

# Journalism in the Era of Disinformation **2019** *White Paper*

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# JOURNALISM IN THE ERA OF DISINFORMATION 2019 WHITE PAPER

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## ABSTRACT

“Fake news” is a term that has globally drawn attention both from governments, the general public, and even social media platforms. To understand the varying terms and differentiate between them, the first section will define terms used often interchangeably. Section two will discuss the evolution of disinformation and historical background in order to give context to the present impact of disinformation. In connection with the impact and evolution of disinformation moving into the 21st century, the paper discusses the role of social media platforms, with a subsection explaining the difference of management of the platforms within the different countries. Section six discusses the public’s perception of media, with statistics indicating that the public’s trust is at a record low. Following section six is a section discussing transparency and verification, the role of fact checking within journalism. The subsections within fact checking discuss the current situation of fact checking and the implications and struggles of it within the digital age. The authors within section eight discuss the differing journalistic values between American journalists and German journalists; this particular section shows both shared values and varying values regarding the ethical practices of a journalist. Section eight discusses strategies and solutions to stop and or prevent the spread of both disinformation and misinformation. The authors discuss the roles of both media and public, from media literacy to journalists reassessing social media.

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION.....   | 4  |
| 1. DEFINING DISINFORMATION VERSUS MISINFORMATION.....                               | 4  |
| 2. EVOLUTION/HISTORY OF DISINFORMATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY.....                     | 6  |
| 3. IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION.....  | 9  |
| 4. ROLE OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE.....                | 11 |
| 5. ROLE OF GERMAN GOVERNMENT IN REGULATING SOCIAL MEDIA.....                        | 12 |
| 6. PUBLIC TRUST IN MEDIA STRIKES NEAR RECORD LOWS.....                              | 13 |
| 7. FACT-CHECKING.....   | 17 |
| 7.1 The role of fact-checking in journalism.....                                    | 17 |
| 7.2 How media outlets currently handle fact-checking.....                           | 18 |
| 7.3 Challenges and implementation of fact-checking in the age of digital media..... | 19 |
| 8. AMERICAN VS. GERMAN JOURNALISTIC VALUES.....                                     | 21 |
| 8.1 American journalistic values.....   | 21 |
| 8.2 German journalistic values.....   | 23 |
| 9. STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS.....  | 24 |
| 9.2 Support Local News.....   | 25 |
| 9.3 Reassess social media use.....  | 27 |
| 9.4 Rethink business models.....  | 28 |
| 9.5 Value transparency.....   | 29 |
| 9.6 Increase viewpoint diversity.....   | 30 |
| 9.7 Diversify news consumption.....   | 31 |
| CONCLUSION.....   | 33 |
| REFERENCES.....   | 35 |

## INTRODUCTION

The Journalism in the Era of Disinformation Fellowship (JED), led by Cultural Vistas and funded by the Transatlantic Program of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany through the European Recovery Program (ERP) of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy (BMW), provided eight German and eight American students with the opportunity to learn about the role disinformation plays in political coverage. Each student brought forth a unique perspective to analyze the trend of “fake news” and came up with solutions to counteract this increasingly relevant trend through a holistic approach. From May 18–24, 2019, all students traveled to Washington, D.C. and New York to visit various news and media organizations such as the Associated Press, Axios, and Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism. A diverse range of guest speakers from across the industry, such as Aaron Blake from the Washington Post and Sarah Oates from the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, equipped students with the relevant strategies, insights, and techniques that are critical to combat disinformation and thrive as media professionals in today’s ever-evolving journalism industry.

## 1. DEFINING DISINFORMATION VERSUS MISINFORMATION

Whether it is Hilary Clinton as leader of a child porn ring hidden as a pizza restaurant (BBC) or the German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel posing for a selfie with an Islamist assassin (Mimikama), inconvenient ‘news’ is spreading online. Such ‘news’ might be a shock for some; others might nod in agreement, but they are not true. In a common context such ‘news’ is called ‘fake news.’ In the past few years, it has come up more and more.

During the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, the term began to be used widely. Even U.S. President Donald Trump is misusing this term – mostly for everything which is not his opinion. Google Trends shows that ‘fake news’ has been used more and more since the election in November 2016 (Google Trends). That is why it is crucial for journalists to know the term’s origin and how to classify this kind of ‘news’. Kovach and Rosenstiel said that news should provide

“independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive information” (11). Additionally, news as an output of journalism should always be true (ibid. 17).

That is why the term ‘fake news’ is an oxymoron. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines fake as “an activity or action, typically one characterized by dishonesty or deception” (OED). Furthermore, there is no common definition of ‘fake news’ (Boyd). Scientists Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan noted that the discourse about “fake news” is part of the terms misinformation and disinformation (44). For journalists, it is necessary to distinguish the different phenomena.

Misinformation is false, not complete or misleading. It is spread regardless of intention to mislead or to deceive (Wardle and Derakhshan 44; Karlova and Fisher 2-3). On the contrary, disinformation is wrong and deliberately misleading, biased or manipulated (Wardle). The one spreading it knows that (Wardle and Derakhshan 44). Additionally, propaganda is not synonymous with disinformation. Wardle and Derakhshan noted that propaganda is more manipulative and more emotional than disinformation (45). Wardle and Derakhshan postulated seven different categories of mis- and disinformation: satire and parody, false connection, misleading content, false context, imposter content, manipulated content, and fabricated content (44-48).

Satire and parody are designed to damage, but it can be misleading. An example is news on *The Daily Show* in the U.S. or on *Der Postillon* in Germany. In a world where news is spreading more and more via social media, one cannot always understand if a site is satirical (Wardle & Derakhshan 46). False connections are made when headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content. The most common example of this kind of misinformation is clickbait headlines (ibid. 47). On the contrary, it is misleading content made up to frame an issue or individual. This can happen by choosing quotes or statistics selectively (ibid.). The selfie of Chancellor Merkel with a refugee was used for this (see above; Mimikama). Wardle and Derakhshan categorized these three as misinformation (44).

False context emerges when genuine content is shared with false contextual information. An example would be an old picture being used in a new context (ibid.). Disinformation is imposter content or when genuine sources are impersonated. Wardle and Derakhshan described a video with a BBC logo that was circulated during the Kenyan election 2017. But the video was not from the BBC (ibid.; BBC). Manipulated content is textual or visual information that is manipulated to deceive. An example of this is the video of the Democratic U.S.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in which she seemed to be drunk (Harwell). But the video was altered. Last but not least is fabricated content — new content that is 100 percent false and designed to deceive or to do harm (Wardle and Derakhshan 48). The example of Hillary Clinton (see above; BBC) is fabricated content. According to Wardle and Derakhshan, these five are categorized as part of disinformation (44).

Wardle also investigated why this content spreads. She detected that reasons could be due to poor journalism, parody, provocation, passion, partisanship, profit, political influence, or power, and propaganda.

## 2. EVOLUTION/HISTORY OF DISINFORMATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Even though the term "fake news" has been increasingly seen in the public spotlight since the 2016 presidential election, there has always been false news - be it in the form of propaganda, accidental false reports or deliberately misleading statements. Even before the printing press was invented, people passed on rumors to each other. The control and transmission of information gave power to individuals (Burkhardt 5).

What also becomes clear when looking back into the past is that there have always been different intentions to spread false news. One of the most infamous moments of journalism in the U.S. was the era of Yellow Journalism. At that time, the press was known for printing sensational or crude exaggerations of news with little to no research. This form of spreading false news was deliberate and intentionally misleading to increase sales.

The intention is one of the most important aspects of false news. From artistic intentions to concrete political agenda with the intention to harm individuals. But when did the concept of fake news first start being used? And what do we actually understand about it today?

The historians Barth and Homberg wrote about the origin of the concept of "fake news": "While the terms humbug and hoax can be found in English since

the 1750s, the concept of fake news became the focus of a broader journalistic debate in the U.S. for the first time in the 1880s" (621).

In Germany, too, false reports have been known since the 19th century as "newspaper duck" or "Tatar report" as part of the reporting of journalistic mass media (Müller and Denner 7). At that time, the main question discussed was which information should be regarded as empirically reliable, as true regardless of perspective, or as deception and lies. While literary realism and reportage journalism became popular, according to Homberg and Barth, fakes also experienced a heyday (Barth and Homberg 620). Only when journalistic standards and codes of ethics slowly established themselves were fakes seen as the "disgrace of honest journalism." Barth and Homberg see the beginning of this development shortly before the beginning of the First World War. They named Ralph Pulitzer as one of the first to plead for the greatest possible "accuracy" in his 1912 speech "The Profession of Journalism" and to invoke the idea of "truth" in reporting (621-622). In the 19th century, the press increasingly staged itself as "the subversive, independent and critical voice of the people" (624).

Moreover, journalistic norms — such as objectivity and balance — can be seen as a counter-reaction to journalists who were against the propaganda during the First World War. Journalists themselves played a decisive role in the dissemination. These norms were supported by local and national oligopolies created by the dominant information dissemination technologies (printing and broadcasting) of the 20th century (Lazer et al. 1094).

In addition to the formation of journalistic values, the entertainment and distraction of their audience also played an increasingly important role for journalists (Barth and Homberg, 2018). This was partly because media companies had to constantly assert themselves in the increasingly intense capitalist competition. The economic competition for attention and resources had often been fundamentally opposed to the professional ethos of objective, fact-based reporting (624).

This struggle for attention is an obstacle that has only increased in this day and reached a new peak with the rise of the Internet. The Internet has significantly reduced the cost of new competitors entering the media market, undermining the business models of traditional news sources (Lazer et al. 1094). Among other things, it was this change that created a breeding ground for a new age of fakes: "The digitalization of daily information has plunged journalism (...)

into an unresolved funding crisis that offers spaces for widespread disinformation, in which social networks also play a central role, while the new speed and simultaneity between reality and media reality does the rest” (Sängerlaub et al. 8).

Though there may have always been forms of mis- and disinformation, today's digitized world is creating a whole new ecosystem for its dissemination. The pressure to attract the attention of readers and bring supposedly new information to the public as quickly as possible can tempt the media to rashly pick up news that is not sufficiently vetted. At the same time, anyone can theoretically become a news channel. These conditions create a historically unique environment.

In recent years, the term "fake news" has been in the public spotlight in an unprecedented way — and in particular, has made the leap from the American to the German-speaking part of the world. This can be deduced, among other things, from the search interest that the term evokes in Google. Prior to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, interest in the term “fake news” was low. The first recorded spike in interest was a few days after the election, where people were 36 percent more likely to use the term in their searches. “Fake news” hit an all-time popularity meter in January 2018, and has started declining since then. The period of increasing interest in the term correlates significantly with the presidential election in the U.S. in 2016.

The search interest also shows that the term fake news stands out from other terms which, as a literal German translation, should actually be synonyms for the term. For example, when searching for the terms "false reports" and "false messages", it is hardly possible to identify peaks such as those found in the term "fake news" in comparable time periods. Fake news can, therefore, be regarded as a special phenomenon that goes far beyond the original meaning of the term.

While the term fake news has become more and more popular in Germany, it has undergone a rapid change of meaning, especially in the U.S. In 2016, for example, the term initially gained popularity because of the false news that supported Donald Trump in the election campaign. The news that Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton, and her former campaign manager had run an underground child prostitution ring attracted particular attention (Lopez). At times it was even suspected that Trump had only been able to win the election campaign through the broad distribution of such fake news by his supporters.

This assumption, however, could not be confirmed by later scientific studies, despite the fact that fake news had actually increased (Allcott and Gentzkow).

Trump quickly managed to add another meaning to the term fake news. Trump repeatedly described journalists as propagators of fake news because they allegedly spread false facts about him. Fake News became a political battle term for Trump, which placed the media under general suspicion of spreading lies. An equivalent to Trump's understanding of the term is most likely to be found in the German term "Lügenpresse," which comes from the right-wing political spectrum.

The journalist and communication scientist Alexander Sänglerlaub wrote about it, saying the conceptual confusion finds its continuation in the conceptual understanding of the different groups of voters. Those who do not consider the media credible and choose AfD will probably understand "fake news" more -like Donald Trump than as "the reporting of the system press." No wonder that AfD voters of all people have the strongest impression that there is a particularly high number of "fake news" in the public (72%, the average for all respondents is 61%). (Sänglerlaub 7). (Note: AfD is the "Alternative for Germany" party)

The history of the term also reveals the problems "Fake News" brings with it, especially for scientific consideration. The meanings of the term are partly diametrically opposed. At the same time, it seems to describe a phenomenon that stands out from other terms, such as false news or false reports. What we understand by the term fake news today, and especially in the context of this work, will, therefore, be defined in detail in the following.

### 3. IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION

The European elections on May 26 were an indicator of the extent to which certain actors try to exert influence on the democratic process. In the 2014 European elections, only 43 percent of eligible voters voted. This year more than 50 percent of eligible voters took part in the European elections, with the highest turnout in 20 years (European Parliament). Just before the German parliamentary elections in 2017, experts and politicians had expected massive attempts to influence the outcome of the elections, either from abroad — through websites

such as Russia Today — or from domestic agitators such as the German blog Politically Incorrect. Andrus Ansip, former Vice President of the EU Commission and Commissioner for Digital Single Market, said there was strong evidence that Russia was the “main source of disinformation in Europe.” Ansip called this “part of the Russian military doctrine” (Boffey).

In the run-up to the elections, Facebook and other social networks staged themselves as bulwarks against disinformation. It is assumed that voter turnout plays a role here; the lower this turnout is, the more effective the manipulation can be. When he was visiting Germany in 2016, former U.S. President Barack Obama said that “if we are not serious about facts (...) in an age of social media when so many people are getting their information in sound bites and off their phones, if we can’t discriminate between serious arguments and propaganda, then we have problems” linking the phenomenon of strategic disinformation to low voter turnout (Roettgers). In fact, targeted disinformation had an effect on voter turnout in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. By using behavioral targeting, voter turnout was suppressed (Morgan 40).

Regarding ideological realignment, a voter’s exposure to fake news items or disinformation has an impact on the extent of his or her willingness to switch ideological camps. Allcott & Gentzkow (212) find that social media was a significant source of election news, with 14 percent of Americans calling social media their most important source. They also found that identifying false news as disinformation is highly correlated with factors such as higher education, higher age and more time spent on news media. Moreover, Donald Trump’s followers most intensively visited websites with false messages, which in turn wrote positively about him. Facebook is, therefore, an important multiplier for the dissemination of such content (Guess et al. 1).

In the German context, misinformation and fake/junk news content play a substantial role in German social media, accounting for roughly 20 percent of all political news and information on Twitter (Neudert 23). Sangerlaub (5) indicates that far-right voters are more likely to believe disinformation or false news than the rest of the population of eligible voters.

According to Simon Hegelich, Professor for Political Data Science at TU Munich, there are indications that the same actors who were active on both Twitter and Facebook were also connected to AfD-related accounts. He said that “priming effects are particularly prevalent in cultural topics” (Hegelich). This

effect describes that the AfD, for example, benefits from being mentioned in the media, whether in a positive or negative context. With other parties, this effect does not occur because it only arises through negative statements on cultural issues such as migration or political correctness. Yet, there is good news for democracy. In fact, the influence of social networks – especially Facebook – on political opinion-forming seems to be overestimated. Garrett (1) analyzed whether those people who spent more time on social networks more often believed false claims. For the 2016 election, the study shows that increased use of social networks did not lead to greater susceptibility to fake news and disinformation.

#### 4. ROLE OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The UNESCO recent Handbook for Journalism Education and Training comes as a “timely reminder that all news institutions, and journalists, whatever their political leanings, should avoid inadvertently and uncritically spreading disinformation and misinformation” (UNESCO 9).

The media play a crucial role in educating the public about what is happening around them; it becomes rather critical when journalists and news media specialists are central sources for the news in places where people have limited sources to knowledge and experiences. News media and journalism play a crucial role in providing people with information, and thus impacting the way their audience receive and understand events around them, and thus respond to them. But when the public has limited access to sources and facts, they tend to make uninformed choices. Recent findings by the Pew Research Center presented key points about Americans’ declining trust in their government and each other. According to the study, “majorities believe that federal government and news media withhold important and useful information.” 61 percent of Americans believe that the media intentionally ignores stories important to them, which concerns the state of trust people have with their media and issues around them (Rainie and Perrin, par. 13).

While the media inform the public and perform different roles for instance on the level of democracy the U.S., Americans still have issues of trust with media and their role accomplishing their goals toward democracy, according to a study by the Knight Foundation/Gallup survey on trust, media and democracy (Ritter and Jones).

For 45 percent of surveyed Americans, “things like inaccuracy, bias, ‘fake news,’ and ‘alternative facts,’” are often the reasons for the lack of trust and credibility of media, according to the Knight Poll (Ingram, par. 4). According to this study, respondents noted that factors such as accuracy, lack of bias, transparency and facts can help restore their trust in media. Such crucial findings can help deter the negative public discourse around media and help redeem the connection with correct and factual news.

## 5. ROLE OF GERMAN GOVERNMENT IN REGULATING SOCIAL MEDIA

In Germany as well as in the US, there are discussions on which rules the state should set for social media platforms in regards of disinformation. The “Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz” (NetzwerkDG), passed by the German Bundestag in June 2017 and coming into effect in October 2017, is an example how to regulate the deletion of “fake news” by the social media platforms. The operators are encouraged to allow their users to report problematic content, citing the NetzDG, which must then be checked by the site operators for their legality and deleted if necessary.

Lawyers have already dealt intensively with the civil and constitutional consequences of this legal regulation in context of the freedom of speech and thereby raised a number of points of criticism (Müller-Franken; Papier; Peifer; Schulz). Accordingly, the law restricts the freedom of expression, which represents one of the most important and highest accords in democratic states. It puts pressure on platform operators to delete contents as a precautionary measure in case of a suspicion. In addition, it transfers sovereign tasks in the field of private-sector self-regulation.

In the internet age, information is found in many different locations and can never be completely deleted. For legal systems of individual states, it is almost impossible to gain access to all operators of websites that provide information. This means that people who represent a conspiracy theoretical worldview will always find information in corresponding spaces within the internet that confirms their worldview. If this does not happen on the platforms like Facebook or Twitter, they move to "alternative" platforms. Presumably, the deletion of disinformation will lead people away from the big social networks into other corners of the Internet, which can better escape state access and laws like NetzDG.

The conspiracy-theoretical and elite-critical world view, which is expressed in much of the disinformation spread, largely corresponds to populist ideology, which is currently being increasingly represented by numerous political actors worldwide (Mudde). Part of this populist message is also the criticism of the established journalistic media (A. Schulz et al.; Waisbord). A state-mandated deletion of content on social media platforms under threat of high penalties for platform operators could serve populists as another argument in their elite critique.

## 6. PUBLIC TRUST IN MEDIA STRIKES NEAR RECORD LOWS

Americans trust journalists marginally more than they trust members of Congress, a recent Pew Research Center survey shows ("Why Americans Don't Fully Trust Many Who Hold Positions of Power and Responsibility"). Poll after poll demonstrates media trust has declined to some of its lowest levels ever (Brenan).

Some attribute the media skepticism to President Donald Trump's continual blasting of mainstream publications as "fake news." In one of the most controversial stunts, he lambasted the New York Times, NBC, ABC, CBS, and CNN as "the enemy of the American People" (Davis, par. 2).

But the decline in media confidence didn't begin in the Trump era. It has been falling steadily ever since Gallup started polling in the 1970s, when media trust ranged between 69% and 72% (Brenan par. 4). By contrast, only 41% of Americans today say they trust media to report the news “fully, accurately, and fairly” (figure 1). Americans are far less confident in their media than several European countries, including Germany, where public trust currently reaches 64% (“New Media and Political Attitudes in Germany”).

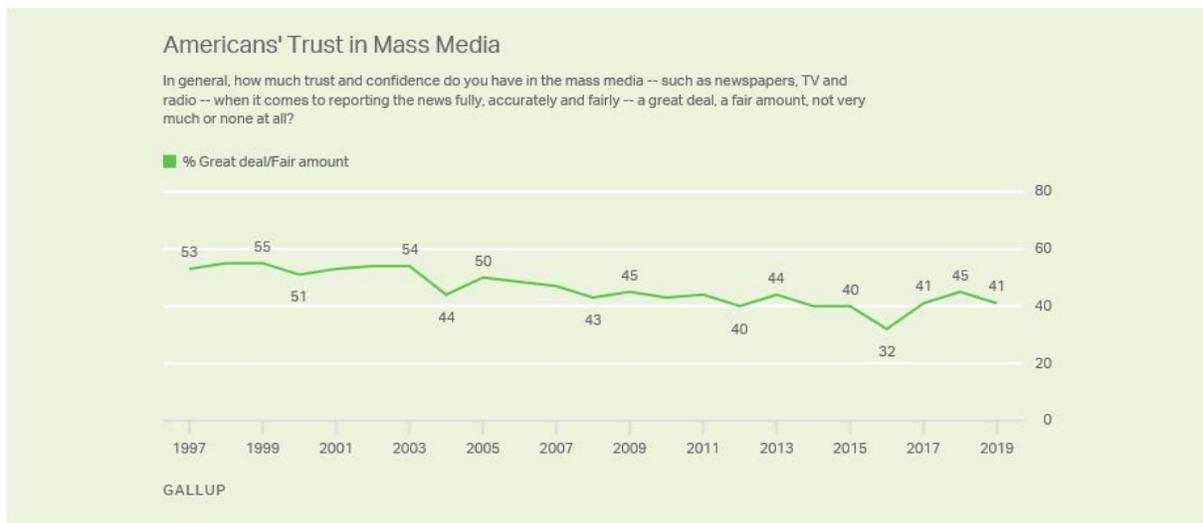


Figure 1. Americans' Trust in Mass Media, Gallup Polls (2018)

Republicans and conservatives trust media the least, frequently criticizing mainstream outlets as partisan and calling for a return to “objective” reporting standards. While the numbers were much higher decades ago, only 15% of Republicans today say they trust media, compared with 69% of Democrats and 36% of Independents (par. 2).

But the important question is not so much whether partisan bias in the news media actually exists. The important question is whether the conventional values of impartiality — the token “objectivity” of 1900s journalism — is still of any use today.

The polls are clear: Democrats and liberals command the vast majority of mainstream newsrooms. A November 2018 survey of 462 financial journalists, most of whom worked for the Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, Associated

Press, New York Times, Reuters, Bloomberg, and the Washington Post, found liberal journalists outnumber their conservative counterparts by a ratio of nearly 13 to 1 (Call et al. 40).

Another study published in 2014 by professors at Indiana University found 50.2% of journalists identified as independents, 28.1% as Democrats, 14.6% as “other,” and 7.1% as Republican (Weaver and Willnat 9).

While numbers are lopsided in newsrooms, the latest Gallup poll shows American citizens are divided almost evenly between the two parties, with 31% identifying as Democrat, 29% as Republican, and 38% as Independent (“Party Affiliation”).

The discrepancy is a big reason why Trump’s electoral victory surprised many who covered it, suggested Jack Shafer and Tucker Doherty in a 2017 Politico report. Nearly 90 percent of all internet publication employees worked in a county where Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton won, and 75 percent where she won by more than 30 percentage points (par. 19). “If you’re a working journalist, odds aren’t just that you work in a pro-Clinton county—odds are that you reside in one of the nation’s most pro-Clinton counties,” the authors wrote (par. 6). That means the overwhelming majority of the media, as Shafer and Doherty put it, inhabits coastal, democratic “bubbles” that almost completely isolate them from middle America, where Trump swept the polls.

The prevalence of liberal journalists is even more obvious in campaign donations. The Center for Public Integrity found journalists’ donations to Hillary Clinton’s campaign in 2016 vastly outweighed donations to Donald Trump. Out of \$396,000 given by around 480 individuals who were identified to be journalists through federal campaign finance filings, 96% of the donations, or \$382,000, went to Clinton. Another 50 individuals gave \$14,000 to Trump (Levinthal and Beckel; Levin).

Journalists and political leaders on the right often seize on statistics like these and criticize mainstream outlets for partisan bias. And there may be an argument here for increased ideological diversity in newsrooms. But the real issue with public trust is not the partisan imbalance. It is the fact that people can not agree on how the news should be covered, regardless of party ties.

The conventional standard of “objectivity” didn’t take root until well after America’s founding. America’s first newspapers were in fact wildly partisan for most of the 1800s. In 1884, the Republican *Los Angeles Times* was so disgruntled by Democrat Grover Cleveland’s election victory, it did not report the election results for days (Baughman par. 3).

The late 1800s brought on the rise of realism. Realism was “the idea that if reporters simply dug out the facts and ordered them together, truth would reveal itself rather naturally” (Dean).

But the big push toward objectivity in journalism began in the 1920s. American writer Walter Lippmann contended the journalist should become “free of his irrational, his unexamined, his unacknowledged prejudices,” and should report news with a “scientific spirit” (Dean).

As decades passed, some began to question whether this approach was too naive. By simply mimicking what sources said without providing some level of context or analysis, journalists seemed to be doing readers a disservice (Baughman). So in the 1960s and 70s, journalists began interpreting news reports, attempting only to publish “professional,” rather than “personal” opinions. It became such a popular practice that some began to question whether objectivity has any merit at all (ibid.).

And today, journalism’s most influential voices are asking the same question. In August 2016, the *New York Times* splashed an opinion column from journalist Jim Rutenberg across its front page, suggesting Trump has forced journalists to exchange their impartial reporting standards for “oppositional” measures. “If you’re a working journalist and you believe that Donald J. Trump is a demagogue playing to the nation’s worst racist and nationalistic tendencies, that he cozies up to anti-American dictators and that he would be dangerous with control of the United States nuclear codes... you have to throw out the textbook American journalism has been using for the better part of the past half-century, if not longer, and approach it in a way you’ve never approached anything in your career,” he wrote (Rutenberg par. 1).

Rutenberg admitted that covering Trump as “abnormal” and “potentially dangerous” isn’t just testing conventional norms; it potentially could have swayed the presidential election in favor of Clinton (Rutenberg). And there’s the rub: either journalists get to convey their judgments to the reader and risk covering

the story unfairly, or they have to back off the analysis and risk the reader making a poor judgment.

Some continue to argue the conventional journalistic standards are naive and unattainable. Others, like Matthew Pressman of Seton Hall University, suggest the fight for objectivity and public trust is not over yet.

“I’m rooting for it to survive,” he said. “Fifty years ago, facing a similar crisis, the press adjusted but didn’t abandon its fundamental principles, and it led to what, in retrospect, was a golden age of journalism. The odds may be against it, but the same thing could happen today” (Pressman par. 17).

## 7. FACT-CHECKING

### 7.1 The role of fact-checking in journalism

When it comes to checking statements and content, fact-checking is becoming more and more relevant. Professor Sarah Oates from Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland said there are a lot of important aspects when it comes to identifying wrong information. These include the identification of the biases, checking other sources and using fact-checking. This is important, she states, because someone can verify statements and content based on verifiable, rational and objective facts. With fact-checking, the media can get the public to trust the news. Fact-checking has always been, aside from objectivity and a second corroboration of the reported story, one of the key elements of reporting. It generally describes the verification of facts mentioned in a piece of journalistic work. These can range from identity information, such as age or job description of a protagonist, to the description of a site where the story takes place or an exact timeline of events.

As journalists aim to report the most distilled version of the truth, publishing (counterchecked) facts, based on quality research, may be the essential task of a journalist’s job. (Wardle).

To underline this and as a guarantee for good reporting, a lot of larger news organizations like The New Yorker, The New York Times or Der Spiegel have their own fact-checking units. Professional documentalists working in these units examine each and every factual detail of an article for verifiability and validity. Still, researching, allocating and verifying factual content remains first and foremost the job of the reporter himself. Fact-checking units or documentation units take on the role of a nearly legal reassurance for publisher and the publication itself.

While being so central to journalistic work, fact-checking has undergone an evolutionary process over the past two decades, invoked by changes in the press landscape and events in recent history. The following expositions will explain which standards are valid for modern fact-checking, what has changed, and how the practice of fact-checking is challenged today. To conclude, there will be a discussion of current challenges and requirements for fact-checking and an elaboration of fact-checking as a strategy to fight disinformation.

## 7.2 How media outlets currently handle fact-checking

The fellows learned that a lot of American media outlets already work with standards for fact-checking. Journalists at National Public Radio work with an accuracy checklist. This checklist contains 13 things that have to be double- or triple-checked before publication. Some points are for example:

- ❖ Ages (Date of birth)
- ❖ Days and dates (Are you sure it happened then?)
- ❖ Locations (Get them right)
- ❖ Quotes (Make sure they're accurate and correctly attributed)
- ❖ Superlatives (Claims to be the first, best, worst, etc. are often wrong)

With this checklist, NPR wants to make sure that their journalists are working accurately. Other media outlets think that fact-checking is more important than ever before. John Daniszewski, a vice president at the Associated Press said that they are not even able to have “first word” anymore. The AP is now more focused on checking the validity of information than being the first who reports about something. That is because it takes more time to publish really intensive verified facts. Daniszewski said it is crucial to collect information, check

it again and again and research it cleanly. They want to convince with quality. The media start up Axios works similarly. They want to be slower but better when it comes to facts.

Media outlets are conscious of the power of social media. Right now, for politicians, entrepreneurs, and others it became much easier to spread their content. In addition to that, the speed and rules of news distribution have changed. Therefore, fact-checking became more important (Sängerlaub 2018). In 2016 a report by the Reuters Institute of University of Oxford called the fact-checkers “a new democratic institution” (Graves & Cherubini 2016). On the one hand, it is the facts that media outlets need to check before publication. On the other hand, they need to disprove statements that are already made by politicians and others. In the second case, it is important that a reaction comes very fast. Then there is a high probability that it will not spread as widely as it would without rectification. But in reality, fact-checking needs time. Between the publication of an incorrect fact and its correction, more than 24 hours can pass, because further research is needed (Sängerlaub 2018). In addition to that, lies spread faster than the truth. To prove that, Vosoughi et al. evaluated some false and true statements on Twitter. “The top 1% of false news cascades diffused to between 1,000 and 100,000 people, whereas the truth rarely diffused to more than 1,000 people,” they found (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral 2018). Reasons could be the degree of novelty and the emotional reactions of recipients. Political news has been especially affected by this (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral 2018).

With this knowledge, it is easy to conclude that fact-checking is a hard and tedious business. And it is hard to reach a broad mass with a rectification of wrong information. That puts pressure on editors working in a strict time frame. In addition to that there is another challenge for media outlets. Many traditional newspapers have had to deal with cost-cutting measures since the 1990s, including the dismissal of a large number of staff. As a consequence, there is less capacity for fact-checking. A result of this is that it is not possible to accomplish perfect fact-checking for many reports (Marwick & Lewis 2017).

### 7.3 Challenges and implementation of fact-checking in the age of digital media

To incorporate a thorough fact-checking process into the hectic newsroom of the digital age, which is critical to combat disinformation and secure the trust in the free press, it is recommended to implement a two-way strategy: On the one hand, it is clear that publishers ought to invest into fact-checking units that not only focus on big stories and sensitive reporting, but more so on general digital content and so called “fast news.” In order to provide fool-proof everyday content and identify disinformation such as deepfake videos, newsrooms are in need of specialists that focus on documentation and verification full time. The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) is a leading example in this field, having established an internal deepfakes task force called the “WSJ Media Forensics Committee” in 2018 (Marconi & Daldrup 2018).

That said, it is of pressing importance to prime journalists and editors to be able to identify disinformation and further upgrade their fact-checking skills. At the same time the WSJ started its task force, the paper also began to train its journalists in verifying digital data. The same is true for NPR, where they try to raise awareness for fact-checking and verification by working on general standards for the reporting process with the whole editorial staff.

In Germany, organizations such as “Netzwerk Medientrainer” and the Google News Initiative cooperate with news outlets to improve the fact-checking skills of their editors and reporters in a period where no image or video spread via Twitter or another social network can be trusted. The German press agency dpa hosts a yearly “verification marathon” where journalists compete with their fact-checking skills.

These efforts are promising. However, not every newsroom seems to engage in this field as much as others do, despite the fact that open source courses are very accessible. In this case – and on the basis of the discussed importance of fact-checking and verification skills for journalists in the 21st century – journalists should take responsibility and upgrade their skills themselves or organize seminars for their newsrooms. For example, the Google News Initiative, reporters of Bellingcat and the network of the Global Investigative Journalism Conference provide valuable, free online content to train one’s skills in this field.

With the help of just a few trainings and online tools, state-of-the-art fact-checking is possible, even with little time on an editor’s hands. On the one side, digitalization has led to an information flood; on the other, digital resources are

able to provide help to tackle this mass of data. An amplified awareness around the topic of disinformation and the importance of modern fact-checking should be mandatory for every journalist.

## 8. AMERICAN VS. GERMAN JOURNALISTIC VALUES

While journalistic values and practices often vary by organization and company, many American journalists adhere to the Society of Professional Journalists and Radio Television Digital News Association codes of ethics. This section of the paper will outline and explain the core values and ethical standards set forth by SPJ and RTDNA for American journalists and compare them to the principles of journalistic work defined in the Press Code of the German *Presserat*.

Both organizations emphasize the role of journalists and journalism itself as a public service and enlightenment, one of the forerunners of justice and a foundation of democracy. Both of the codes can be found in the reference section or on their websites:

<https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

[https://www.rtdna.org/content/rtdna\\_code\\_of\\_ethics](https://www.rtdna.org/content/rtdna_code_of_ethics)

### 8.1 American journalistic values

*Speak the truth and report, with accuracy above all*

- ❖ Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ The facts should get in the way of a good story. Journalism requires more than merely reporting remarks, claims or comments. Journalism verifies, provides relevant context, tells the rest of the story and acknowledges the absence of important additional information. Facts change over time. Responsible reporting includes updating stories and amending archival versions to make them more accurate and to avoid misinforming those who, through search, stumble upon outdated material.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.<sup>3</sup>

*Minimize harm*

- ❖ Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate <sup>4</sup>
- ❖ Balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness <sup>5</sup>
- ❖ Show compassion for those who may be affected by the news coverage. Use heightened sensitivity when dealing with juveniles, victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment <sup>6</sup>

*Practice accountability and transparency*

- ❖ Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage and news content <sup>7</sup>
- ❖ Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly. <sup>8</sup>
- ❖ Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness. <sup>9</sup>
- ❖ Effectively explaining editorial decisions and processes does not mean making excuses. Transparency requires reflection, reconsideration and honest openness to the possibility that an action, however well intended, was wrong. <sup>10</sup>

*Remain independent*

- ❖ Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts. <sup>11</sup>
- ❖ The acceptance of gifts or special treatment of any kind not available to the general public creates conflicts of interest and erodes independence. This does not include access to events or areas traditionally granted to working journalists in order to facilitate their coverage. It does include "professional courtesy" admission, discounts and "freebies" provided to journalists by those who might someday be the subject of coverage. Such goods and services are often offered as enticements to report favorably on the giver or rewards for doing so; even where that is not the intent, it is the reasonable perception of a justifiably suspicious public. <sup>12</sup>
- ❖ Deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.

Distinguishing news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Prominently label sponsored content <sup>13</sup>

## 8.2 German journalistic values

As being a journalist is not trademarked, the Press Code is basically the ethical contract of everyone who sees himself as part of this craft. From respect for human dignity to the presumption of innocence, from the protection of victims to the separation of advertising and editing: the 16 points of the Press Code are not only rules for journalists themselves, but also the basis for the assessment of complaints submitted to the German Press Council (“Deutscher Presserat”).

Most German publishers are committed to respecting the Press Code. This section will shortly summarize and outline the principles of journalistic work in Germany (Deutscher Presserat 2017).

### *Respect the truth and presume innocence*

- ❖ Report only what is true and can be witnessed and corroborated. Research is one of the most important tools of the job and should be done thoroughly. If you report something falsely, you will have to correct it publicly in your publication.
- ❖ No news coverage is allowed to depict a person as guilty, until it is proven in a court trial. If this rule is not applied, the publication can be sued.

### *Respect human dignity, protect victims, witnesses, and youth*

- ❖ The press respects human dignity, privacy and informational self-determination. Only if a person’s behavior is of public interest, it can be discussed in the press. It is contrary to journalistic ethics to violate people’s honor with inappropriate representations in words and images. The identity of victims or vulnerable witnesses must be particularly protected.
- ❖ No one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, disability or membership of an ethnic, religious, social or national group. The press refuses to defame religious, ideological or moral beliefs.
- ❖ The press maintains professional secrecy and makes use of the right to refuse to testify and does not disclose information to informants without their expressed consent. The agreed confidentiality is to be maintained without exceptions.

### *Separate press and advertisement*

- ❖ The responsibility of the press towards the public requires that editorial publications are not influenced by private interests of third parties or by personal economic interests of journalists. Publishers and editors fend off such attempts and ensure a clear separation between editorial text and publications for advertising purposes.
- ❖ Journalists and publishers do not carry out any activities that could call the credibility of the press into question.

One of the biggest differences between German and American journalists may be the handling of the expression of private opinions on (political) topic, for example online. While Americans often shy away from expressing their private thoughts on a topic they deal with in their professional life, a lot of German journalists share their thoughts deliberately in social networks. It is considered more truthful to not hide a political opinion, instead of trying to make a neutral impression although everybody knows one has his own views. This may also be a consequence of the diverse landscape of political parties in Germany in contrast to the bipartisan American model. This could affect the trust in journalists themselves because of a black and white view on politics and the role of the media.

## 9. STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS

### **9.1 Emphasize Media Literacy**

During the course of the fellowship, fellows heard from Michelle Cuilla Lipkin, the executive director of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. Lipkin defined media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and act using all forms of communication,” (2019). As a term, media literacy has mostly been applied to K-12 education (Hobbs, 1998), and Lipkin noted that many of her program initiatives circulated around children being equipped with the digital skill-sets necessary to be a productive member of this now digital society. However, it is also important to note how news organizations might have a responsibility to incorporate media literacy initiatives in their organization and coverage, particularly as it pertains to trust, credibility and

discerning disinformation from reliable news. Mihailidis and Hiebert (2005) call media literacy a “survival tool” and argue that journalists should begin prioritizing it while still in journalism school. “In journalism [curriculum] specifically, where students learn the theories behind media industries, and the ethics and standards of their profession, a media literacy curriculum can further their understanding of and engagement with the media” (Mihailidis and Hiebert). As news grows further toward a mobile-first priority and attention spans decrease (Jang and Pasek, 2015), it would behoove journalists and news organizations alike to contribute to media literacy education.

Peter Adams wrote a paper on ways to approach media literacy education in light of the “fake news” movement, reminding readers that not all information is created equal, but all credible journalism is created from the same set of values (2018). He notes that “digital forensic skills” are often needed for readers to determine what elements of an article they found on social media makes or does not make the news they are reading credible. Adams also notes that a large problem with the spread of disinformation is a simple assumption on the journalists’ part that all readers know of and respect the journalistic process. However, this is often not the case (Anderson, 2011).

The Columbia Journalism Review notes, “A central irony of the newsroom is that while many journalists’ decisions are made with readers in mind, the audiences for their work often remain unfocused, imagined abstractions, built on long-held assumptions, newsroom folklore, and imperfect inference,” (2019). Therefore, journalism organizations should constantly work to explain their values and newsgathering process and procedure, as this contributes to media literacy education. Other suggestions on increasing transparency and credibility, as mentioned in other sections of this paper, seek to continue to make reliable journalism more accessible and identifiable for readers of all levels of media literacy.

## 9.2 Support Local News

The decline in trust in journalism in the Era of Disinformation cannot practically be separated from a larger societal shift toward distrust of civic institutions more generally (Pew Research, 2019). Local journalism has been one of the few institutions able to retain a healthy level of public trust (Guess et al,

2018). While trust in media remains low and highly polarized on the national level, trust in local journalism is substantially higher — and much less polarized. The difference is driven, in the United States, by independents and Republicans who report much higher levels of trust in news sources on the local level. Moreover, numerous studies have found that there is a direct relationship between local news and citizen engagement (Hayes 2018). The reality, though, is that local journalism is on the decline due to changing revenue models and a nationalized media environment.

What's more, Hayes and Lawless found that as the local news environment continues to deteriorate, concerns about media distrust and political engagement are likely to worsen (2018). A holistic response to disinformation and media distrust cannot exclude local journalism. While some market forces are outside of journalists' control, there are some strategies that reporters and editors can employ to improve the chances for local news. As much as possible, larger news should link to and cite prominently local sources from which they are pulling news up to the national level. This is a matter of fairness, but it is also a matter of trust.

Some national organizations have gone even further. Nonprofits like Report for America and ProPublica have taken steps to bolster local news. Report for America places and sponsors local journalists in newsrooms across America. The organization is growing rapidly and aims to install some 1,000 journalists in understaffed newsrooms by 2022. ProPublica has taken a similar path, partnering with local and state newspapers to sponsor investigative reporting projects through its Local Reporting Network, which is also expanding. Such programs can help a struggling local journalism industry and bolster trust during a time of crisis. More news outlets should consider similar partnerships.

Local journalists also have a responsibility to counter disinformation. Given the high level of trust in local newsrooms, smaller newsrooms should consider launching their own fact-checking enterprises, especially when it comes to stories and issues that are of local importance. Vibrant relationships between local journalists and their communities are also shown to boost trust of journalism more broadly. Local newsrooms could consider launching media literacy and outreach initiatives to further bolster their local credibility and place a dent in broader, society-level issues of disinformation and institutional distrust.

### 9.3 Reassess social media use

Journalists are not unlike the general public in that they rely heavily on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to gather, report, distribute, and share their journalism (Backholm et al 2017). Brandtzaeg (2016) found, through interviews with 24 working journalists at major news organizations in Europe, that social media content is often a primary source of news gathering. A majority of U.S. journalists also used social media to find stories, keep in touch with readers and views, and find additional information (Heaver 2016). While the journalists had an overall positive impression of the impact of social media on their work, the most common negative perception, according to Heaver, was that online journalism and social media have caused accuracy to be sacrificed for speed.

A key challenge within this ecosystem is being sure that the available information obtained through social media platforms is accurate, which requires filtering and validation, processes which can be time consuming. However, given that such a large percentage of information circulating on social media is, in effect, disinformation, such processes are imperative to restoring and maintaining trust in journalistic institutions (Brandtzaeg et al 2016). Many news outlets already use defined methods for social media post verification including major ones like the Associated Press and Reuters. Other news outlets should also adopt clearly defined processes and procedures when it comes to choosing what social media-originated news to report on and how to verify its accuracy. Verifying the accuracy and legitimacy of photos and videos on social media is particularly difficult, but the tools and methods exist that can provide journalists a way to verify, through metadata and reverse image searching, whether the photos and videos are truly reflective of what they seem to be portraying. Traditional journalistic standards of verification cannot be abandoned when it comes to social media. When possible, social media posts should be verified by more traditional forms of sourcing and newsgathering.

On the individual level, though, journalists should be hesitant about relying on social media to define their news judgment. Social media is not "real life," and while journalists may be forced to report on issues that become "viral" on social media, standard journalistic ethics and verification processes should not be abandoned for the sake of speed. Sometimes viral posts should not be reported on at all. Other times, journalists can take steps to debunk or fact-check dubious

or inaccurate claims on social media, but care should be taken in order to avoid amplifying or further distorting misinformation. The Associated Press has done an excellent job in this regard by avoiding publishing stories based on individual false claims, but by aggregating those claims into their weekly "NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week."

#### 9.4 Rethink business models

It is impossible to analyze developments in journalism without viewing media outlets as businesses. With declining advertising revenue for newspapers and print magazines, an endless quantity of social media content and decreasing willingness to pay for news, so-called "entrepreneurial journalists" have emerged: Ruotsalainen and Villi define them as those who do not only produce journalistic content themselves, but also run their own businesses. In their definition, they do not only include individuals such as freelancers or bloggers, but also start-ups, organizations, cooperatives, and initiatives (2018).

Entrepreneurial journalists often try to do journalism differently and adapt to the rapidly changing online environment. They do not only test new ways of interacting with their audience and reaching the latter via new channels such as newsletters or social media, but they also try to find new ways of financing their work. That is why, especially in North America, journalism schools have begun to include aspects of entrepreneurship in their curricula (Cohen 2013) and thereby redefine what a journalist needs to know and learn.

Over the past years, countless start-ups have been founded: During the course of the fellowship, participants were able to meet with journalists from InsideClimate News and Axios. The Buzzard and Krautreporter on the other hand would be only two examples of German journalism start-ups which have tried to establish themselves over the past years. These and similar projects have not only created a media landscape where small outlets become more and more important alongside established ones, but have also brought new ideas with them for both recently founded and well established media outlets.

InsideClimate News is a nonprofit and therefore does not depend on readers' contributions, but on a foundation which sponsors the outlet's work. In 2013, InsideClimate News won a Pulitzer Prize for its work – despite not having a newsroom to put it in, as a New York Times headline joked afterwards (Stelter

2013). Whereas foundations can be an excellent opportunity for some journalists to finance their projects, there are strict legal guidelines as to what kind of projects foundations are allowed to finance: the German law does not define journalism as nonprofit, whereas U.S. law does (Tillmann 2018). As a consequence, foundations such as the Knight Foundation and the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation have become trusted partners for some U.S. journalism projects, whereas partnerships with foundations are not an option for the German media landscape.

Another business model which has been explored in both countries alike is crowdfunding. In a broader attempt to create journalism as an “affectual, personal and social experience(s)” (Ruotsalainen and Villi 2018) for the audience, the latter is asked to contribute financially in order to build up the media outlet and therefore to some extent given control over what type of content is produced and how. German journalist Pauline Tillmann who founded the digital magazine “Deine Korrespondentin” described crowdfunding as not only a new business model to get the audience involved, but also as a way to test whether a concrete idea a journalist has come up with has potential (2018). In that sense, crowdfunding can also be a way to find out whether a niche a journalist wants to focus on (such as e.g. reporting on climate change) is able to attract an audience which is willing to pay for the coverage.

## 9.5 Value transparency

Transparency has slowly become an acknowledged ethical principle in journalism. It can be defined as openness. In research it is mostly interpreted in two ways in relation to journalistic practice: explaining how news is made and inviting the public to be a part of the news-making process (Karlsson and Clerwall, 2018). Meier and Reimer (2011) call that transparency from outside and transparency from inside the specific media. Inside transparency, which comes from inside the specific media, means the journalist is publishing information about himself, the research process or his journalistic choices regarding a story. Outside transparency means parts of the public or other parts of the media system reflect on specific journalistic work (Karlsson and Clerwall, 2018).

Transparency has been seen as an instrument which allows journalists to be more accountable to the public and possibly increase trust and credibility (Karlsson and Clerwall, 2018). But scientific research could not prove that until

now. Research shows different results when it comes to proving the trust-strengthening effect of journalistic transparency, differing what kind of transparency is used in which media. For example Michael Karlsson and Christer Clerwall show in their paper “Transparency to the rescue” (2018) that “there is no major transparency effect on credibility, nor are there urgent demands for it by the public.” If transparency can add to journalistic credibility, they add, it is necessary to teach readers to recognize and appreciate the effort. Nevertheless transparency as a way of disclosing research methods is more likely to improve the public perception of journalism than including readers in journalistic work.

What should also not be forgotten when talking about journalistic transparency is that journalists, who publicly reflect their own work, bow out of the ideal of the journalist as a neutral observer (Meier and Reimer, 2011). This does not mean that transparency should be unwelcome, but it goes hand in hand with a completely new understanding of journalism. Some researchers even call this change that is happening in journalism a normative or a paradigm change (Karlsson, Clerwall and Nord, 2017).

It should come as no surprise that this change to more transparency is also deeply related to online journalism. Not only that online journalism finally has the privilege that space for information is not limited but it also provides completely new possibilities of transparency. Often in traditional an ombudsman is as far as transparency and interaction with readers can get. Online media have the possibility to publish webcast of department conferences and interact with users more spontaneously on social media (Meier, 2009).

## 9.6 Increase viewpoint diversity

Having a diverse set of viewpoints in the newsroom can have an impact on the types of stories written. A diverse newsroom can ensure stories come from a wider range of communities that best meet the audience’s needs. As stated by Kevin Merida, a Washington Post managing editor, in a Nieman Report study on diversity in newsrooms (Stewart, 2015), “Do you have enough people who come from different religions? People who grew up poor? People who grew up rich? People who are of every ethnicity and every race and are young and veterans? That’s really why you want to have a diverse newsroom: because we’re in the

business of explaining people to each other. How can we do that if we don't have enough variety in our newsroom?"

According to the Knight Foundation (p. 4, 2018), the news media has been suffering from a decline in public confidence. Specifically, 69% of U.S. adults in the study said their trust in the news had declined in the past decade. Particularly, Republican trust in the media fell to 14% in 2016, a historic low and rose to 15% in 2019, according to a study done by Gallup (Brenan, 2019). Republicans were critical of how the media portrayed Trump during his 2016 election campaign and have continued to remain critical since Trump's description of the media as "the enemy of the people."

Though a majority of both parties believe the news media favors one side, Republicans are much more likely to believe it, which perpetuates distrust in national news organizations. Widening the scope of published stories that offer viewpoints to a range of people will garner more trust in the news organization. Finding the right balance in publishing stories that cater to different people will show fairness and build public trust.

## 9.7 Diversify news consumption

Currently, two-thirds of American adults (68%) say they at least occasionally get their news from social media (Shearer and Eva Matsa, 2018). Of those using social media, sites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram are the most popular (ibid.). However, most of those who get their news on social media (57%) suspect the information to be largely inaccurate (ibid.). This may be because false information spreads faster and further online than the truth.

In a study done by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, researchers found that "contrary to conventional wisdom, robots accelerated the spread of true and false news at the same rate, implying that false news spreads more than the truth because humans, not robots, are more likely to spread it" (Vosoughi et. al, 2018).

This study implies that people are spreading fake news at a greater rate than bots are. One solution to that is for people to diversify their news consumption. With a healthy set of news sources, people are more likely to get a

comprehensive view of an issue. Before sharing a story read on social media, the information should be checked more than once on other news sources. This can help stop the spread of misinformation.

## CONCLUSION

Though the term “fake news” has been used increasingly in the last few years, concerns about truth in journalism are not new. Barth and Homberg (2018) write that the origins of “fake news” can be found in the 1750s. Although U.S. President Donald Trump has decided “fake news” is information that does not fit into this viewpoint, the term means different things to different people, from things they do not agree with to simply inaccurate reporting.

The JED Fellowship exposed fellows from America and Germany to these foundations and presented solutions on how to maintain the highest level of accuracy in reporting. NPR, for example, has a short accuracy checklist to remind its journalists to double check basic information. The Associated Press is now more focused on verifying validity than being the first to report news. Each news organization and journalist who spoke to the fellows shared their perspective on false information in the media and solutions on how the current landscape can be improved.

Upholding the highest standard of accuracy takes the effort of all journalists to double check information, focus on being accurate than first, increasing transparency so the reader understands what goes into producing journalism. Neglecting any of these steps can leave the audience confused and break down trust between news consumers and journalists, but upholding the highest standard in reporting can only help improve trust, which is an essential component of this profession.



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