of pandemic misinformation. A wide range of articles, blog posts and online resources describe and justify the importance of media literacy for resilience to misinformation about the virus but refer back to pre-pandemic media literacy research and/or share findings from surveys into the problem, and cite media literacy as the solution, as opposed to offering evidence from during the pandemic (see Jolls, 2020; Polizzi, 2020).

Elements of the media literacy response were specific and targeted, including youth engagement to address COVID-19 misinformation; online discrimination and information overload during the pandemic; African youth on the frontline of the crisis; tips for parents on dealing with Covid information with children; Philippine youth responses to Covid fake news and 'Empathic Communication and Dialogue: Ubuntu, Solidarity and Healing Letters in Pandemic Times'. These responses were more in keeping with the body of work which is presenting media literacy as an applicable, adaptable resource to a new situation.

Austin et al. (2021), in a kind of hybrid contribution, used a model derived from established media literacy capabilities (from NAMLE, 2020) to test the hypothesis that, as media literacy enables agency in information environments, media-literate citizens would be better placed to interpret emerging health information in a time of crisis and develop self-protective behaviours:

> The results, verified in two cross-sectional surveys, deployed at two time points with different, nationally representative samples, highlight the important of skills to interpret health and science information in a complex media environment. Individuals with more media literacy are better prepared and willing to take experts' recommended preventive actions. (Austin et al., 2021, p. 11)

Studies found that intersectional disadvantage positioned BAME communities at greater health risk from the virus as also at greater risk from misinformation. But the findings of these were, given the timescale and scope, focused on assessing the media literacy skills of participants, diagnosing (from examination) the problem of Covid misinformation targeting vulnerable communities and then combining elements to prescribing media literacy as the remedy, as opposed to providing empirical evidence of its efficacy.

Ashrafi-rizi and Kazempour (2020) offer a typology of COVID-19 (mis) information which moves onto a recommendation for media literacy as

preventative for people to discern information and develop appropriate behaviours when future crises emerge. Again, an existing conceptual framework for media literacy form is used for the categorisation of information, and subsequent challenges for communities, and the development of media literacy, through education, is presented as important in the future, but the study does not directly address media literacy during this pandemic. Johara et al. (2021) applied random sampling to analyse data from their faculty members to evaluate their resilience to misinformation and their relative degrees of media literacy, addressing also the complexity of how social media moderating behaviours relate to the capability to recover from adversity and knowledge of awareness of events in the immediate environment related to the virus.

The above are examples of studies conducted during the pandemic which diagnose misinformation challenges with regard to public health and situate media literacy as either solution or prevention, as either an aspect of or a prerequisite for health literacy. One more forward-looking example is from Vraga et al. (2020). This study also presents the existing knowledge on media literacy as a prospective tool for social media users, in particular, to deploy for responding to Covid misinformation:

> In many ways, Covid-19 represents a novel pandemic, in terms of its spread and impact on the global economy as well as the media environment in which people learn about the virus and its effects. But we can build from existing research to improve how we respond to misinformation about the virus. Fostering news and science literacy provides a flexible solution that can help people distinguish quality information about Covid-19 and empower more active curation of their social media feeds to protect themselves and others from misinformation. (2020, p. 477)

However, it differs from others cited here in its call for research in Global South contexts, rather than a 'universal' methodology with the attendant risks of colonial epistemologies. Another distinctive contribution in this space comes from Gerosa et al. (2021) who offered a forensic analysis of American citizens' susceptibility to COVID-19 misinformation in correlation to their educational qualifications, as opposed to extracting media literacy as a discrete attribute in the 'knowledge-gap hypothesis' (and the implications of such for public health messaging):

> Our findings suggest that those with a lower education level are at a structural disadvantage when it comes to learning about guidelines to limit the spread of COVID-19 and protecting themselves and others. If the media do not differentially contribute to knowledge acquisition for people with varying education levels, then knowledge gaps are mostly based on previous knowledge or on the ability to interpret new information through the lens of existing information literacy. (2021, p. 16)

At the Media Education Summit in 2021, an international conference convened during the second year of the pandemic, drawing a community of media

literacy researchers and practitioners to share research, several studies relating to media literacy in the time of Covid were disseminated, but these were all focused on media education pedagogies for remote or virtual learning (Das, 2021; Holt, 2021; Rukmi, 2021; Scott, 2021). Similarly, the Media Education Lab's 2020 forum, 'Crisis Creates Opportunity', explored how the pandemic had advanced digital media literacy in US schools by enabling students to share their lived experiences of isolation through digital media and teachers to model new practices in informal peer learning. In addition to MES, the North American Media Literacy Education conference in 2020 and the Salzburg Global Forum on Media Literacy explored the intersection of media literacy, Covid and social justice, specifically around protest and the Black Lives Matter movement, and how inequalities relating to the pandemic were drawn on similar lines, with media literacy for social justice speaking to this intersection. Notable examples from within this strand of current research include Peters-Lazaro and Shresthova's work on civic imagination for 'practising futures' (2020) and Pablo Martínez-Zárate's practice research *Forensic Landscapes* (2021), a film which offers a vision of immersive media literacy, in which shared experience is understood as 'truth' and thus an antidote to the polarisation of discourse during pandemic. This work locates media literacy during and after the pandemic as being about citizens interacting differently with media ecosystems, as opposed to a set of competences to be measured as more or less developed and assumed to develop resilience.

The European Union Funded *Smart-EU* project offers a 'Social Media Resilience Toolkit' produced during the pandemic. At this time of this review, three items featured in the toolkit related to media literacy and Covid misinformation, specifically. A partnership between Thomson Reuters and NAMLE provides a podcast, video, classroom discussion guide and infographic on identifying Covid misinformation and applying media literacy strategies in response. An online article from *Now Toronto* curates a series of fact-checking and media literacy workshops and resources to tackle 'infotagion' and Knight Center's free MOOC on 'Disinformation & Fact-Checking in Times of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean' is publicised. These initiatives are all more focussed on the specific application of media literacy for misinformation resilience in Covid times, but it is too early to evaluate their impacts (see Smart-EU, 2021).

There have also been research findings shared and projects funded and in progress during this period which offer more specific contexts for how media literacy relates to the capacity to interpret health (mis)information during the crisis. Feigenbaum et al. (2021) are investigating the visual representation of Covid information in web-based comics across social media platforms. Both the media literacy practices at work in the visual representation of public health messages and the reception of them by readers are addressed. Tilton (2021) reflects on journalists' media literacies when reporting on Covid with the safeguarding of children in mind. A range of studies are investigating children's (virtual) play and development during the pandemic, most notably the *Play*

Observatory (Potter et al., 2020) which does not explicitly focus on children's media literacies with regard to resilience to health (mis) information but does explore the importance of the intersection of play, media and creative expression for wellbeing during the crisis. Like the Feigenbaum study which works at the interdisciplinary convergence of media literacy, data mapping and health information, Potter's project connects media literacy to the study of folklore. These examples indicate a more 'dynamic' development of media literacy methodologies in response to and informed by the pandemic. Musi and Carmi (2020) are developing a 'crisis informatics' approach to global digital activism in times of Covid: 'Being Alone Together: Developing Fake News Immunity'. The methods at work in this study intend to 'reverse-engineer' Covid misinformation, similar to 'mining back' in Feigenbaum's contribution. This sub-field of media literacy research is in the process of using the urgency of the Covid misinformation crisis to move the field on methodologically, but the more empirical findings and sustainable impacts of these studies will be reported and evaluated in the coming years.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.