Training Guidebook on Media Literacy

for media professionals in the Indo-Pacific Region

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Acknowledgement

An Overview of the Guide Book

Chapter 1: Journalism in the 21st Century

The rapid advancement of digital technology has offered newer ways of reaching a wider audience through social media, instant messaging, search engines, among others. This has changed the contours of contemporary journalism, and is often fraught with risks/ challenges of inaccuracy, lack of transparency and accountability, among others. Such challenges contribute to the rising information disorder online, while also raising concerns over ethical practices adopted by journalists in the digital age. This chapter analyses the risks and challenges of enhanced usage of technology in contemporary journalism in the 21st century. It contextualises the need for adopting ethical practices in journalism.

Chapter 2: Misinformation, Disinformation and the Mind

Cognitive biases are intrinsic to humans. They influence judgment of ideas, decision-making process and any factual information. For instance, more often than not, the brain automatically fills in informational gaps from the past knowledge which leads to distortion of content, as consumed/ produced. Journalists may fall prey to such biases, thereby distorting their news stories. Another slippery slope for journalists is the use of headlines which induce an emotional reaction within the reader. Stereotypical phrases are also used many a times, which can lead to fixating on identified signs of an individual's behaviour. This chapter will enable readers to better identify inherent biases so that usage of stereotypes can be avoided, which may get in the way of accurate understanding and dissemination of a piece of news.

Chapter 3: Understanding Information Disorder

The phrase 'information disorder' includes misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. Each of them has different meaning, intent and narratives. Notably, such types of information disorder can come in many different forms of content, such as: satire or parody, false content, manipulated content, etc. This makes differentiating between news and fake news difficult for journalists, who may inadvertently fall prey to fake news, thereby unknowingly becoming contributors of information disorder. This chapter helps identify and distinguish between such terminology/ definitions and types of content, thereby capacitating them to avoid problems associated with 'information disorder'.

Chapter 4: Understanding Health Misinformation and Disinformation

The global diffusion of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in health misinformation and disinformation in media and other sources of information. Beginning from the conspiracy theories of its origins *(China Virus, 5G cellular networks, etc.)* to the spread of misinformation *(vaccine hesitancy, heard immunity, etc.)*, there have been several adverse implications of the infodemic. These have resulted in negative real-world outcomes such as uncertainty, confusion, and anger amongst people jeopardising measures to curb it. This chapter identifies the link between health and information, while investigating the role of media during the pandemic. It further lays down precedents of adverse infodemic implications, along with identifying journalists' duty to curb it. It leaves the readers with the thought of self-identifying misinformation and disinformation in order to curb a health crisis and information chaos.

Chapter 5: Combating Information Disorder

The road to combating the hazard of information disorder is long. Widespread belief in misinformation and disinformation online is a critical hurdle for modern societies, adding up to the hazard which media literacy needs to combat. Having media literacy is a skill which enables journalists to read between the lines of information and dodge the bullet of manipulation. This chapter enlightens readers on how to identify information disorder in any news article. Subsequently, a list of good practices is provided to assist journalists in combating information disorder.

Chapter 6: Tools for Verification

Real-time audience engagement has elevated unaccountable crowdsourcing content. This makes it difficult to decipher fakery in content created by ill-intentioned creators. It has given rise to increased relevance of fact-checking across the globe. However, fact-checking is a sub-set of a larger framework of verification. Good journalism entails verification of source – ensuring what is being disseminated is genuine and without any manipulation. Using tools of verification requires regular upskilling of journalists, given its dynamism with respect to advancing technologies used for creating and disseminating different kinds of misinformation and disinformation. This chapter aims to upskill readers about the stages of fact checking and tools available for verification.

Chapter 7: Combating Online Abuse and Offline Workplace Harassment of Women Journalists

The online targeting of journalists evokes a risk of undermining the public faith in the profession. The issue exasperates in case of a women journalist. Harassment can have a long-lasting impact, not only on the overall reputation of the concerned victim, but also on her mental health. Studies show that many women have experienced online harassment in the course of their work. Workplace harassment is not confined to office premises, and may occur on-field as well. This chapter sheds light on online and offline harassment of women journalists and strategies to prevent and/ or combat such harassment are discussed.

Chapter 8: Cross-border Collaboration of Women Journalists in the Indo-Pacific Region

While a free and fair Indo-Pacific regional order can ensure stability and economic growth, countries in this region are also prey to anomalous challenges such as to their sovereignty, prosperity, and peace. In addition to the global hazards like climate change, transnational crime, etc., journalists need to collaborate across borders to highlight the challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. This chapter helps instil the importance of cross-border collaboration for journalists on pertinent issues and provides for suggestions to facilitate such collaboration.

Journalism in the 21st Century

1.1 Introduction

The 21st century has harbingered a rapid advancement of digital technology. It has created new ways for content dissemination to a wide audience through social media, instant messaging, search engines, and other digital technology enabled services. This has opened new avenues through which news can be transmitted. While this has positively changed the contours of contemporary journalism, it is often fraught with risks and challenges of *inter alia*, inaccuracy, lack of transparency and accountability. Such challenges contribute to the rising information disorder online, while also raising concerns over ethical practices adopted by journalists in the digital age, thereby questioning the credibility of the fourth pillar of democracy.

1.2 Transition from Contemporary to Digital Journalism

The 21st century gave birth to digital giants like the Google and Facebook, which revolutionized information access and exchange. Newspapers, which at one time were the main pillars of journalism, began losing readership. A study conducted by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010, found that annual growth of global newspaper circulation began slowing since 2004, reached zero in 2007 and thereafter, became negative.[1] As per United Kingdom's Office of Communication (Ofcom), the years from 2007 to 2011, witnessed a steep decline in global newspaper and magazine advertising revenues, which plummeted to ~£28 bn from ~£40 bn.[2] Contrary to this scenario, overall news consumption has increased in the last two decades.[3]

The underlying explanation for it is the advent of digital modes of information discovery, access, and dissemination, through search engines, news websites, social media, private blogs, among others. These have enabled easier, quicker and wider information reach for consumers, while also making way for citizen led journalism.[4]

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[1] C.P. Chandrasekhar (2013) The Business of News in the Age of the Internet, The Hindu, accessed at https://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/the-business-of-news-in-the-age-of-the-internet/article4681152.ece

[2] Brad Adgate (2021) Newspapers Have Been Struggling and Then Came the Pandemic, Forbes, accessed at https://www.forbes.com/sites/bradadgate/2021/08/20/newspapers-have-been-struggling-and-then-came-the-pandemic/?sh=59b5ff1712e6

[3] Nic Newman (2020) Executive Summary and Key Findings of the 2020 Report, Digital News Report, accessed to https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2020/overview-key-findings-2020/

[4] Danny Crichton, Ben Christel, Aaditya Shidham, Alex Valderrama and Jeremy Karmel (2011) Journalism in the Digital Age, Stanford University, accessed at https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/2010-11/Journalism/index16e4.html?page_id=24

The fact that digital platforms have proved to be a boon for bringing the world closer, and enabling consumers to express themselves freely, fearlessly, and safely across the globe is undisputed. However, the flip side of it is the accompanying bane. Due to the misuse of the digital platforms, excessive falsity in news pieces, and prejudiced information travelling, leading to information disorder has taken many forms, such as: incorrect, sensational, provocative, divisive, hateful, and misleading content.

Notably, while consumers have often fallen prey to such problematic content, it has often been seen that even journalists are not immune to inadvertently contributing to the spread of information disorder. This calls for revisiting the accountability of journalists, and rethinking principles of ethical journalism in the digital age.

1.3 Accountability of Journalists for the Content they Produce

One of the notable principles of ethical journalism pertains to journalists taking responsibility for the content they produce. This includes correcting mistakes, inviting criticism, and exposing unethical practices of the media.[5] Few points to be noted in this regard include:

- In case of any error or omission made and recognised, a good journalist will make all efforts to rectify it, at the earliest, thus taking accountability for the same.
- A good journalist will encourage the open exchange of views and opinions in a civilised manner, even if they find it repugnant.[6]
- A good journalism will expose any unethical practice conducted,[7] even if within their own organization.
- A good journalist will provide for relevant sources wherever necessary.

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[5] Society of Professional Journalists (2014) SPJ Code of Ethics, accessed at https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp
[6] Society of Professional Journalists (2014) SPJ Code of Ethics, accessed at https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp
[7] Danny Crichton, Ben Christel, Aaditya Shidham, Alex Valderrama and Jeremy Karmel (2011) Journalism in the Digital Age, Stanford University, accessed at https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/2010-11/Journalism/index16e4.html?page_id=24

1.4 Whose Interests should Journalists Serve

While it is clear from the above, that journalists should be accountable, the question remaining to be answered is accountable to whom? Being considered as the fourth pillar of democracy, journalists should serve the public. This can only be achieved if journalists enjoy independence from financial compulsions, political pressures as well as personal biases, and remain committed to the core values of journalism. A good journalist will:

> **Flight 9525 – risks of digital age**
>
> In March, 2015, the flight crashed into the French Alps because the co-pilot committed suicide when he smashed the same into the mountains, killing about 149 people. A "citizen journalist" tweeted a picture, wrongly claimed to be of the co-pilot. The journalist bodies, including the highly regarded professionals, without verifying it, re-tweeted it which led to damage to the reputation of the person whose picture it actually was.

- Recognise diversity in human societies with all their races, cultures and beliefs and their values and intrinsic individualities in order to present unbiased and faithful reflection of them.
- Present diverse points of view and opinions without bias or partiality.
- Accord due respect to audiences and address every issue or story with due attention to present a clear, factual and accurate picture.
- Adhere to the journalistic values of honesty, courage, fairness, balance, independence, credibility and diversity, giving no priority to commercial or political considerations over professional ones.
- Critically analyse the underlying objective sought to be fulfilled behind every piece of information disseminated while choosing sides in such an ethical dilemma.
- Label sponsored content in order to distinguish news from advertisements.
- Refuse to any favours, gifts or special treatment offered which can potentially damage the credibility by inducing partiality.

A good journalist will work to serve in the best interests of the consumers, democracy and the society. Accordingly, apart from the general consumers, journalists must also be accountable, and adopt an ethical approach towards other stakeholders as well. These include:

- **News Sources:** Observe transparency in dealing with news and news sources while adhering to internationally established practices concerning the rights of these sources. Maintaining the anonymity of the source/ individual's privacy is a vow that must not be broken. Further, The Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists, established by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) was revised in the year 2019 to incorporate principles like privacy as an imperative factor in the digital age.[8] The Global Charter also establishes professional conduct needed by journalists to protect the sources of information. However, in certain situations, sources of the information also become 'relevant

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[8] International Federation of Journalists, Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists, accessed at
https://www.ifj.org/who/rules-and-policy/global-charter-of-ethics-for-journalists.html

information' in themselves, to conclude the agenda or motivation behind it. Public welfare is the threshold. In a situation, wherein

- **Victims:** Give full consideration to the feelings of victims of crime, war, persecution and disaster, their relatives and our viewers, and to individual privacy and public decorum.

- **Society at large:** An information piece should be disseminated to the extent it is creating an impact to the public, or the society at large. All relevant information gathered by a journalist must be shared with the public, while publishing a news story.

1.5 Risks/ Challenges for Journalists in the Digital Age

In light of the above, it becomes imperative for journalists to re-visit and re-assert their core values and functions, to remain relevant, and uphold consumers trust in their profession. This becomes more important in the digital age, given the fast and far-reaching content dissemination tools, technologies and networks.

Furthermore, apart from the legacy issues discussed above, the digital age brings forward various new age risks and challenges for journalists. These include the following:

- **Exposure and inadvertent spread of problematic content:** The internet has brought along with it, certain consequences. With wider dissemination of non-reliable news, there is a greater need for verifying each piece of information. Misinformation and disinformation is likely to spread quickly, in case consistent efforts are not made to verify it. Such information has the potential to cause a haywire in the society, in the short term, as was identified in one instance given in the adjacent box story. In a long term, it can question the credibility of the particular journalists and/ or news agency.

- **Constant public scrutiny:** This era is marked with opinionated public, critically analysing everything happening around, i.e., active citizen or explainer journalism.[9] Constant public scrutiny is overwhelming but ultimately, the society is dependent upon an ethical media system. What is important is to survive and evolve in a phase where the "citizen journalists" constantly dip in and out. In a real-time digital world, audience has a desire to collaborate with the journalists. This could be dealt with as Networked Journalism. The term implies a collaborative nature of journalism wherein the journalists and "pseudo" journalists work together to get the real story, linking together to share facts, opinions and perspectives.[10] While such model may provide various benefits, such as: free content creation, adding an

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[9]   Nic Newman (2015) How journalism faces a second wave of disruption from technology and changing audience behaviour, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism University of Oxford, accessed at: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/how-journalism-faces-second-wave-disruption-technology-and-changing-audience-behaviour-2

[10] Anja Kröll (2015) The role of Journalism in the Digital Age Being a superhero or Clark Kent: Do journalists think that Networked Journalism is an appropriate tool to work with (in the future)?, Fellowship Paper, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism University of Oxford, accessed at: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/role-journalism-digital-age

economic value to the news piece; however, there can be situations in which the citizens pass on *fake news*, in order to gauge likes or reactions on social media. It all boils down to verification of news. A seven-step strategy can be employed as is elaborated upon, in the following instance.

> **The Pizzagate Theory – public accountability**
>
> In 2016, the New York Times published a theory which claimed that a restaurant in Washington was running a child prostitution ring looked over by Hillary Clinton. This came in right before the presidential elections of 2016. This had consequences. A man walked into a pizza parlor and fired gunshots. While no one was injured, this incident happened because of the theory that was shared online. It was later when the public scrutinised the cause and effect of the case, and how an acclaimed publisher like the New York Times should be accountable for their actions. A seven-step strategy was advised – **to tell the truth, prove it with actions, listen to the key stakeholders (including public), manage for tomorrow, act as if the whole ecosystem depends upon it, understand that people are an essential part of the media character and finally, to remain calm and patient**.

- **Trap of racing against time:** A good journalist will undertake the primary functions – to filter, edit, check, analyse and then comment on a news piece. Even in the digital age, these have not become obsolete. What have changed are methodology and the pace to do the same. However, the catch is not who delivers the news first. It is difficult to beat information carriers like Facebook or Twitter in the dissemination of news. However, the winner is the one who provides verified, relevant, unbiased and an informed information. A good journalist will ensure quality of information as against quantity of information supplied.

- **False metrics of measurability:** In the digital age, the success of the media depends upon the number of 'clicks' that it achieves. This creates an ecosystem of clickbait headlines, dramatic beginnings of news pieces and narratives based on unfounded assumptions. Journalists get trapped into these. This leads to insensitivity to the incident that might have happened. For instance, a gruesome act of murder which directly impacts the victim has indirect and crucial effects on the entire society. Under this garb, media houses often disseminate the news with attractive headlines, irrespective of the truth in them. This induces decisions being made by the public without any judicial power or knowledge. Short term publicity gain is achieved. Journalists must look at the holistic picture that in the long run, such acts of falsity are bound to bring their credibility into question.

1.6 The Way Forward

1.6.1 Rework Ethical Values of Journalism for the Digital Age

The popularly accepted principles[11] of ethics largely include – accountability, commitment to truth, verification, fact checking, maintaining credibility by doing no alterations to the information and having no biases or partiality. Over a hundred countries have prescribed codes of ethics journalists. However, only a few talk about the implications of the digital age on journalism.[12] A few good examples have been given below:

- The United Kingdom Editors' Code of Practice established that the editors and publishers are solely responsible to apply the provisions of the code to both - printed and online versions of publications.[13]

- The code also establishes the need to ensure privacy of individuals in an age where the issues of data privacy are rising at an accelerated rate. It established that information gathered via hidden cameras or listening devices must not be publicised.[14]

- The Canadian code assured that ethical practices must remain constant irrespective of the medium of dissemination of information.[15]

- On the other hand, it grants the right to media independence. The media has the right to refuse the disclosure of any unpublished content such as tapes of interviews, email exchanges, etc.[16]

1.6.2 Self-Regulation in Content Publication and Dissemination

The spread of misinformation and disinformation raises the question of regulation. The United Nations (UN) has time and again asserted on self-regulation within the media houses and urged to follow UN standards on the right to impart and seek information.[17] A good journalist will self-regulate to provide information, which has been verified using the modern tools and techniques of verification. The action of individuals producing information is part of the global network and has a contribution (positive or negative) to make to the ethical digital media system.

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[11] Ann Auman, Susan Stos and Elizabeth Burch (2020) Ethics Without Borders in a Digital Age, Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, accessed at: https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1077695820901941

[12] Díaz-Campo, Jesus and Segado-Boj, Francisco (2015) Journalism Ethics in a Digital Ethics in a Digital Environment: How Journalistic Code of Ethics have been Adapted to the Internet and ICTs in Counters around the World, Telematics and Informatics, Telematics and Informatics accessed at: https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01329982/document

[13] Ethical Journalism Network (2019) Accountable Journalism: Monitoring Journalism: Monitoring Media Ethics Across the Globe, Ethical Journalism Network, accessed at: https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/accountable-journalism-codes-of-ethics

[14] José-Luis González-Esteban, José-Alberto García-Avilés, Matthias Karmasin and Andy Kaltenbrunner (2011) Self-regulation and the new challenges in journalism: Comparative study across European countrie, Revista Latina de Comunicación Social, accessed at: http://dx.doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-66-2011-940-426-453-EN

[15] Charles Ess (2009) Digital Media Ethics, Polity Press, Cambridge and Malden.

[16] Charles Ess (2009) Digital Media Ethics, Polity Press, Cambridge and Malden.

[17] UN Human Rights Council (2018) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, UN HRC Report A/HRC/38/35, accessed at: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/096/72/PDF/G1809672.pdf?OpenElement

1.6.3 Upskill/ Reskill

Familiarise oneself with the dynamic concepts of information – the need for verification in order to attain reliable information, subsequent creation of more information, its modes of dissemination in the digital age and the risks associated with the same. Traditional media – for instance the newspapers, radio or television – have been heading towards a downfall. Journalists need to constantly up-skill themselves with the digitising world, learning the tools and techniques for attaining reliable information and enabling wider dissemination. Having a social media presence is imperative, not only to educate the masses, but also to learn the diverse opinions of the population.

1.7   What to expect in Subsequent Chapter?

Going forward, the next chapter will explain the cognitive biases that come in the way of understanding and interpreting any information; and the ways to combat it.

2 Chapter
Misinformation, Disinformation and the Mind

2.1 Introduction

The world we live in is beset by the phenomena of *Information Disorder*. This Information Disorder Syndrome refers to mobilisation of manipulated information and capitalising its dissemination. It has been a longstanding feature of human history. The spread of Gutenberg's printing press in the mid-15th century, followed by the development of broadcasting and subsequent rise of journalism as a profession with advancing technology, has resulted in the amplification of propaganda and hoaxes.[18]

The rise of social media has fuelled the spread of false information. The significant shift to 24-hour journalism and digital transformation has increased its complexity and challenges. The issue of mental shortcuts or cognition, which is an inherent feature of the human brain, also contributes significantly to the environment of Information Disorder. Cognition plays an important role in influencing journalist's decisions about news coverage and, as a result, aids in the spread of false information. It is about how the brain processes and reacts to information. This "processing" is independent of the information content, and is influenced by ideological affiliations, past experiences, or learned biases.
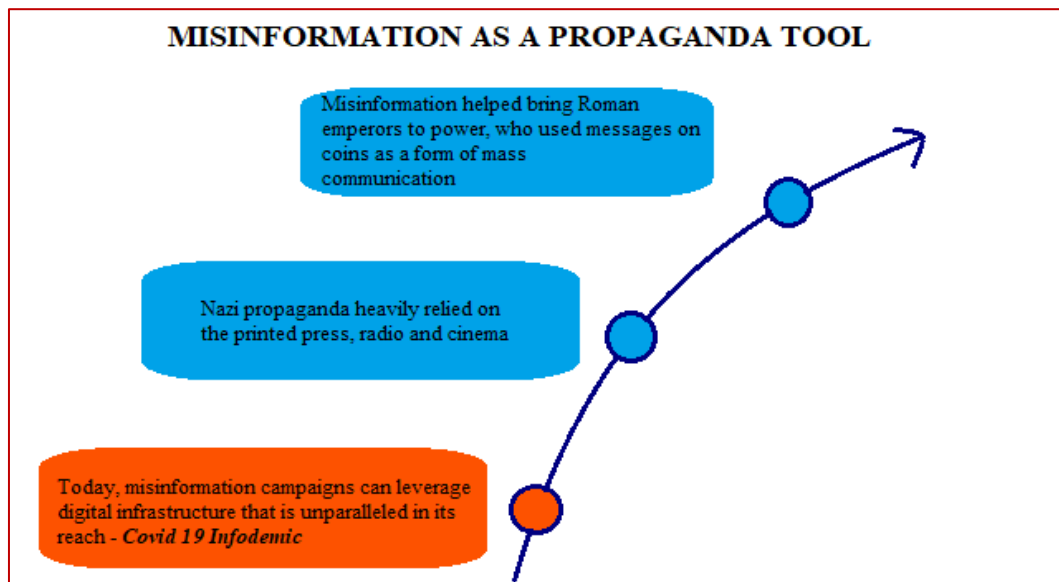
Source: The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief and its Resistance to Correction (2022), accessed at: https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y

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[18] UNESCO (2018) Journalism, Fake News & Disinformation: Handbook for Journalism Education and Training, accessed at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265552

2.2 Associated Psychological Barriers in Information Processing

The professional standards of journalism require journalist to be impartial as much as possible and well trained to verify information. They must inhibit a strong independent approach in order to be unaffected by outside influences and personal beliefs.[19] The quality of information disseminated, which has characteristics of misinformation or disinformation, is the result of more than just exposure to false information, but other psychological factors also play a role. Humans have a tendency to think in particular ways that can lead to systematic deviations from making rational decisions.

These tendencies give rise to mental errors that may arise either from information processing shortcuts, limited processing ability of the brain, emotional and moral motivations, distortions in storing and retrieving memories or social influence.[20] They works to form mentally constructed bias, affecting the ability to perceive information rationally and thereby blurring or distorting the way we see and understand world to be. These tendencies or psychological drivers are precursors of false information.
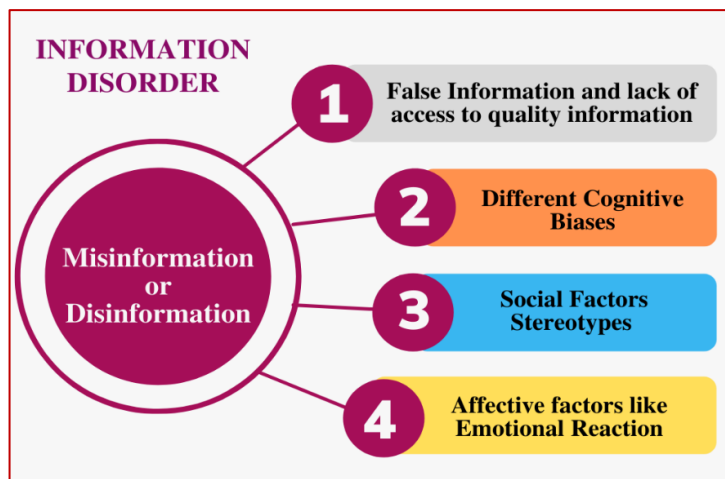
People generally believe that they are mostly rational in their thinking, decisions and actions. But even the smartest and best educated individual often commits cognitive errors or is influenced by other psychological factors while making judgments. These cognitive errors or psychological barriers affect all people in almost every situation. Even News organisations have a collective organisational view point that influences both what they report and how they report. Though studies have shown that to some degree errors in thinking can be effectively moderated with education.[21]

This chapter broadly defines and discusses psychological barriers to knowledge as Cognitive biases, Stereotypes and emotional reaction. It will discuss as to how these factors encourage human mind to believe in things that are not true, also highlighting some mitigating strategies for the same.

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[19] The Elements of Journalism, American Press Institute, accessed at:
https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/elements-journalism/

[20] Jeff Desjardins (2021) Every Single Cognitive Bias in One Infographic, Visual Capitalist, accessed at:
https://www.visualcapitalist.com/every-single-cognitive-bias/

[21] Cognitive Biases: What They Are and How They Affect People, Effectiviology, accessed at:
https://effectiviology.com/cognitive-biases/

2.2.1 Cognitive Bias

A cognitive bias is a systematic error in thinking that occurs during the processing of information by the brain. The brain can only process a limited amount of information, and too many incoming stimuli can lead to information overload. To avoid becoming overwhelmed by the amount of information received, the brain attempts to simplify information processing by employing mental shortcuts or tricks.

Cognitive biases can be advantageous because they require little mental effort and allow you to make decisions quickly. These methods are effective in one sense, but when used in the wrong contexts, they can become biased and lead to harmful prejudice. It is a process bias where the tendency to process information based on cognitive factors rather than evidence. It is a type of selection bias wherein some information is unconsciously chosen or ignored, which may result in misleading the analyst into a wrong conclusion.[22]

Biases have an effect on a wide range of human behaviours, including decision making, judgement, beliefs, and social interactions. These tendencies, which are influenced by individual values, memory, socialisation, and other personal characteristics, determine whether decisions or actions are illogical or not. There are as many as 50 cognitive biases identified but this module discusses some of the most common cognitive biases that affect decision making in general.

- *Confirmation Bias*: The tendency to interpret new information as confirmation of pre-existing beliefs and opinions is known as confirmation bias. It is the tendency of human mind tendency to search, select, analyse, interpret and recall information that supports an existing belief or value. People will disregard facts that contradict their beliefs in favour of interpreting ambitious evidence that supports their beliefs. It is prominently displayed in support of deeply held values or emotionally charged issues. Although confirmation bias cannot be entirely eliminated but critical thinking skills can help to mitigate and manage it. *For example*, a proponent of capitalism who believes that instead of running various social security programmes, the government should invest in national infrastructure development to make better use of resources. When covering a story about the Integrated Child Development Service programme, such a person is likely to experience bias based on his underlying beliefs. In order to produce results that support their initial hypothesis, he may then selectively interpret data or ignore unfavourable data.

- *Anchoring Effect*: Anchoring Effect occurs when an individual's decision making is influenced by a specific point of reference known as an 'Anchor.' Once an Anchor is established, all subsequent perceptions, estimates, and suggestions are adjusted to account

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[22] Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia and Filippo Menczer (2018) Biases Make People Vulnerable to Misinformation Spread by Social Media, The Conversation US, accessed at: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/biases-make-people-vulnerable-to-misinformation-spread-by-social-media/

for it. People who are under more cognitive load are more vulnerable to the effects of anchoring. *For instance*, a journalist while reporting MNREGA scheme in India anchored his study on CAG report. His assessment of information and consideration of data in accordance with the report was influenced by this anchoring.

- *Halo Effect***:** The halo effect is a type of cognitive bias in which our overall impression of someone influences how we feel and think about them. In essence, your overall impression of a person influences your assessments of that person's specific characteristics. It is the human tendency to form an unfounded belief in the goodness or badness of a particular thing or person based on previous interactions and judgement. *Consider* a journalist interviews the Commerce Minister in order to gain insight into the highs and lows of the most recent E-Commerce (Amendment) Rules, 2021. The halo effect will be evident when the decision made, as reflected in the concerned reporting, is based solely on the minister's personal characteristics and the meeting's overall experience, rather than on the objectivity of the Amendment.

- *Availability bias or heuristic***:** It is the tendency to place a higher value on information that comes to mind quickly. The information that comes to mind faster influences our future decisions because we give more credence to this information and tend to overestimate the probability and likelihood of similar things happening in the future. This is a bias of error in memory caused by overemphasis on a certain memory. *To demonstrate* the availability heuristic, consider how watching several television shows, news reports, or movies about shark attacks may lead you to believe that this occurrence is relatively common when it is not.

Yellow journalism is an American term used to describe journalism and associated newspapers that present little or no legitimate, well-researched news and instead rely on eye-catching headlines to increase sales. Exaggeration of news events, scandal-mongering, or sensationalization are some of the techniques employed
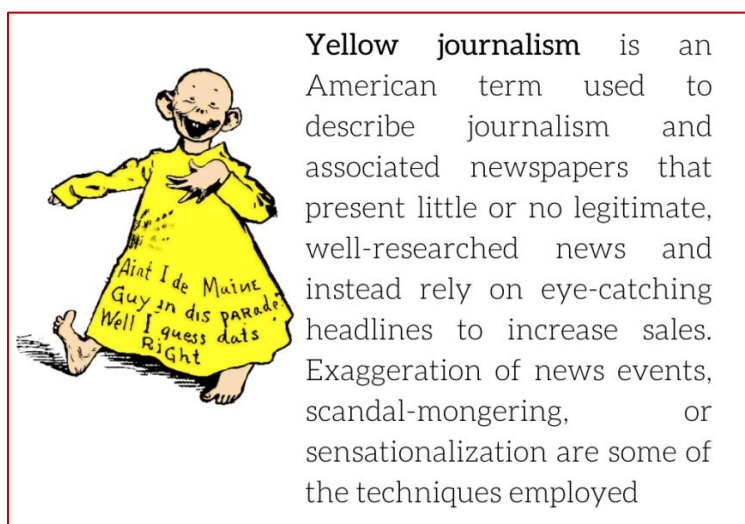
Source: Biagi, Shirley, Media/Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media. Cengage Learning. p. 56, 12th ed. (2017)

2.2.2 Stereotype

Stereotypes are deeply ingrained in every society in a variety of ways. It is a type of social bias based on our interactions with others. The way we process and analyse information is influenced by our relationships with the people who provided us with information or hypotheses. Stereotyping or Labelling is a technique that "*attempts to arouse prejudices in an audience by labelling the object of the propaganda campaign as something the target audience fears, hates, loathes, or finds undesirable.*"[23] These stereotypes become so common that they begin to shape people's daily thoughts and opinions, and and one is unable to see beyond them. They then become dominant ideologies that are unassailable. The effects a stereotype can have are heavily dependent on who is speaking about whom, where the source is located in the world, and the historical time frame being referenced.

LANGUAGE PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HOW PEOPLE PERCEIVE THE WORLD. AT STANFORD, LINGUISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS STUDIED HOW LANGUAGE AID PEOPLE TO INTERPRET. EVEN THE SLIGHTEST DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE USE CAN CORRESPOND WITH BIASED BELIEFS OF THE SPEAKERS.

"GIRLS ARE AS GOOD AS BOYS AT MATH," THE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE OF THE STATEMENT IS SUCH THAT IT IMPLIES BOYS BEING GOOD AT MATH IS MORE COMMON OR NATURAL THAN GIRLS.

Source: The Power of Language: How words shape people and culture, accessed at:
https://news.stanford.edu/2019/08/22/the-power-of-language-how-words-shape-people-culture/

The role of journalism and the media in the creation of stereotypes is crucial. Media is a dominant mode of communications with huge outreach in the society. The media has shaped people's minds and influenced them in a variety of ways over last many years. Mass media influence collective identities and intergroup attitudes, and by stereotyping certain groups, audiences' perceptions of different groups are distorted. There is evidence that these skewed media representations not only promote public hostility toward other social groups, but also lower the self-esteem of such individuals.[24] Therefore, researching into ways to combat stereotypes and promoting more positive media representations is critical.

2.2.3 Emotional Reaction

Our affinity for stories and the emotional reactions they elicit in us is another hardwired human tendency that plays a key role in how we consume information. This affinity can draw us in to news stories and make us want to learn more about what's going on in the world. However, this has the unintended consequence of making us more vulnerable to manipulation. Misleading

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[23]   Steve Emsomba (2012) Advertising and The Spread Of Business, Democracy And Knowledge, Page 44, accessed at: https://books.google.co.in/books?id=TY_FBgAAQBAJ&pg=PA44#v=onepage&q&f=false

[24]   Tara Ross (2019) Media and Stereotypes, The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity, accessed at: https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-13-0242-8_26-1

content that spreads quickly and widely on the internet frequently uses emotional appeals to persuade people. People have started to recognise the link between emotion and persuasion, and have made a natural shift to use more emotional language when attempting to persuade others. Emotion can be persuasive because it diverts reader's attention away from potentially more diagnostic cues that encourages them to think critically. Information inferences are also influenced by one's own emotional state. [25] People who rely on their emotions for information are more likely to be deceived, and high level of emotional reliance also increases vulnerability to misinformation.

Journalism today is more interactive, inter-connected, participatory, open and global. This helps in providing journalists with a great deal of creative freedom as well as communicative power. Journalism is widely believed to have a significant impact on changing societal emotions as well as the dynamics of how news is produced and consumed. In studies, individual's beliefs and judgments about social issues are also found to be overly influenced by the news media.[26]

2.3 Mitigating Strategies

Bias tendencies, whether cognitive or psychological, cause people to unknowingly make irrational decisions or take unfounded actions. These biases can have an impact not only on decision-making, but also on humans' ability to make judgments, construct values, and social interaction. To overcome it, people must adapt ways to incorporate objectivity into their decision-making process and allow more time for it. Use tools to help evaluate background information systematically, surround oneself with people who will challenge their existing beliefs, and listen carefully and empathetically to others points of view, even if they say something doesn't want to hear.

Following are some of the key points of consideration while dealing in information and assessing its credibility and reliability for further analysis:

- Check for **usability of data**
- **Systematically review all sources**, and identify information sources or references that appear most critical or compelling. **Triangulate the information** with other sources, considering whether there are any details being left out by one source?
- Assess the **credibility of the evidence**. People are prone to relying on any type of evidence or information to support their biased hypothesis.
- Determine whether your **analysis is supported by sufficient data**.

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[25] Soohee Kim and Yong-Chan Kim (2021) Attention to News Media, Emotional Responses, and Policy Preferences about Public Health Crisis: The Case of Fine Dust Pollution in South Korea, Int J Environ Res Public Health, accessed at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8701914/

[26] Charlie Beckett (2015) How journalism is turning emotional and what that might mean for news, London School of Economics Blog, accessed at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2015/09/10/how-journalism-is-turning-emotional-and-what-that-might-mean-for-news/

- Consider the problem from a **variety of angles and perspectives**. This can be done through "**What If?" analysis**, which entails challenging a preconceived notion or stated assumption that an event will not occur by assuming that it has occurred and investigating how it occurred.
- E**xamine the number of assumptions used** to fill information gaps carefully and actively **seek alternative hypothesis**
- Usage of **vague phases should be discouraged** and writers should instead use more **direct and descriptive language**
- **Don't publish one-sided accounts** in a story
- Where comments are laced with stereotypes, don't simply accept such comments and incorporate in your writing instead journalist should **ask follow-up questions** aimed at the specific and personal intentions. **Seek to understand context** in which the source is framing the comments; press the source to clarify the meaning.
- **Have multiple sources to verify information**. If all sources, supporting sources, and documents do not provide a clear picture, do not publish the story.
- When possible, **visit the field and report from the ground**. Conducting extensive research, specifically looking for facts and other data, can assist in determining potential gaps between one's gut reaction and reality.
- Be **careful while referring to the reporting of events on social media.** While social media has a large audience, it lacks a system for policing content and sources to prevent the spread of false information.

Listed below are some of the good practices that should be encouraged to be used by journalists while reporting /writing any piece of information.
- Make it a general practice of provide **attribution to all sources** in the story. The sense of accountability is important to discourage spreading of fabricated pieces of information.
- Write **balanced headlines.** Avoid derogatory, provocative, and biased words. It has been highlighted above selection of language or words used have a significant impact on how one interprets the meaning of information shared.
- Support claims or theories in news stories or articles with **adequate research**, facts, and figures. **In-depth research** can help to keep biases at bay.
- **Employ logical reasoning** to counter false or exaggerated claims. **Critical thinking** is necessary because it allows people to form well-informed opinions or judgments.
- When reporting on **sensitive topics, use extreme caution**.
- **Examine your own biases** to see if they're affecting your judgement. Biases occur naturally in human thinking and are thus difficult to overcome. Only by being aware of their existence can one take steps to prevent them in decision making.
- **Provide critical and educative stories** on a topic.
- Provide a **good balance of news and opinions**, and be **transparent and clear in your distinctions.**

- Do not resort to the "**bandwagon effect**" where a journalist is forced to report a story just because a competitor has reported it.

2.4   What To Expect in Subsequent Chapters?

Going forward, the next chapter will encapsulate the risks associated with the new digital modes of news dissemination. Such risks include misinformation, disinformation and malinformation.

Understanding Information Disorder

3.1 Introduction

The advent of social technology in this digital age promised us a connected and a collaborative community, with the world coming closer almost into a 'global village'. With it, came information pollution, rising on a global scale. The idealised ecosystem of being connected with just a 'click' or a 'swipe' is largely threatened by what will further be explained as 'information disorder'. In common parlance, it is referred to as 'fake news' which lacks specificity. Not all is false. Most of it is truth which is contextualised in a manner that falsehood has truth on its brim, which makes the entire story, believable for the reader. Despite losing substantial meaning, when journalists use such terms, it grants legitimacy to it and augments a perilous word in the society.

3.2 Information Disorder

Information disorder encapsulates all the ways in which the information in the ecosystem is polluted. With the rapid increase in the intensity of this phenomena, the use of the term 'fake news' is consciously refrained from the module, as the same is inadequate to capture all scenarios.

3.2.1 Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation
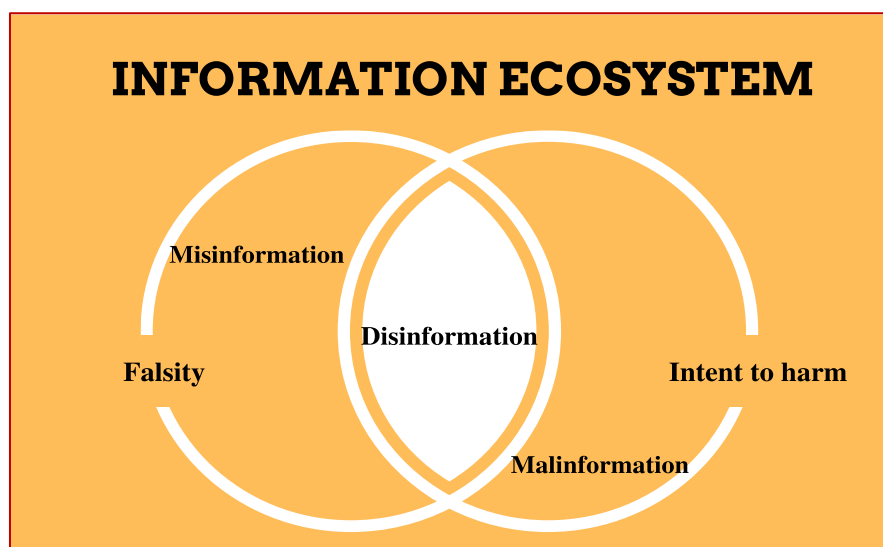
Source: Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation: Clarifying the Definitions and Examples in Disinfodemic Times, accessed at: https://www.redalyc.org/journal/147/14768130011/html/

Disinformation = false information + spread with an intent to harm
Misinformation = disinformation – spread with an intent to harm
Malinformation = disinformation – false information

Harm to a person, social group, organization or country.

- Disinformation appears at the intersection of misinformation and malinformation. Intentionally created rumours will amount to disinformation. For instance, high profile rumour that in 2017, the then French President, Emmanuel Macron wanted to bring Turkey within the garb of European Union was an unsupported piece of false information, which was spread with an intention to create a haywire in both the countries.[27]

- Misinformation can include *unintentional* spread of false information like inaccurate statistics or unverified images. For instance, a tweet which said that the State of Wisconsin, during the elections of 2020 recorded a greater number of votes than the registered voters, was false information.[28]

- Malinformation, on the other hand, is the deliberate spread of *genuine* information to cause personal or corporate harm. Phishing is considered to be a tool of malinformation as it relates to capturing personal/ confidential information to cause harm to the concerned individual. For instance, doctor spreading news about a patient being infected with AIDS, in an attempt to cause him personal harm is malinformation.

3.2.2 Mechanism of Information Disorder

To better understand the examples of information disorder, it is imperative that we understand the stages and the key elements that play the major role in each stage.

Process of Information Disorder

Creation of Information	Reproduction of Information	Spread of Information
anybody can be the creator	*reproduced in the media*	*disseminated to or within the public*
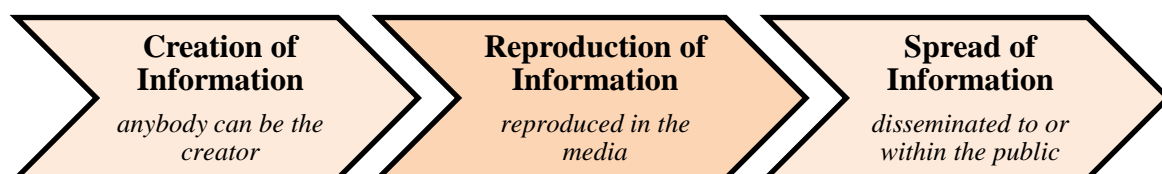
Certain questions need to be posed in order to better segregate the instances of information disorder amongst misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. They are as follows:

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[27] The New Indian Express (2020) Turkey's Erdogan calls for boycott of French goods as European leaders support Macron, accessed at: https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2020/oct/26/turkey-president-erdogan-calls-for-boycott-of-french-goods-amid-macron-row-2215239.html

[28] Eric Litke and Madeline Heim (2020) Fact check: Wisconsin did not have more votes than registered voters, JS Online, accessed at: https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/11/04/fact-check-wisconsin-did-not-have-more-votes-than-registered-voters/6166062002/

- Who were the creators/ distributors of such information?
  - whether it is an individual, a community, a media house or even a PR firm in order to decipher their intention
- What was their intention?
  - once the creator of information is established, intention can be understood as financial (making profits from information disorder); or political (demeaning an eligible candidate in an election atmosphere); or social (creating a resonance with a group or community); or psychological
- What type of information was it?
  - to ascertain the accuracy and falsity of the information; whether it was an audio or a visual information
- What are the characteristics?
  - whether the content is legal, that is not amounting to any privacy infringement; or 'imposter', that is stealing relevant information in order to pose as an official source
- How did the recipient interpret the information?
  - to understand the audience to which the information has affected the most
- What action did the recipient take?
  - to delineate whether information was reported to further re-shared on social media websites like Facebook

3.2.3 Types of Misinformation and Disinformation

In this training module, we intend to place our focus primarily on misinformation and disinformation, as the spread of 'false' information is of utmost concern. There are seven divisions of misinformation and disinformation, which are elaborated as follows by way of the intensity of their potential harm:
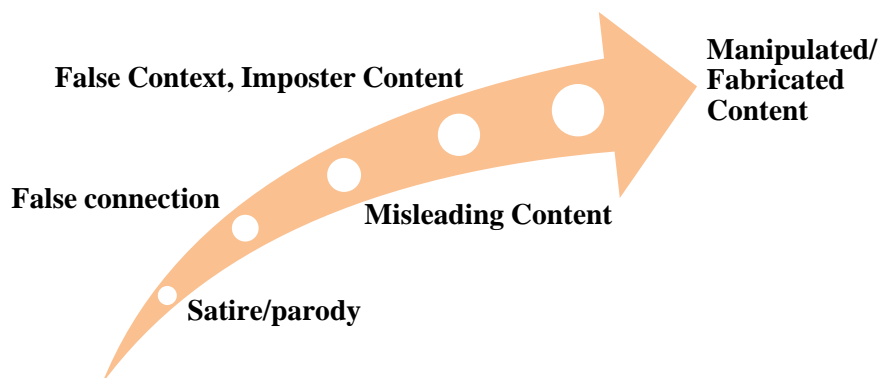
3.2.3.1 Satire/ Parody
- Information spread without an intention to cause harm but it has the potential to fool the reader.
- For instance, during the electoral campaign of 2020 elections of US, a 'fake' website was created on a presidential candidate, showing exaggerated images of him with women. This parody page had mentioned in the bottom, as disclaimer which clearly

said that the website is not the official one of the presidential candidates and is created only for entertainment purposes.

- This type of information disorder is the least harmful amongst all primarily because there is no intention to harm and the same is substantiated with disclaimers, in most cases.

3.2.3.2 False Connection

- A situation wherein a headline of news is different or unsupported by the content within it. This induces 'clickbait' content – when newsrooms use attractive headlines to invite more clicks, however, the content falls short for the reader once website is accessed.

- Facebook, for instance, has on a number of occasions changed its algorithm on the interface to undermine the sites using such clickbait headlines.

- While this induces excessive traffic online, people eventually get used to this idea; hence the risk and harm remain minimal.

3.2.3.3 Misleading Content

- As the word suggests, it is the misleading use of a piece of information to attack any issue or person.

- For instance, posing fragmented content to substantiate own arguments or using certain statistics to prove a point, ignoring all other factors that might affect the news, is misleading content.

- It is harmful to the extent to which a part of the message is omitted or a picture has been cropped and how significantly has it changed the meaning or gist of it.

3.2.3.4 False Context

- A true information when falsified, that is interlinked with false information is called false context. The usual practice is with images and videos.

- One of the known examples of this is that of a political advertisement campaign showed that migrants were crossing the US border from Mexico when in reality; the migrants were crossing from Morocco to Mellila in Northern Africa.[29]

- It has the potential of causing discontent and anger, beyond the true context of the setting in which the image was taken or video was shot, thereby inflicting harm to the victim, or to a community.

3.2.3.5 Imposter Content

- Posing as an official source is making the content, 'imposter content'. This happens when well-known images or logos are used to portray false information. This is considered an information disorder primarily because we are heuristic humans – minds

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[29] Eliza Collins (2016) Trump ad uses footage from Morocco, not Mexican border, Politico, accessed at: https://www.politico.com/story/2016/01/donald-trump-ad-footage-border-morocco-217332

of whom believe in shortcuts which help make sense of our surroundings. Content, thereby, under the banner of a known logo is believable, hence of great heuristic value.

- Immense numbers of images were created in 2014 under the banner of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) showing beautiful pictorial descriptions of yachts and comfortable homes inducing the refugees to call to a number which was mentioned on the poster.
- The fact that such a poster promised the refugees of a safe voyage to the Mediterranean explains the intent behind the posting to sway those in need. Given the heuristic value of the well-known logos (in this case, UNHCR), this type of content is disproportionately harmful.

3.2.3.6 Manipulated Content
- It is when genuine information is manipulated to deceive.
- For instance, in 2019, Nancy Pelosi who was at the time a representative speaker in one of the Houses in US had interviewed, the video of which was easily available. The video was just slowed down which portrayed her as drunk while flustering with her words.
- Even slightest of the manipulation caused great harm by virtue of the position that she had held. Given that these have the potential to defame the concerned individual in their personal as well as professional capacity; this type of information disorder is on the upmost side of radar.

3.2.3.7 Fabricated Content
- This refers of fabricating of false content with intent to deceive.
- The infamous instance when a picture of Hillary Clinton was placed against a backdrop of a poster which suggested that the voters could vote for her ahead of the official elections by texting "Hillary" at a certain phone number, given on the poster.
- The reason of this being the most harmful of all is that the content is a cent percent false and it is designed with a *mala fide* intention to deceive the viewers.

3.3 Impact of Information Disorder on Democracy and Society

Information disorder has a long-lasting impact on democracy and society, in general. The Pacific region specifically is not new to these implications. One thing common between the countries of the Pacific region is that they have witnesses a long history of foreign actors, specifically political players manipulating information to serve their authoritarian ends. The colonial period marked how Britishers were the key drivers of manipulated information. For instance, Burmese monarchy was manipulated to be perceived as an 'aggressor' which needed the support of the Britishers to be pacified. Such stories were made to justify their invasion

which led to the three Anglo-Burmese wars. Filipinos was also portrayed as 'hostile' to justify invasion by US.[30] Following are the implications of information disorder in the digital age:

3.3.1 Weakens Trust in Democratic Institutions

Information disorder causes pressures on the stability of the society. Without information, citizens are hampered of their right to make informed decisions. With information disorder, citizens may end up making ill-informed decisions.

Further, there are multiple ways in which the trust in democratic institutions weakens - this includes both – public institutions like the government and also others like media houses. For instance, if there exists misinformation about any of these institutions, public may choose to believe it which may negatively impact their image and weaken public trust. There may also be a case where these democratic institutions themselves spread information disorder, thereby deviating from their own role and weakening trust. These may be carried on through:

- Use of social media platforms to undermine the integrity of such institutions.
- Generating content that enhances the number of 'clicks' has plummeted distrust amongst the 'clickers'.
- Undermining free opinion and alternative choices causes citizens oblivious of their basic human rights.

Further, media is a democratic institution that serves as the fourth pillar of democracy. Information disorder has not only made it susceptible to not performing its watchdog function effectively but has also weakened the public trust in it. Further, they may themselves contribute to its spread.

The spread of information disorder is such that it has become increasingly difficult to detect its different forms. This makes differentiating between news and fake news difficult for journalists, who may inadvertently fall prey to fake news, thereby unknowingly becoming contributors of information disorder.

3.3.2 Disrupts the Democratic Functioning

In a democratic society, every citizen has the right to participate in the functioning and working of the government, either directly or via the elected representatives.[31] As elected representatives are elected on the basis on their public image and the perception people have about them, any kind of malignment of the public image of a candidate who is going to fight an election can impact the election outcome. When such malignment is done, citizens may not be able to assess the candidates properly. Information disorder employed during the electoral

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[30] William H. Frederick (1994) The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia Volume II: The Ninetieth and Twentieth Centuries, edited by Nicholas Tarling, Cambridge University Press, The Journal of Asian Studies, accessed at: https://doi.org/10.2307/2059942

[31] Article 21, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, accessed at: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

campaigns in order to influence the potential voters can reduce their freedom of making their own informed choices.

Misinformation and disinformation propagated about the opponent candidate, through social media or otherwise may wrongfully influence the voters which in turn, reduces their free will. Such practices interfere with the legal right of voting without any coercion of the citizens. This is irrespective of the outcome of such manipulation. The attempt to disrupt the functioning is enough to pose doubt on whether the democratic government actually represents the free will of the citizens or not. Further, democratic functioning may also be disrupted if information disorder about any particular political party keeps on spreading. Citizens may fall prey to propaganda riddled with information disorder which reduces their free will.

3.3.3 Digital War

Violence in the digital age is also referred to when someone employs a device such as mobile phones, computer, etc. to insult or hurt a person in some way.[32] One of the major effects of information disorder in the digital age is the causation of a digital violence. With easy access to graphical and other content of an individual, the same is manipulated by the creators of information disorder. Online harassment, of especially women, has become common by ways, for instance, sharing pictures without consent. This can be perpetrated by both – state and non-state actors. This will further be thrown light upon in Chapter 6 of the module.

Trolls have become a convenient method to undermine voices and induce hate speech. Hate speech is usage of words which disparage a particular sect or community or group of individuals with some common characteristic like race or even sexual orientation.

3.3.4 Causes Exclusion of the Already Marginalised

There are instances wherein information disorders have been incited to perform exclusivist functions. This has generally happened to specifically those groups who come in the spotlight by fighting for human rights like greater equality in the society. For instance, disinformation regarding a woman's modesty is spread to drive her out of politics completely. Another targeted group is the LGBTQ. Religious minorities may also be targeted. Information disorder in such cases disrupts an already weak system and further excludes the already marginalised.

Information disorder has a deep impact on democracy and society. The journalism profession and journalists have to play a key role in not only fighting the information disorder but has to proactively act in order to better serve democracy and the overall society. They need to have a deepened understanding about information disorder and adopt measures which can help then detect and fight it in the current media landscape. In a scenario otherwise, differentiating between news and information disorder will become difficult for the journalists, who may

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[32] Dragan Popadica and Dobrinka Kuzmanovic (2013) Utilisation of Digital Technologies, Risks, and Incidence of Digital Violence among students in Serbia, UNICEF Report, accessed at: https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/reports/utilisation-digital-technologies-risks-and-incidence-digital-violence

inadvertently fall prey to fake news, thereby unknowingly becoming contributors of information disorder.

Thus, journalists need to skill and reskill themselves to combat information disorder and its spread. Further, strengthening of journalists so that they can combat information disorder will immensely serve the society and democracy.

3.4 What to expect in subsequent chapters?

Going forward, the next chapter will explain the good practices which can be employed to combat information disorder.

Understanding Health Misinformation and Disinformation

4.1   Introduction to Health Misinformation and Disinformation

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been the first pandemic in history, in which technology and social media were used on a massive scale to keep people safe, informed, productive, and connected. At the same time, the technology which was relied upon was also misused to spread health and science-related misinformation and disinformation, in the form of unfounded opinions, rumours, myths, etc.[33]

Such information usually hides falsehoods among true information and conceals itself in the form of right information with tweaked facts. It resorts to familiar formats, misleading memes and fake sources. The result leads to disinformation related to the spread, origin, symptoms, and responses from the governments and other actors. Due to the misuse of the digital platforms, excessive falsity in news pieces, and prejudiced information traveling, leading to information disorder has taken many forms, such as: incorrect, sensational, provocative, divisive, hateful, and misleading content.

This led to uncertainty and confusion, amongst people, who then had to face trouble in finding the right source of information to trust,[34] leading to people often declining public health measures, and vaccines, as well as not maintaining physical distancing, and not masking.[35] In extreme instances, it has also led to violence against and harassment of public health professionals, frontline workers, and other people tasked with communicating evolving health measures.[36]

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[33]   R Smith, S Cubbon, and C Wardle (2020) Under the surface: Covid-19 Vaccine Narratives, Misinformation & Data Deficits on social media, First Draft News, accessed at: https://firstdraftnews.org/vaccinenarratives-full-report-november-2020

[34]   H. Branswell (April 2021) We know a lot about Covid-19. Experts have many more questions, STAT News, accessed at: https://www.statnews.com/2021/04/20/we-know-a-lot-about-covid-19-experts-havemany-more-questions/

[35]   J. Roozenbeek, C. Schneider, S. Dryhurst, J Kerr
., Freeman, A.L.J., Recchia, G., van der Bles, A.M., & van der Linden, S. (2020) Susceptibility to misinformation about COVID-19 around the world. Royal Society Open Science, 7(10), accessed at: http://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.201199

[36]   Vraga, E., & Bode, L. (2020). Defining misinformation and understanding its bounded nature: Using expertise and evidence for describing misinformation. Political Communication, 37(1), 136- 144. http://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1716500

This undermined the global response and jeopardised measures being taken to control the pandemic,[37] and prompted the World Health Organisation (WHO) to describe the disinformation swirling amidst the pandemic as a "massive infodemic" – a major driver of the pandemic itself.[38] Notably, contrary to popular notion, such health-related misinformation and disinformation was not only seen in developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), having more uneducated people; but also, in developed countries having more educated masses.[39]

4.2   Spread of Health-related Misinformation and Disinformation

The rapid spread of the infodemic has been sparked through social media, instant messengers, search engines, and other online retail sites – wittingly or unwittingly *(to create false and catchy breaking news)*.[40] In times of pandemic, people are more viscerally connected, and if the information is not presented correctly it may lead to several physical and mental distortions, such as depression, anxiety, violent aggression, and dismal proven public health measures such as physical distancing, masking, vaccines which can lead to loss of life.[41]

4.2.1   Misinformation and Disinformation tends to spread quickly on such platforms for reasons as follows[42]

- **Emotional and sensational connection:** People get hypersensitive to any information related to health at the time of a health catastrophe. They seem to start relating to the information and get emotionally attached to it. This drives their decision-making power on any health information at the time of a catastrophe.

- **Platform errors:** A common social media practice is to incentivise people to bring in more likable content. This means of 'reward engagement' rather than 'accuracy' in content allows emotionally charged misinformation to fire spread. Further, algorithms defined on

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[37]   WHO, UN, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNAIDS, ITU, UN Global Pulse, and IFRC. (September 2020) Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation, World Health Organization, accessed at: https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation

[38]   PAHO (2019) Understanding the Infodemic and Misinformation in the Fight against COVID-19, Pan American Health Organisation, accessed at: https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52052/Factsheet-infodemic_eng.pdf

[39]   Anderson J and Rainie L (2017). The Future of Truth and Misinformation Online, accessed at: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2017/10/19/the-future-of-truth-and-misinformation-online/

[40]   Rocha, Yasmim Mendes. Acácio de Moura, Gabriel. Alves Desidério, Gabriel. Henrique de Oliveira, Carlos. Dantas Lourenço, Francisco and Deadame de Figueiredo Nicolete Larissa (2021) "The Impact of Fake News on Social Media and its Influence on Health during the COVID-19 pandemic: A Systematic Review." Journal of Public Health, accessed at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8502082/

[41]   WHO, UN, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNAIDS, ITU, UN Global Pulse, and IFRC. (September 2020) Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation, World Health Organization, accessed at: https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation

[42]   Confronting Health Information: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Building a Healthy Information Environment, accessed at: https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-misinformation-advisory.pdf

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social media combine different kinds of information on a single subject matter, leaving consumers confused about the source and content of the information.[43]

The misinformation and disinformation if demonstrated systemically, is unavoidable. It not only grips the vulnerable or uneducated section of the society but also the educated and privileged ones.

4.2.2 The following themes related to false and misleading health-related information at the time of Covid-19, have been identified.

- **The origin/ spread of the disease:** There has been an ample amount of information that is false and misleading in terms of the disease and its connection to a race or blaming 5G networks, among other conspiracy theories. [44]
- **Information related to medical science:** Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment - For example, myriad 'sticky' memes claim that drinking or gargling cow urine, hot water, or saltwater could prevent the infection from reaching the lungs.
- **False and misleading statistics:** For example, few economies try to hide the number of deaths or the number of vaccines administered.
- **Discrediting journalists and credible news outlets:** Some information providers, news outlets, and social media users discredit the accurate information to gain access to followers. They are in a way peddling disinformation. This behaviour includes abuse levelled at journalists publicly, but it is also used by less visible disinformation campaigns to undermine trust in verified news produced in the public interest. Attacks on journalists during the time of COVID-19 have been associated with crackdowns on critical coverage of political actors and states.[45]

4.2.3 Four key infodemic format types that could be identified directly linking health and information include the following:

- Fabricated websites and authoritative identities
- Emotionally connecting narratives and graphics
- Fraudulently fabricated, altered images and videos without relevance or context
- Disinformation infiltrators, spam, and false cures targeting the online community - This could be connected with the influencers, and video testimonies of doctors on all relevant social platforms.

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[43] H. Branswell (April 2021) We know a lot about Covid-19. Experts have many more questions, STAT News, accessed at: https://www.statnews.com/2021/04/20/we-know-a-lot-about-covid-19-experts-havemany-more-questions/

[44] Fadia Dib, Philippe Mayaud, Pierre Chauvin and Odile Launaya (2021) Online mis/disinformation and Vaccine Hesitancy in the era of COVID-19: Why we need an eHealth Literacy Revolution, Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics, accessed at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21645515.2021.1874218

[45] Joint statement on the safety of journalists and access to information during the COVID-19 crisis, UK Delegation to the OSCE, accessed at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-safety-of-journalists-and-access-to-information-during-the-covid-19-crisis--2

Instances of infodemic

× **Fake News #1 Claim:** *If you have COVID and aren't showing symptoms you won't transmit the disease[46]*

   ✓ **Fact:** Not everyone who has COVID-19 has symptoms and it can take up to 14 days to show symptoms in some cases. There are some asymptomatic cases that while carrying the virus still can transmit the disease. That's why it is important to get oneself tested, isolate and take proper medication.

× **Fake News #2 Claim:** *We don't need to worry about the second wave of COVID-19. It's just the same as the normal winter cold and flu season.*

   ✓ **Fact:** Many economies are working towards running the covid-19 vaccines campaign. While the drugs are boosting one's immunity system, Covid-19 cannot be seen as winter cold or flu illness.

× **Fake News #3 Claim:** *Covid 19 death rate is 0.1 percent of people that catch it.[47]*

   ✓ **Fact:** This is incorrect information. The death rate is likely to be around an average of 3.2% worldwide. However, it is important to note that coronavirus fatality is affected by other factors such as smoking or obesity.[48]

× **Fake News #4 Claim:** *Face Masks don't work.*

   Fact: This is incorrect information. Not all facemasks work, but medically proven facemasks if worn properly can help reduce the spread of Covid.

4.3 Adverse implications of the infodemic

In the first quarter of 2020, more than 6000 people across the globe were hospitalised due to coronavirus misinformation.[49] Further, at least 800 people died due to misinformation related to the pandemic.[50] Following are some of the forms and issues of health Misinformation identified:

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[46] Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public: Mythbusters, World Health Organisation, accessed at: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters

[47] Covid-19 kills far more than 0.1% of the people who catch it (2020) Fullfact, accessed at: https://fullfact.org/health/covid-ifr-more-01/

[48] Bloomberg School of Public Health (2021) Mortality Analysis, John Hopkins University, accessed at: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality

[49] Fighting misinformation in the time of COVID-19, one click at a time, World Health Organisation, accessed at: https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/fighting-misinformation-in-the-time-of-covid-19-one-click-at-a-time

[50] Md Saiful Islam, Tonmoy Sarkar, Sazzad Hossain Khan, Abu-Hena Mostofa Kamal, S. M. Murshid Hasan, Alamgir Kabir, Dalia Yeasmin, Mohammad Ariful Islam, Kamal Ibne Amin Chowdhury, Kazi Selim Anwar, Abrar Ahmad Chughtai, and Holly Seale (2020) COVID-19–Related Infodemic and Its Impact on Public Health: A Global Social Media Analysis, The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, Vol 103, Issue 4, accessed at: https://www.ajtmh.org/view/journals/tpmd/103/4/article-p1621.xml

- Low rates of vaccine acceptance are a concern across the globe. Data released in January 2021 by the Johns Hopkins Centre for Communication Programs suggest that across 23 countries, only 63 percent of respondents will accept a vaccine. That is well below the 75 percent minimum estimate recommended by public health experts for a population to reach "herd immunity" — the point where enough of the community has been vaccinated against COVID-19 to make further spread unlikely. [51]

- A minimum of 8 out of 10 people have used home remedies to prevent, treat and cure Covid-19[52]. Gargling warm salt water, taking vitamins, or heating your nasal passage will not eliminate the virus or keep it from reaching your organs.

- Another major setback was the hesitancy for covid vaccines among people.

- There has been an increasing number of news, reports, instances, social media posts, and activities documenting the harassment, stereotype, and bullying directed at people of Asian descent or similar following the spread of coronavirus. While the virus appeared in a specific region of China, no one ethnic or racial association is at a greater risk of spreading the infection. Associating coronavirus with Mainland China or Wuhan (a region in mainland China), through the references such as 'China Virus' or 'Wuhan Virus',[53] helps engender xenophobia or cultural biases. Slurs attract more views and also enable hatred and disgust toward a particular race leading to a false association and misinformation. Hence, the World Health Organization (WHO) strongly recommends against linking communicable diseases to specific geographic regions and recommends that all economies refrain from their use too.

4.4 Building Hoax in the Pandemic Chaos

There are a set of hoax narratives that tend to develop and build in the form of mis and disinformation. Following are some of the few examples of such a narrative that directly impacts the consumers of such information.

- **Cow Urine** by few proportions of the Indian population, was believed to be an antidote to the virus. The hoax baffled on numerous levels without any scientific evidence established to it. This misinformation was endorsed by news channels, and people on other social media platforms.[54]

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[51] Bloomberg School of Public Health (2021) Mortality Analysis, John Hopkins University, accessed at: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality

[52] Lisa Maria Parisius, Beate Stock-Schröer, Sarah Berger, Katja Hermann and Stefanie Joos (2014) Use of home remedies: a cross-sectional survey of patients in Germany, BMC Family Practice, accessed at: https://bmcprimcare.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2296-15-116

[53] Vazquez Marietta (2020) Calling Covid-19 the Wuhan virus or China virus is inaccurate and xenophobic, Yale School of Medicine, accessed at: https://medicine.yale.edu/news-article/calling-covid-19-the-wuhan-virus-or-china-virus-is-inaccurate-and-xenophobic/

[54] Tweet by Shweta Tripathi, accessed at: https://twitter.com/swetatripathi14/status/1238861707168145408

- **Meat eaters** were also targeted on social media. To which the industry took a 2000cr hit. A perfect example of misinformation and disinformation hitting the varied food practices and economy at large.[55]

Above are some of the hoax narratives that were presented as accurate information to the people. These false narratives and practices should be differentiated from fake news, as the former tends to bring a drastic change in the lifestyle of the consumers to have the potential to cause more harm than good.

4.5 Journalists' Duty to Curb Misinformation and Disinformation

There has to be a right kind of checklist that needs to be made available or simultaneously worked upon by news agencies and organisations. This checklist could be followed at the time of presenting particular news to help curb the wrong information. It will help craft an efficient and effective response to counter such information. A unique approach could be tailored for communicating information that is accurate and true to its sense.

Following is an example of such checklist which may be followed:[56]
- Source: Find the right source of the information. Media or any other agency should get their scientific facts correct and check with professionals.
- Headline: They don't always tell the full story. Find the correct headline that doesn't give out the wrong idea or information.
- Analyse: As a source person to the information, the face value analysis of the news is important. One needs to check if the information is making any sense at the first look of it.
- Refrain: Look out for misleading pictures, stories, and videos about the virus or related to the pandemic, and refrain from using such content.
- Error: It's time to break the information chain by mostly looking out for mistakes and not sharing them. Further for any discrepancies, one can refer to the guidelines issued by the government in case of health emergencies.

Journalists have the power to select their key informants and challenge the source of information. However, it is pertinent to find trustworthy voices beyond the socio-cultural environment and other networks.

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[55] Hindu Mahasabha says coronavirus an 'angry avatar' to punish meat-eaters (2020) Live Mint, accessed at: https://www.livemint.com/news/india/hindu-mahasabha-says-coronavirus-an-angry-avatar-to-punish-meat-eaters-11581864507316.html

[56] Başak Taraktaş (2022) Incorporating Computational Social Science in Political Science, Opportunities and Challenges for Computational Social Science Methods, accessed at: https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8553-5.ch002

Research studies have found that journalists are more source-dependent, a trend which is stronger in journalism related to science and health.[57] In such research, the field of journalistic sources is inseparably related to framing (how) and agenda-setting (what).[58] Thus, the analysis of sources is central to any news content and production.[59] Although all authors agree that journalism is driven by sources, research on sourcing is still quite limited,[60] particularly concerning specialised journalism.

Apart from the identification of resources, there are other strategies that could be adopted. One of the examples could be the viral media messages, a game in partnership with Cambridge University and the UK cabinet office. This was developed as an innovative online game called '*GO VIRAL'.[61]* The game reduced the perceived liability of fake news by an average of 21 percent. Such methods could be adopted by journalists to curb inaccurate information.

Mis and dis information related to health at the time of a catastrophe, cannot be stopped but could certainly be managed through campaigns and collaborations. It is time to identify, report, and show people how to improve their media literacy and turn the tide of infodemic.

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[57] Jelle W Boumans, Rens Vliegenthart and Hajo G Boomgaarden (2016) Nuclear voices in the news: A comparison of source, news agency and newspaper content about nuclear energy over time, European Journal of Communication, accessed at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0267323116629879

[58] Daniel Catalan-Matamoros and Carlos Elías (2020) Vaccine Hesitancy in the Age of Coronavirus and Fake News: Analysis of Journalistic Sources in the Spanish Quality Press, Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, accessed at: https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17218136

[59] Rodney Tiffen, Paul K. Jones, David Rowe, Toril Aalberg, Sharon Coen, James Curran, Kaori Hayashi, Shanto Iyengar, Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Stylianos Papathanassopoulos, Hernando Rojas & Stuart Soroka (2013) Sources in the News: A comparative study, accessed at: https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2013.831239

[60] World Health Organisation (2019) Ten Threats to Global Health in 2019, accessed at: https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019

[61] Go Viral Game - Play the Go Viral game to protect yourself against misinformation, accessed at: https://www.goviralgame.com/books/go-viral/

Combating Information Disorder

5.1 Introduction

Information disorder has a long-lasting impact on democracy and society. Journalists need to be equipped with the media knowledge to combat this effectively. 'Media and Information Literacy' is a concept employed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to refer to the knowledge that enables us the access, understanding, critical analysis, use and ethical dissemination of information, turned into a media product.[62] Perceptions and opinions are formulated based on what the information, our minds receive and how it interprets it. It determines the belief system of the recipient, too. This competency has become largely important for a journalist in the digital age primarily due to the information flood in the print and digital media.

5.2 Media Literacy

Media literacy is basically critically dissecting a media content and analysing it.[63] There is an information explosion in the digital age. With the upraise in information disorder, being 'media literate' is the only sustainable solution. This is because information disorder threatens the sustainable development goal (SDG) 16 of 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions'[64] by hampering good governance and democratic institution. In this backdrop, media literacy will empower the journalist and encourage a critical analysis while making decisions.

5.2.1 Need for Media Literacy

We live in an age where there is a dramatic rise in the quantum of information that travels digitally, today. It is only going to increase and expand with the future generations. Not all information is true. We have already understood how misinformation and disinformation can have an adverse effect on the society. In this backdrop, literacy can build resistance to information disorder. Literacy not only formulates the perception of the recipient of information, but it also builds resistance to information disorder, trolls, etc.

Journalists are considered to be the fourth pillar of democracy. It is the media responsibility to disseminate accurate information without any ulterior motive. Having media literacy is a skill

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[62] UNESCO, Media and Information Literacy, accessed at: https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy

[63] Erica Morrissette, Simon Pierpont, Riley Murray, Julie Nagel and David Muite, The Importance of Media Literacy, Media Studies Press Book, accessed at: https://mediastudies.pressbooks.com/chapter/the-importance-of-media-literacy/

[64] United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16, accessed at: https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16. It stands for promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

which enables journalists to read between the lines of information and dodge the bullet of manipulation. This is even more imperative in light of the advanced technologies coming up for disseminating information which make it look like from genuine sources hence making it more difficult to differentiate.

In light of these, it is imperative for the journalists to be 'media literate' because it enables the answers to the following questions, amongst others:

- How can information be searched and accessed? ~ *computer literacy*
- How can information be critically analysed? ~ *news literacy*
- How can information be used and contributed to? ~ *advertising literacy*
- What are the rights vis-à-vis information – online and offline? ~ *human rights literacy*
- What is ethical dissemination of information? ~ *privacy literacy*
- What are the ways to engage with the media houses with respect to the information received in order to initiate a peaceful intercultural discussion for the benefit of all? ~ *intercultural literacy*

5.2.1.1 News Literacy

It is the kind of literacy which enables the reader to critically analyse the credibility and genuineness of the information. Only when this is understood, can the information be ethically used and contributed to.[65] Being 'news literate' can help recognise the difference between:

- Media product – a piece of information which is based on true events and is backed by evidence; and opinion – a statement upon the interpretation of the true events by any person,
- Evidence – substantive backing of any information; inference – a logical conclusion from a piece of information; and
- Cognitive biases created by the media houses and those by the readers (and further disseminated through social media).

5.2.1.2 Human Rights Literacy

While we are divided on cultural points, human rights are the language that binds us all. The most basic right – human right – allows the reader to move towards an open and a democratic society. The key elements of learning about human rights, internalising it and keeping it a backdrop in our education causes a transformative change[66] in the vicious circle:

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[65] Centre for News Literacy, What Is News Literacy?, accessed at: https://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/what-is-news-literacy/

[66] Anne Becker and Annamagriet De Wet (2015) Human Rights Literacy: Moving towards Rights-based Education and Transformative Action through Understandings of Dignity, Equality and Freedom, South African Journal of Education, accessed at: https://www.ajol.info/index.php/saje/article/view/118003
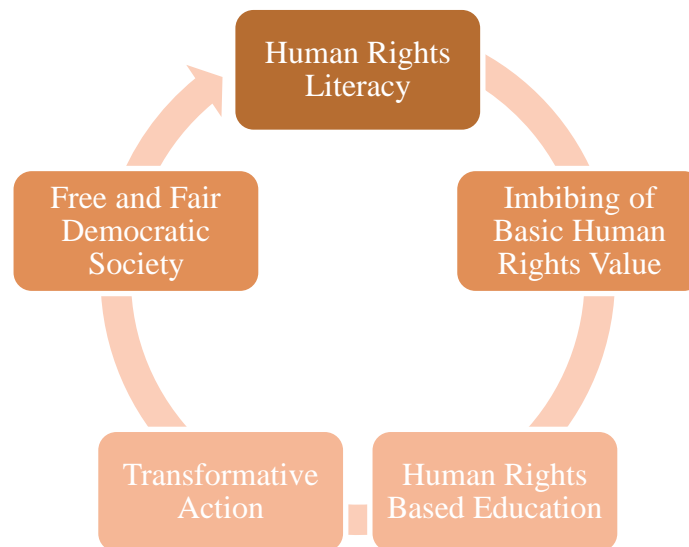
5.2.1.3 Privacy Literacy

This kind of literacy helps one identify own responsibility in the information ecosystem. It also deals with analysing the risks involved in the information received and disseminated.[67] Following are the aims of privacy literacy:

- Acknowledging the ways in which confidential information is used online.
- Understanding the scenarios wherein personal information is being shared.
- Realising the rightful ways and scenarios to share such personal information.
- Recognising the consequences of such use and share of personal information.
- Being able to do a risk-benefit analysis of sharing a personal information.

5.2.1.4 Advertising Literacy

With the development of the media ecosystem, lines have been blurred between media content and advertising content. This challenges the advertising literacy of journalists. Following is the skillset that one imbibes as a 'advertising literate':

- Differentiation between advertising content – one which promotes any product and may or may not be true; and media product - a piece of information which is based on true events and is backed by evidence.
- Intent of advertising – in order to infer whether there was an ulterior motive to cause harm with false information (which will amount to disinformation).
- Techniques of advertising – this will enable to recognise in future, possible avenues wherein information disorder can take place.
- Coping up with advertising content – this will enable capacity building of journalists to identify and deal with advertising content.

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[67] John Correia & Deborah Compeau (2017) Information Privacy Awareness (IPA): A review of the use, definition and measurement of IPA, 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, accessed at: https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/41646/paper0497.pdf

5.2.1.5 Intercultural Literacy

The kind of literacy that encourages a debate, discussion or even an exchange of ideas in a cross – cultural setting is understood to be 'intercultural literacy'.[68] This can be initiated only by understanding the following nuances prevailing in the society:

- varied identities around us;
- their beliefs and attitudes;
- their competencies and capabilities; and
- their understanding and opinions.

Being 'intercultural literate' is considered to be one of the greatest assets of the digital age because of the infinite number of culturally distinct communities, coming together in this global village.

5.2.1.6 Computer Literacy

Owning a computer does not make one 'computer literate'. It is when the tools and techniques of the computer (including the internet) are being utilised to the utmost efficiency, that makes one 'computer savvy'. Following are the skills one incorporates with this kind of literacy:

- Search engines – learning about advanced search can help identify between good result and a bad result
- Privacy – ensuring that encrypted websites are used in order to maintain own privacy as one may be vulnerable to cyberattacks.
- Tools of verification – equipping oneself with tools like google reverse image search feature, inVid, TinEye, etc. in order to verify visual content

5.3   Combating Information Disorder

We have established that the impact of 'Information Disorder' is long-term and wide-spreading. There are certain good practices which can be undertaken by journalists and media houses in order to avoid falling prey to misinformation/disinformation; and by spreading the same, becoming a predator, too.[69]

5.3.1 Good Practices by Journalists and Media Houses

Having media literacy can enable journalists and media houses to perform the following good practices which can help them in combating information disorder.

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[68]   Mark Heyward (2004) Intercultural Literacy and the International School, University of Tasmania, accessed at: https://eprints.utas.edu.au/423/

[69]   Opportunity Agenda (2016) Best Practices for Journalists: Reporting on Police Killings of Black and Brown People, accessed at: https://www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/best-practices-journalists

5.3.1.1 Sources

- Verification of all the sources must be done.
- In case it is verified that the information is false, the same should be brought to the knowledge of all.
- Sources, for instance those having a political affiliation should be investigated thoroughly because such information has the potential to cause harm to the democratic functioning of the society.
- Sources which have previously infused false information should be cautioned against.
- In the age of social media, comments over a post/ image can also be skimmed through to map the accuracy of information.
- For certain events, journalists can consider visiting the site of the incident too, for efficient reporting.

5.3.1.2 Writing and Editing

- Awareness about the potential impact of what a journalist is writing must be mapped beforehand.
- Truth, as far as possible must be employed in writing. This is to avoid hyped up headlines and sensitising news pieces.
- Every claim made must be supported with researched sources and figures (if any).
- Headlines, especially must strike equilibrium. They must not be unnecessarily provocative.
- Reports on calamities, pandemics (like the Covid-19), etc. must be sensitively handled. Specialised persons can also be hired by the media houses to this end.[70]
- Date of any information must be checked so as to not combine with falsely with any current day event.

5.3.1.3 Media Houses

- There are varied business models followed by the media houses. However, one thing common between them must be that they be sensitive to their audience – analysing what is likely to affect them and how.
- Advertisements must not be dependent upon for generating revenue, lest the sustenance of such media houses be upon the funding which may or may not be received.
- Policies should be made transparent and available to public.

5.3.2 Role of Fact Checking Organisations

Fact checking organisations have become an integral part of media houses and journalism, in the digital age. The role of journalists and media houses is to provide daily information from across the globe.[71] This is easier said than done. The process involves making accurate

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[70] College of Social & Behavioral Sciences (2020) Best Practices and Safety Guidelines, University of Massachusetts Amherst, accessed at: https://www.umass.edu/journalism/best-practices-and-safety-guidelines

[71] Allan Leonard, Alan Meban, and Orna Young, What is fact-checking and why is it important, Co-inform, accessed at: https://coinform.eu/what-is-fact-checking-and-why-is-it-important/

information available. To this end, fact checking organisations assume great importance. The skillset required by the debunking personnel at fact checking organisations is a suitable combination of technologically savvy and knowledge of the concerned domain, to which the news relates to.

These organisations can act as an intermediary between the contemporary media and the audience, calling out any information disorder prevailing and being spread as 'news'. They also play an important role in equipping the media houses with the technology needed to verify sources and visual content before publication. This is further discussed in chapter 4 of the training module. Following are good practices by fact-checking organisations –

- The fact checking organisations have to be wary of the incentives being provided by the large big techs of providing alerts about the accuracy of the news and shooting up the link in the search results bar.
- Such organisations need to have their ethical policies to be transparent.
- Initiatives have to be taken up at the organisational/ individual level to combat information disorder.
- Focus of fact checking organisations must be placed on those news stories which are going viral primarily because they have the potential to impact greater number of people.
- Fact checking organisation can set up workshops for educating journalists about day-to-day methods of fact checking.

5.4   What to expect in subsequent chapters?

Going forward, the chapters will explain specific tools needed by the journalists to undertake good practices of fact checking. The chapters will further throw light upon the tools and techniques of verifying the information.

Tools for Verification

6.1 Introduction

Relevance of fact-checking has been established in the previous chapters as to how information disorder can adversely impact democratic institutions and the overall society. From politicians to marketers, everyone has an incentive to distort and manipulate information, in order convince the readers about their ideology.[72] It is almost improbable for a journalist to check each and every information that comes their way. No set formula can be established for spotting information disorder each time. However, what needs to be undertaken is to check information emanating from a doubtful or an unknown source. Additionally, any information which causes a strong reaction in the mind of a journalist or the public community must be checked at all times.

6.2 Key Terminologies

The terms – **verification** and **fact-checking** are used interchangeably on most occasions; however, they are not the same. Verification lies at the heart of journalism. It is a step in the editorial process. Fact-checkers resort to verification to adjudge the accuracy of their statements. Thus, it enables fact-checking. **Debunking** is considered to be a sub-set of fact-checking which utilises the same skills of verification with respect to User Generated Content (UGC).[73]

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[72] CUTS Webinar on Online Trolling, https://cuts-crc.org/workshop-on-online-trolling-and-workplace-harassment/

[73] Zuzana Kvetanová, Anna Kačincová Predmerská and Magdaléna Švecová (2020) Debunking as a Method of Uncovering Disinformation and Fake News, Intechopen, accessed at: https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/73323

6.2.1 Defining the terms

Verification — Getting the facts right, before the story is published.

Fact-checking — Checking for the accuracy of any claims made of public. /relevance.

Debunking — A method of identifying disinformation.
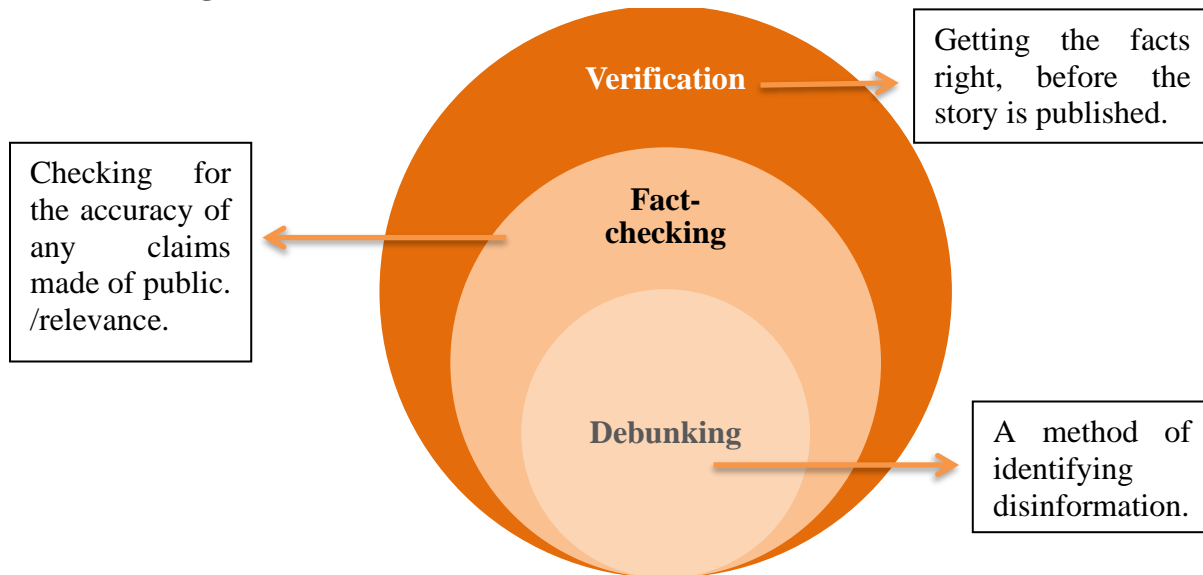
6.2.2 Key Points

- All three terms have the same genesis of *checking* a piece of information. Fact-checking and debunking are specific applications of verification; hence they form the sub-set of verification.

- Traditionally, fact-checkers were employed in newsrooms to check and proofread any information that is supposed to be disseminated. This double checked the facts and figures of a news piece before the publication. This served as an overall quality control for the media house.[74] With the dawn of modern journalism, this came to be clubbed with a desk-editorial practice and is now being referred to as verification.

- Fact-checking in the era of modern journalism is checking facts or any claims made to the public community, *after* it has been made. This is an "ex-post facto" exercise.[75] Fact-checking employ reputable and known sources for the purpose to confirm or negate the claims made in public.

- Debunking is considered a wave of fact-checking in the wake of information disorder. It is essentially publicly uncovering falsely disseminated information with intent to manipulate the public (disinformation).[76] It requires the skillset of verification.

6.2.3 Phases of Fact-Checking

Manual fact-checking is necessary to the end that there is no one software or technique that can help identify any wrong claim made in the public domain. Thereby, following are the steps followed by a fact-checker:

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[74] Brad Scriber (2016) Who decides what's true in politics? A history of the rise of political fact-checking, Poynter, accessed at: https://www.poynter.org/news/who-decides-whats-true-politics-history-rise-political-fact-checking

[75] Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin and Susan Currie Sivek (2017) Magazines find there's little time to fact-check online, Columbia Journalism Review, accessed at: https://www.cjr.org/b-roll/magazine-fact-checking-online.php

[76] Zuzana Kvetanová, Anna Kačincová Predmerská and Magdaléna Švecová (2020) Debunking as a Method of Uncovering Disinformation and Fake News, Intechopen, accessed at: https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/73323

- Finding fact-checkable claims – this step requires identification of facts that a) can be checked; b) need to be checked. The need to check may arise from the potential impact of the news piece upon the public.
- Substantiating the fact – this step requires looking for best evidence to support the claim made via the fact.
- Analysing the fact – this step essentially is determining the truth in the fact by looking at it from the lens of the evidence produced.

Facts are not the perfect characterisation of the world, and are linked with human's pre-conceived notions, beliefs and preferences. Mental obstacles come in the way of attaining new factual information. These will be highlighted in the next chapter of this training module.

6.3 Journalist Verification Skills – General Tips

Following is a list of general tips that a journalist must abide by prior to dissemination of any piece of information in order to ensure the accuracy of the information –

6.3.1 Cross-Checking

It is the most basic and simplistic form of verification. It requires comparing the concerned piece of information from different sources to verify that all the sources signify the same explanation of the information. This could be undertaken via search engine searches. However, what needs to be understood here is the algorithm of search engines. They display the searches which match our previous search history, internet habits and other relevant factors. The verifier has to skim through the next few pages to accurately verify the information.

6.3.2 Lateral Reading

Lateral reading is similar to cross-checking wherein to identify the accuracy in a statement, one must hop from site to site verifying the information. However, in case of lateral reading, one must try to identify the original source of the information. This means to trace the origin of the claim. A good journalist will cite the process through which the information was identified and reported. This displays credibility in the news piece. Others may simply provide for a link to the website wherein they found the information and reported it, thereafter. A step forward in lateral reading is to identify who runs the website wherein the concerned information was gathered from. This will enable understanding the ulterior motives behind the publication. ICANN provides for a tool to look up who runs the website, who is it registered to and when was it registered. It is an international non-profit which provides a directory of domain names.[77]

6.3.3 Plagiarism

The digital age has acted as catalyst for accelerating plagiarised content on the internet. Stories get recycled every day on social media. A good journalist would try to locate when exactly a

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[77] ICANN, accessible at: https://www.icann.org/

particular piece of information first published was. Archive.org is one website that stores all old stories with details about when they were first published. It works through Wayback Machine, an open access tool.

6.3.4 Efficient Use of Statistics

Abuse of statistics is a common practice. A good journalist will consider the following for verifying the accuracy in a statistic –

- Does the statistic seem too good to be true? If yes, that is the hint to verify it.
- If there is a link/ source provided for the statistic, cross-check it.
- Source document to be reviewed properly to verify that the statistic provided for in the source document is similar to that article.
- Use of lateral reading to read about the writer or author of that article.
- Cross-checking methods to be employed to read about the organisation which has published.
- Find a different source which provides for a same statistic as given in the concerning article.

6.4   Tools for Verification – Specific Tips

6.4.1 Visual Information

Social media posts rely upon visuals to enhance its power of dissemination. This is because they tend to invoke a stronger emotional reaction within the readers.

- **Mislabelling –** it is easy to manipulate visual items like images without sophisticated digital software. The image can simply be downloaded and text can be added to it. This gives a direction of context to the reader in order to draw a particular sense of conclusion. Such mislabelled photograph can make a reader perceive something which is not true.
- **Selection Effect –** this type of manipulation does not require any alteration or modification. It can be undertaken by cropping any photograph or using selective photograph from a bunch given with a particular headline. This can misinterpret the situation. Selectively edited videos can also leave a false impression on the viewer.
- **Forgery –** this is when images are deliberately forged or altered for the reader to misinterpret the story.

There are many elements in a picture that can give a hint of manipulation. For example – if all the shadows do not point in one direction or what language is the signage written in, etc. Following are the digital tools which can be used for the purposes of verification of visual information:

- Google Reverse Image Search Feature – it searches on the internet any similar picture to identify the origin of it
- TinEye – allows to compare the concerned image with others on the internet to see what may have been changed

- FotoForensics.com – it takes time and analytical mind for verification but it accurately analyses the image and flags the places from where it has been altered
- InVid – allows the user to detect any video tampering or alterations
- Youtube Data Viewer –it is a tool which allows reviving the exact time of a video upload and the breaking down of video into images
- Watch Frame by Frame – allows users to slow down the speed of the video which will enable glance on the finer details of the video

What is important to remember is that all aforesaid digital tools and techniques transform quickly. A tool may become technologically advanced or it may be replaced by something better, or suddenly obsolete. Tools can be extremely helpful, but there are no substitutes for your own good judgment.

6.4.2 Source Verification
As established earlier, sources of information need to be credible and reliable before the publication of any news piece. While social and digital media are much relied upon for information, journalists have to beware for the information disorder being spread. False websites or social media accounts can be verified[78] by asking the following questions:

1. Confirming the source:
   - Does it look real?
   - When was it made?
   - What is the frequency of publication of news?
   - What is the source of the posts published?
   - Are there any other accounts with that holder?

2. Confirming the authenticity of the piece of content:
   - What is the link between the account/ website with story?
   - Does the upload history of the account link with the story?
   - Is the content consistent with the news media reports?

3. Confirming the date and location of the event:
   - When did the event take place?
   - What is the geographical location of the event?
   - Is the event story supported by the local newspapers as well as the global ones?

Variations in the name of user across different social media platforms should be noted. This can be identified by using the google reverse image search feature by checking if the image of the user on one platform is consistent throughout. It must also be taken note whether there are

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[78]   Claire Wardle, Verifying User-Generated Content, Data Journalism, accessed at:
    https://datajournalism.com/read/handbook/verification-1/verifying-user-generated-content/3-verifying-user-generated-content

any vested interests in funding the research being published on a website; or the other way round – whether the website is posting basis the funding that it gets. Further, what needs to be also understood is whether the sample of the study is representative of a group. Every minute detail of the source needs to be verified.

6.5 What to expect in subsequent chapters?

Going forward, the chapters will discuss techniques to combat online abuse and offline workplace harassment of women. The subsequent chapter will throw light upon how collaboration of women journalists within the Indo-pacific region can be enhanced.

7 Chapter

Combating Online Abuse & Offline Workplace Harassment of Women Journalists

7.1 Introduction

Until now, the various facets of information disorder and how it spreads have been discussed. How such spread of misinformation, disinformation and mal-information causes impacts democracy and society which includes weakening of trust in democratic institutions and disrupts democratic functioning has also been discussed. Further, various methods for combating information disorder and the various tools which can be used for this purpose were also highlighted.

It is worthwhile to note that apart from the impact information disorder has on democratic institutions, it may also have severe impact on individuals. As highlighted in Chapter 2, information disorder may further lead to digital violence where individuals may become victims and face insult or be hurt in some way. In particular, individuals may be targeted through online abuse and may face different types of online harassments including trolling and astroturfing, etc.

Engaging with the masses through social media becomes crucial for journalists.[79] Here, they are also often targeted through online abuse and harassment. Such targeting is done by individuals or groups, primarily, because of their personal, political, or religious biases. The motivation of such individuals or groups is to threaten free journalism and reporting of news. As such threats and targeting leads to journalists fearing their own safety, it affects their online engagement which ultimately challenges and undermines their freedom of expression.[80]

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[79]   Gina M. Masullo, Paromita Pain, Victoria Y. Chen, Madlin Mekelburg, Nina Springer and Franziska Troger, Women Journalists and Online Harassment, Media Engagement, accessed at:
https://mediaengagement.org/research/women-journalists/

[80]   Beth Grossman (2021) Combating Online Harassment and Abuse: A Legal Guide for Journalists in England and Wales, Media Lawyers Association, accessed at:
https://medialawyersassociation.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/combatting-online-harassment-and-abuse-23.06.2021-09.10-5.pdf

Further, at times, journalists have also been found to spreading information disorder themselves on social media. They may have done so advertently or inadvertently. In such cases, they may be targeted by trolls. This evokes a risk of undermining the public faith in the profession.

Further, studies have shown that gender has an impact on political affiliation and trolling.[81] Thus, the issue only exasperates in case of women journalists as they are more vulnerable when compared to their male counterparts. Women journalists may face online abuses which may include sharing of personal pictures without consent, derogatory and sexist slurs, and threats of physical violence among others.

Studies show that nearly 73% of women journalists have faced online violence in the course of their work.[82] Further, as per a survey, 56% women journalists reported to have faced sexual harassment at workplace.[83] Further, studies show that such online abuse also translates to impacting victims in the offline world, in both personal and public space. These may include impact on personal relationships and future job prospects, among others.[84] Such harassment can have a long-lasting impact, not only on the overall reputation of the concerned victim, but also on her mental health and well-being.[85]

In case of women journalists, as their work is majorly public in nature, online harassment may result in workplace harassment which is not confined to office premises, but may happen on-field as well. Before delving into the different kinds of harassments, a broad classification on the basis of online or offline harassment faced by women is detailed below.

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[81] Pninia Fichman and Maren W. McClelland (2020) The Impact of Gender and Political Affiliation on Trolling, First Monday, accessed at: https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/11061/10034

[82] In a 2020 UNESCO-ICFJ global survey on online violence faced by women journalists, 73 percent of women respondents said they had experienced online violence in the course of their work, accessible at: https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-and-partners-offer-open-online-course-safety-women-journalists and https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136

[83] Shampa Sengupta (2011) A New Study Talks About Sexual Harassment Of Women Journalists In West Bengal, Feminism in India, accessed at: https://feminisminindia.com/2021/03/11/women-journalists-west-bengal-sexual-harassment-media/

[84] Amnesty International (2018) Toxic Twitter – The Psychological Harms of Violence and Abuse Against Women Online, accessed at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-6/

[85] Beth Grossman (2021) Combating Online Harassment and Abuse: A Legal Guide for Journalists in England and Wales, Media Lawyers Association, accessed at: https://medialawyersassociation.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/combatting-online-harassment-and-abuse-23.06.2021-09.10-5.pdf

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │ Harassment faced by Women│
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                ┌────────────┴──────────────┐
        ┌──────────────┐            ┌──────────────────┐
        │ Online Abuse │            │ Offline Harassment│
        └──────────────┘            └──────────────────┘
              │                      ┌───────┴────────┐
    ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────┐
    │ Hate Speech,     │   │ In office        │  │ Outside  │
    │ Trolling,        │   │ harassment       │  │ Office   │
    │ Doxxing etc.     │   │ by colleagues    │  │ harassment│
    └──────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘  └──────────┘
```
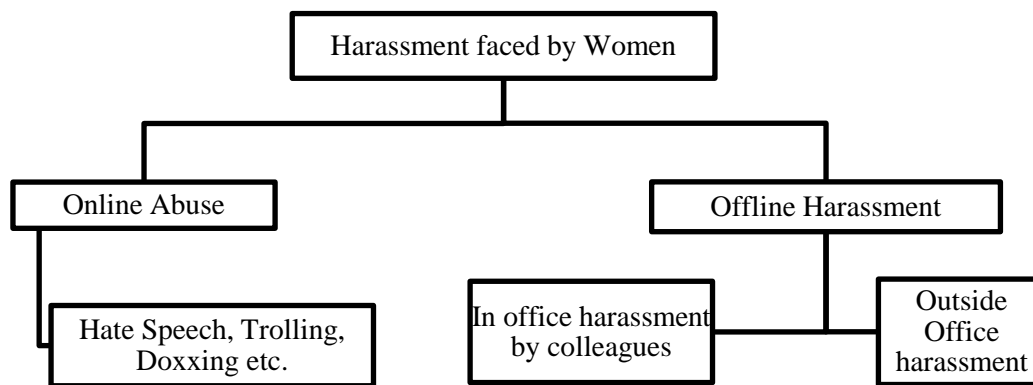
While the digital world has opened up new possibilities for women and journalism with its unprecedented number of avenues, it has given rise to "online abuse". This chapter sheds light on online and offline harassment of women journalists and strategies they can adopt to prevent and/ or combat such harassment is discussed.

7.2 Different Kinds of Online Abuse and Harassments

Online abuse of women journalists can be done in various forms. This includes cyber-bullying, 'astroturfing' 'trolling',[86] and other aspects of online harassment of women. In order to easily recognise the different kinds of online abuse acts and counter them, it is important to first have a deeper understanding of the same. This will also help in understanding the impact of online abuse on women journalists and journalism. For this purpose, this section holistically defines the different kinds of online harassment.

7.2.1 Hate Speech

Online hate speech contains hateful speeches or content made with the intention of causing emotional or psychological harm on social media platforms and are directed at either an individual or a group of individuals based on their religion, caste, race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background etc.[87] In democratic societies, the freedom of speech is essential. Many a times, hate speech is propelled as free speech which may restrict the government agencies from taking stern action. Thus, hateful content propelling as free speech may cause harm to others. Hate speech may also be aimed at inciting violence and can include 'dog-whistling' which means to make implicit threats at others.[88]

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[86] Defining "Online Abuse": A Glossary of Terms, accessed at: https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/defining-online-harassment-a-glossary-of-terms/
[87] N. F. Johnson, R. Leahy, N. Johnson Restrepo, N. Velasquez, M. Zheng, P. Manrique, P. Devkota and S. Wuchty (2019) Hidden resilience and adaptive dynamics of the global online hate ecology, Nature, accessed at: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1494-7
[88] George van Rooyen, 10 Forms of Online Harassment Your Government Agency Should Look Out For, Pagefreezer, accessible at: https://blog.pagefreezer.com/10-forms-online-harassment-government-agency

Women journalists are increasingly vulnerable to hate speech. Two recent cases in India are prime examples of this where more than 100 women journalists and activists were harassed by conducting an online mock auction.[89] Though the law enforcement agencies took action against the perpetrators, the victims were severely traumatised.

7.2.2 Trolling

The act of 'trolling' involves making unsolicited comments on a social media or an online platform. Such comments are often aimed at provoking emotions which may lead to starting of a fight. It may involve using lies, false information and sexually derogatory comments.[90] Further, trolling may be done by using memes or creating fake images.

Trolling, if repetitive in nature, may become cyber-bullying and thus, may be humiliating, psychologically and emotionally damaging.[91] In case of journalists, constant trolling may also discredit their social reputation and undermine their voices.

The ones who do trolling are termed as trolls and often disguise themselves under a fake identity. Trolls can also be backed by different political groups which pay them for this purpose.[92] Further, many times, bot accounts which are not directly managed by a human are used for trolling purposes. It is important to note that trolling is not a crime but extreme cases may be lead to other types of crimes.[93] Trolling can be of different types.

- **Astroturfing:** Coined in the year 1985, the term was used to describe fake grassroots movements where the ones propagating the same mask their motives.[94] In the online context, it refers to amplification of content which may appear to have originated and spread organically but is actually a coordinated effort by a group of individuals, often

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[89] The Sulli Deals case and the Bulli Bai case are examples of hateful speech where coordinated efforts were made targeting women journalists and activists from one minority religious community. They were presented as deals of the day in an online mock auction through apps hosted on the GitHub platform. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues called out the issue as a form of hate speech and demanded equal protection of minorities. More details available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/12/sulli-deals-a-virtual-auction-of-indian-muslim-women, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sulli-deals-bulli-bai-and-the-young-and-educated-hatemongers/article38305009.ece and https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/sulli-deals-case-sulli-deal-case-news-sulli-deal-case-news-today-form-of-hate-speech-must-be-condemned-un-special-rapporteur-on-minority-issues-dr-fer-2703164

[90] Digital Information World (2019) 7 Types of Online Harassment to Watch Out For [Infographic], accessed at: https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2019/03/infographic-how-to-handle-online-harassment.html

[91] Cyberbullying Resource Center, What is Cyberbullying? accessed at: https://cyberbullying.org/what-is-cyberbullying

[92] Karnika Kohli (2013) Congress vs BJP: The curious case of trolls and politics, The Times of India, accessed at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/congress-vs-bjp-the-curious-case-of-trolls-and-politics/articleshow/23970818.cms

[93] Digital Information World (2019) 7 Types of Online Harassment to Watch Out For [Infographic], accessed at: https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2019/03/infographic-how-to-handle-online-harassment.html

[94] Eric Goldschein (2011) 10 Fake Grassroots Movements Started By Corporations To Sway Your Opinion, Business Insider, accessed at: https://www.businessinsider.com/astroturfing-grassroots-movements-2011-9

representing some interest group or an organisation.[95] It is a carefully constructed narrative which is designed with an aim to manipulate the opinion of the receiver of content. Journalists may be directed at and face astroturfing. The aim of the trolls is to threaten the career of journalists so that they can be forced to be silent on critical issues.[96]

- **Dog-piling:** It is a form of cyber-mob attack which is often done by multiple trolls who engage with a coordinated effort to post negative comments on a target's profile.[97] Here, trolls may use methods like threatening, insulting and questioning the credibility of the target.[98]

7.2.3 Doxxing

Doxxing means to publicly share online the target's personal information such as their address, bank details, phone number, identity card details and information about family members etc. with an intention of harm.

Further, online harassment may also be caused because of hacking of accounts which may result in personal information being accessible to hackers and them posting undesirable content through the victim's profile. Deep-fakes may also be used by abusers to replace the victim's face by an artificially generated face which can be used to propagate fake speech. Deep-fakes may also be used to make sexually explicit content of individuals.[99]

Irrespective of the approach used for online abuse and harassment, the abusers have the intent of causing emotional distress and public humiliation by using public and personal information of an individual. Certain events have proved that such online harassment may also be state or corporate sponsored and countering them is necessary.[100] When journalists face doxxing, it may also result in them facing offline threats. There life may be disrupted completely because of this as abusers may use personal information to target women journalists both, professionally and personally.[101]

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[95] JR Thorpe (2016) What is Astroturfing? Bustle, accessed at: https://www.bustle.com/articles/191211-what-is-astroturfing-theres-a-new-way-to-detect-this-type-of-trolling

[96] Matt Moon (2015) Trolls on the Astroturf, Secret Politics, accessed at: https://medium.com/secret-politics/trolls-on-the-astroturf-4168261f0f15

[97] Digital Information World (2019) 7 Types of Online Harassment to Watch Out For [Infographic], accessed at: https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2019/03/infographic-how-to-handle-online-harassment.html

[98] George van Rooyen, 10 Forms of Online Harassment Your Government Agency Should Look Out For, Pagefreezer, accessible at: https://blog.pagefreezer.com/10-forms-online-harassment-government-agency

[99] Cyberbullying Resource Center, Deepfakes, accessed at: https://cyberbullying.org/deepfakes; Tim Biggs and Robert Moran (2021) What is a deep fake?, Sunday Morning Herald, accessed at: https://www.smh.com.au/technology/what-is-the-difference-between-a-fake-and-a-deepfake-20200729-p55ghi.html

[100] Maria Ressa (2021) Nobel Prize winner Maria Ressa on how social media is pushing journalism—and democracy—to the brink, Harvard Kennedy School, accessible at: https://www.hks.harvard.edu/more/policycast/nobel-peace-prize-winner-maria-ressa-how-social-media-pushing-journalism-and

[101] Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (2015) The dangers of journalism include getting doxxed. Here's what you can do about it, Poynter, accessible at: https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2015/the-dangers-of-journalism-include-getting-doxxed-heres-what-you-can-do-about-it/

7.3 Offline Harassment - Inside and Outside of Office

Offline Harassment includes any kind of harassment which happens outside of the online world. It is generally manifested in the form of the harasser harassing the victim through the verbal or physical means and includes sexual harassment. Further, such harassment is not only limited to inside the office but is also prevalent outside of the office.

Further, research shows that in today's dynamically changing environment, the online and offline worlds cannot be delinked.[102] The happenings in the online world may severely affect the offline world and vice-versa. For instance, as journalists often use social media to engage with audience and disseminate their stories, their life is surrounded by both online and offline work. If they face online abuse through means such as hate speech and trolling, their credibility may be undermined. This may lead further lead to offline harassment in workplace where colleagues may harass them. Thus, any kind of online harassment also impacts journalists in the offline world.

Further, in the offline world, a journalist's workplace consists of both the newsroom which may be an office setup and field which journalists may visit for reporting. It is important to note that harassment may happen in the workplace - in the office as well as outside it. For instance, while reporting where the woman journalist may face harassment by the public. This may include offline intimidation to not report on certain matters and threats of physical harm and violence including sexual violence.

Further, journalists can also be vulnerable to different kinds of offline risks which could be related to physical harm. For instance, while reporting from difficult locations such as war-torn areas or areas affected from disaster, they may be subject to different types of violent attacks like – killings, imprisonment, physical and psychological attacks, acts of intimidation to not report on certain matters, threats of physical abuse, and surveillance to not let one work freely. However, in case of women journalists, the attack is often manifested in the form of sexual violence.[103]

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[102] Julie S. LaLonde (2014) Online vs. offline harassment: Are there blurred lines? Rabble.ca, accessed at: https://rabble.ca/feminism/online-vs-offline-harassment-are-there-blurred-lines/; Timo Tapani Ojanen, Pimpawun Boonmongkon, Ronnapoom Samakkeekarom, Nattharat Samoh, Mudjalin Cholratana, Thomas Ebanan Guadamuz (2015) Connections between online harassment and offline violence among youth in Central Thailand, Child Abuse and Neglect, accessed at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25913812/

[103] International Media Support, The safety of women journalists, accessible at: https://www.mediasupport.org/publication/the-safety-of-women-journalists/

Thus, women journalists should exercise extreme caution against offline harassment as perpetrators may be both from within and outside of the industry.[104] While being inside the office, they should be aware about company policies for prevention of sexual harassment. In case of facing any kind of harassment from any colleague, women journalists should file a complaint.

While outside of office, a good practice to combat such offline harassment is to be culturally aware of the norms and social practices including clothing and appearance. Further, women journalists should also exercise situational awareness, for instance, the exit routes. While traveling, they should be conscious while using public transport and keep in handy the emergency contact details of local administration including the police station, hospitals etc. They should also carry their identity proof and should utilise it if they are in a situation of perceived threat.

7.4 Methodology to Combat Online Abuse

Online abuse and offline harassment happen because abusers want to stop journalists from having opinions and report as the kind of reporting they do.[105] Harassment and abuse is the doing of the perpetrators who engage in this activity and victims are not at fault. Women journalists shouldn't blame themselves in any manner. Further, they should not remain silent as such trolling and hate speech becomes a risk for all women.

However, to combat this, women journalists should take certain measures at an individual level. A good practice would be to define the strategy one wishes to adopt while taking any action. This should include (i) preparedness before facing any online abuse, (ii) identifying online abuse, having readiness for harassment scenarios and (iii) knowing what the action can be taken.[106] This will make women journalists better equipped to combat such online abuse.

7.4.1 Preparedness before Facing any Online Abuse

7.4.1.1 Auditing Personal Information
- Women journalists should ensure that personal information such as address, phone numbers etc. are not available online on social media platforms or elsewhere online.
- Many a times, we tend to forget details uploaded on our old accounts on various social media platforms which may be accessed by online abusers. Moreover, in the recent

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[104] The Representative on Freedom of the Media (2016) New Challenges to Freedom of Expression: Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists, Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe, accessed at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/3/220411.pdf

[105] Gina M. Masullo, Paromita Pain, Victoria Y. Chen, Madlin Mekelburg, Nina Springer and Franziska Troger, Women Journalists and Online Harassment, Media Engagement, accessed at: https://mediaengagement.org/research/women-journalists/

[106] George van Rooyen, 10 Forms of Online Harassment Your Government Agency Should Look Out For, Pagefreezer, accessed at: https://blog.pagefreezer.com/10-forms-online-harassment-government-agency

past, mobile numbers have emerged as a digital identity and can be used to identify any one.[107] This may be used by online abusers to do doxxing.

- Therefore, it is critical to keep on periodically auditing personal details on such social media platforms. For this purpose, one should keep do a Google search of their name and check if any personal information is available online. One may then request deletion of such information.[108]

- Women journalists may also make their social media profiles private, in case the same is not used for journalistic purposes. This will also ensure that doxxing efforts can be curbed. Further, in case of public profiles, it becomes easier for trolls to access and use old photographs for trolling purposes.

- While sharing your personal information in the offline world as well, one should have extreme caution and know that one is sharing their personal details to trusted persons and for official and important purposes.

7.4.1.2 Ensuring own Cyber-Security

- To prevent social media accounts from getting hacked, one should have strong alphanumeric passwords and should change them periodically. One should also use two-factor authentication which is provided by most social media and email platforms.

- Further, many platforms provide privacy and security checkup tools. For instance, Facebook provides its security checkup feature[109] and privacy checkup feature.[110] One should make a use of the same.

- Women journalists may also use Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection to ensure that their safety is protected. They may also utilise other privacy conscious tools[111] to protect themselves from surveillance.

7.4.1.3 Building Support System

- To better prepare, women journalists may build a network where they can share personal experiences and strategies used and have a virtual meet periodically to share each other's experiences. They may utilise this platform to collectively counter online abuse.

- Women journalists may also ask their employers to put in place legal teams which can take legal recourse, if required. Further, women journalists may choose to report any cases of online or offline abuse to the employer.

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[107] Move Over SSN – Here's Why Phone Numbers Are the New National Identifiers, Prove, accessed at: https://www.prove.com/blog/move-over-ssn-heres-why-phone-numbers-are-the-new-national-identifiers
[108] Dealing with online harassment & bullying, The Cyber Helpline, accessed at: https://www.thecyberhelpline.com/guides/online-harassment
[109] What's Facebook Security Checkup and how do I start it? Facebook.com, accessible at: https://www.facebook.com/help/799880743466869/
[110] What's Privacy Checkup and how can I find it on Facebook? Facebook.com, accessible at: https://www.facebook.com/help/443357099140264
[111] Privacy Guide: Fight Surveillance with Encryption and Privacy Tools, accessible at: https://www.privacytools.io/

- For this purpose, cross-border collaboration among women journalists would be beneficial. More on this will be covered in Chapter 7.

7.4.2 During an Incidence of Online Abuse

7.4.2.1 Keeping Evidence by Documenting Everything

- As a first step, women journalists should maintain a systematic record by documenting everything they can of such online abuse.[112] Along with this, journalists should make sure that they are logging in the data, time, nature of the incident, details of the abuser including their social media profiles, email ids, IP addresses etc. For this purpose, journalists may also adopt the 'Screenshot and File' approach by taking screenshots of all such abuses and placing them in a safe folder. Journalists may also permanently archive the content online using online tools.[113]

- This process will make it easier to communicate to not just fellow journalists and employers but also to the law enforcement agencies. This method will also help in identifying if there exists any pattern in the abuse.

7.4.2.2 Self-help Remedies for Women Journalists

- Counter Speech: Engaging with Harassment and Abuse
  - Women journalists may choose to counter the harassment and abuse by posting the screenshots of hateful and abusive comments and messages. By doing this, they may be able to garner support for themselves and create awareness. However, this approach is advisable only if there is no threat of physical harm or abuse.
  - A better approach for doing this is to condemn the action by giving reference to the potential harm of such abuse rather than getting personal by naming and shaming the abuser/perpetrator. If a screenshot is being shared, personal information of the abuser should be hidden.
  - One should not engage directly with the abusers/perpetrators. Further, counter speech should not be open-ended as it may invite undesirable response.
  - Further, one may decide to practice investigative journalism and try to figure out who are the real people behind the abusers.
- Blocking and Muting Abuse:
  - Women journalists may also choose to report such abuses to the concerned social media platform. Most social media platforms follow community standards which need to be adhered to.

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[112] The Cyber Helpline, Dealing with online harassment & bullying, accessible at: https://www.thecyberhelpline.com/guides/online-harassment

[113] Websites like https://archive.is/ and https://archive.org/ can be used for this purpose.

The #MeToo Movement in India
The #MeToo movement took the social media by storm wherein women who faced sexual harassment, in any form – both online and offline, came out on social media in large numbers. The women detailed out the ordeals they faced, risking their reputation and safety, bringing to light the widespread harassment and molestation which women face. [114] It has helped women fight the harassment including online abuse and offline harassment. However, some of these cases brought to light have also been questioned for their credibility due to lack of evidence. Thus, while such movements encourage women to speak up and empower them, misutilisation of the same can also discredit them. Such movements need to take a prudent approach so that justice can be achieved. It is to be noted that the #MeeToo movement also engulfed the media/ journalism industry, with many women journalists coming out in public, recounting their ordeal/ harassment faced at the hands of male colleagues.[115]

7.4.3 Taking Legal Action

- Many a times, taking self-measures may not be enough. If women journalists feel that they may are physically threated, a better approach is to take legal action which should include approaching to law enforcement agencies.[116]
- Further, if the extent of abuse is such that dignity of any woman journalist is impacted in any manner, law enforcement agencies must be approached.
- While taking the legal recourse, women journalists should share all the information they have with the law enforcement agencies including sharing of relevant data.
- In case the law enforcement agencies are not responsive, approaching the courts may be another option. Since different countries will have different judicial recourses methods, women journalists must get themselves familiarised with the same.

7.5 What to expect in subsequent chapter?

In the next chapter, the importance of having cross border collaboration between women journalists in the Indo-Pacific region, including the advantages of the same will be discussed. Further, how the same can be achieved will also be discussed.

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[114] A year into India's #MeToo movement, here's how the cases have played out, Business Standard, accessed at: https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/a-year-into-india-s-metoo-movement-here-s-how-the-cases-have-played-out-119101400105_1.html

[115] Dark Underbelly of Indian Media Revealed as Scores of Journalists Say #MeToo, The Wire, accessed at: https://thewire.in/women/indian-media-metoo

[116] Dealing with online harassment & bullying, The Cyber Helpline, accessed at: https://www.thecyberhelpline.com/guides/online-harassment.

Cross-border Collaboration of Women Journalists in the Indo-Pacific Region

8.1 Introduction

With increased globalisation, the world has become strongly interconnected. Further, the rise and increased adoption of informational and communications technology (ICT) has accelerated the interconnectedness. Now, people across the world want to be more aware of global happenings. This is because the happenings in one part of the world may severely impact another part of the world.

However, with this, many of the challenging problems which are global in nature have also come to limelight. These include concerning issues such as climate change, global migration, transnational crime, cross-border terrorism etc., which require significant media attention. While many of such issues are covered by several media houses across the world, many stories are revealed through collaborative journalistic projects which may be cross-border in nature.

In this chapter, the concept of cross-border collaboration between journalists is explored, and the importance of cross-border collaboration on pertinent issues which affect journalists in their respective communities is highlighted. Accordingly, it seeks to provide for a sustainable framework to facilitate such cross-border collaboration.

8.2 Cross-Border Journalism

8.2.1 What is Cross-Border Journalism?

Cross-border journalism means collaboration of journalists from different countries for a particular journalistic project or story. They compile, mutually cross-check, collate and merge their findings. This is followed by dissemination of the story to local and global audiences. Such collaboration helps journalists to investigate matters of public importance by pooling in their expertise and resources.

There have been several successful stories of cross-border journalist efforts which have revealed remarkable stories. For instance, the 'Panama Papers'[117], *inter alia*, has been one of the incidents which attempted to tackle multi-country issues collectively. With one publication encapsulating tax evasion practices of the global elite, more than a hundred million dollars was collected by states and enquiries being initiated in about 80 countries.

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[117] Alexander Mühlauer, Frederik Obermaier, and Vanessa Wormer, Shedding Light on the Grey Areas, Panama Papers: The Secrets of Dirty Money, accessible at:
https://panamapapers.sueddeutsche.de/articles/e329109/

Such journalistic projects need not be conducted at a large scale. Independent journalists may also collaborate for reporting on stories of local or global importance. For instance, a team of three journalists from Germany and India did a reporting, 'Silicosis - The Silent Killer' on how silicosis was killing thousands of workers in India, having an unseen connection with Germany and Europe where silica is exported.[118]

8.2.2 The Importance of Collaborative Journalism in the Indo-Pacific Region

In the Indo-Pacific region, with hundreds of people climbing out of poverty and the region becoming home to multi-national companies (MNCs), there has been a remarkable transformation. This has tremendously contributed to the global economic growth.[119] The region is home to few of the largest economies and has the potential to shape the global politics of the 21st century.[120] This reflects from the fact that globally, major powers including the US, Australia, Japan, European Union etc. are recognising the importance of the region and want it to be a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).[121]

While a free and fair democratic order will ensure geopolitical stability in the region, countries here are also prey to anomalous challenges to their sovereignty, prosperity, and peace. The region has several issues of concerns including degradation of the marine ecosystem by climate change and overfishing to activities by non-state actors like terrorists, pirates and criminal syndicate.[122] Accordingly, journalists need to collaborate across borders to highlight such concerning issues and further fortify values that can support progress for the region.

8.3 Advantages of Cross-Border Collaboration

There are several advantages of cross-border collaboration. A few are highlighted below:[123]

- **Move away for routine work:** Working on cross-border stories lets a journalist interact with different people from around the world who would have different socio-cultural perspectives. It will also give an opportunity to travel extensively.

[118] Petra Sorge, Julia Wadhawan and Sunaina Kumar (2017) Silicosis - The Silent Killer, Journalism Grants, accessible at: https://health-de.journalismgrants.org/projects/silicosis-the-silent-killer; Jorn Lelong (2018) Cross-border journalism: The successful example of a German-Indian collaboration, European Journalism Centre, accessible at: https://medium.com/we-are-the-european-journalism-centre/cross-border-journalism-the-successful-example-of-a-german-indian-collaboration-99a4eb75e8f7

[119] Department of State, United States of America (2019) A Free Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision, accessible at: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf

[120] Premesha Saha (2022) India's Role in the Emerging Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, Observer Researcher Foundation, accessed at: https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-role-in-the-emerging-dynamics-of-the-indo-pacific/

[121] Ibid.

[122] Brahma Chellaney (2018) A Challenging Time for the Indo-Pacific, Live Mint, accessed at: https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/HoGKWXREvIRZ6oGO94pj7H/A-challenging-time-for-the-IndoPacific.html

[123] Jakub Šimák, Staffan Dahllöf, Vlad Odobescu and Margherita Bettoni, Going for that Scoop, accessible at: https://playbook.n-ost.org/finding-stories/why-cross-border-journalism

- **Personal and Professional Growth:** By engaging in cross-border journalism, journalists can develop newer skills such as journalistic methods which were not adopted previously, reporting in a foreign language, data analysis, working in a changed cultural environment, among other things. Further, journalists can also learn project management skills through doing such projects.
- **Wider Reach of Work:** When cross-border stories are done, a wider set of audience is reached. This will help journalists increase their footprints and recognition in different countries. Further, this can also lead to a wider impact creation from stories.
- **Strong Profession Networks:** Working on cross-border projects often would take months to finish and this will lead to journalists making strong connections with other journalists which may come useful even after successful completion of a project.
- **Form networks to counter information disorder:** As information disorder has a tendency to spread across borders and thus cause harm to a large population, journalists can create teams with members across borders to bust information disorder.

8.4 The Seven Step Process

To engage in cross-border collaboration for performing investigative journalism, journalists need to take steps beyond of what they already do. In order to streamline this process, following the 'Seven Step Process'[124] is recommended:

8.4.1 Networking

For cross-border journalism, journalists need to adopt a 'minimum effort, maximum results' approach. Generally, journalists have an intent of competitive spirit which often tends to bring the best out of them. However, as a first step for cross-border journalism, they need to overcome it and adopt a collaborative approach. For this purpose, as a first step, rather than working individually, journalists need to do effective networking. This will ensure that an individual's efforts are minimised but results are maximised.

To make the networking successful, building trust in the network is of utmost important. Since journalistic projects may involve preserving crucial information, a network without trust may lead to journalists not be able to cooperate fully. Trust is built over a period of time and for this purpose, journalists need to communicate regularly, maintain high moral standards, and report their work with honestly.

Further, there may be four degrees of networking which journalists can choose to make:
- **Loose network:** This can be used by journalists living in different countries but having similar areas of interest for their work. For instance, a few journalists from different

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[124] Brigitte Alfter (2019) Cross-border Collaborative Journalism: A Step by Step Guide, Routledge, accessible at: https://www.routledge.com/Cross-Border-Collaborative-Journalism-A-Step-By-Step-Guide/Alfter/p/book/9781138613638; and Brigitte Alfter, Cross-border Journalism as a method, accessible at: https://blog.hostwriter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/crossborderjournalism-method-final.pdf

countries may have an interest in environment and can keep each other updated through relevant happenings in their own countries.

- **One-off assistance:** Journalists may take a one-off assistance from a fellow journalist in another country for some small service like short translation or verification of any quote, photo or footage. Journalists should also understand that they should be proactive in helping other fellow journalists which will help build trust.
- **Loose Collaboration:** Some projects may not require journalists to have close collaborations. Here, journalists may utilise their loose network to form a loose collaboration. Stories may be done independently and only exchange of specific information may be done.
- **Close Collaboration:** In the case of close collaboration, journalists form a close-knit network and work together akin to a newsroom. Here, the trust level is high among the participating journalists.

8.4.2 Story Idea

Before forming a research team, a journalist needs to decide upon the story idea with which he or she will approach other journalists. There may be several different types of story ideas including:

- Breaking news stories can be done for current events such as natural calamities, police raids, or other such sudden incidents.
- Organisation stories can be done covering stories related to international organisations and business etc. International relations can be a focus area of such stories where journalists can highlight the impact of decisions on their own stories.
- Chain stories can be done on trafficking of humans and wildlife, illegal trade etc.
- Comparative stories can be done for events happening in different countries such as on issues related to health, education, transportation etc., irrespective of whether or not the developments impact other countries.

8.4.3 Building the Team

Often, research work requires journalists with different skillsets. These skills can include knowledge about a particular field, language skills and network a particular journalist has. Further, different journalists adopt different kinds of journalistic research methods such as data journalism, using right to information law for obtaining official data etc. Furthermore, many journalists have experience in doing different kinds of stories such as covering war crimes, elections etc. Therefore, it is crucial to a journalist to form a team based upon the research skills required for the story idea he or she wishes to pursue.

The selection of publications and countries where the stories will be published should also be done at this stage, keeping in mind the impact the stories might have. If stories are sensitive in nature and can result in harm to reporting journalists, their security must also be considered. Thus, privacy centric solutions should be used to while connecting with them.

8.4.4 Research Plan

After having a story idea and after the formation of a research team, a research plan must be created. To create this plan, it is important for all team members to come together and brainstorm on different aspects of research such as the research methodology and the format of the story – video, written, photojournalistic etc., among other things. The type of story may also be reworked based upon the inputs of the team members. Further, the making of the research plan should include forming a timeline and schedule and the list of tasks to be performed should be listed. For this purpose, journalists may choose to create a Gantt chart illustrating the project schedule.

It is often advisable to set up a physical meeting at an easily accessible location for all team members. While assessing accessibility, journalists should include factors like distance from the location, connectivity to the location and visa restrictions, among other factors. However, with Covid-19 pandemic, the world has moved on to adopting virtual meetings. Journalists may also choose to do a virtual meeting. In this case, managing issues like coordinating meetings between different time zones are also important.

In the beginning of the project, all journalist members may choose to do different tasks based upon their skills. The working within the team can be further streamlined as research gets complex and tasks such as reporting or editing can be delegated as per the role divisions in the team. Here, one of the team members should also be chosen as the coordinator to help coordinate the operations and meetings. Further, secure communication tools such as those highlighted in *Chapter 6* may be used.

At this stage, it is also advisable to think about fundraising. Journalists should agree on the sources of funding that are acceptable for all the team members. This will ensure that credibility of the work is upheld in all the countries where the story is likely to get published. Freelance journalists should also approach potential media houses which will publish the story and seek funding.

Journalists should also be able to agree on the journalistic methods and ethics which will be followed for the study. There are certain standard ethical practices, discussed in previous chapters, which journalists may adopt. Further, different countries will have their own sets of ethics based upon the culture followed in the country. Therefore, while adopting any particular journalistic method, journalists should be wary of the cultural context. Further, creating a consensus for journalistic method to be used can be a big challenge as journalist may have conflicting opinions. This may also impact the professional and personal relationship with a team member which may impact the story itself. In this case, it is important to respect thoughts of all team members and try to create consensus.

8.4.5 Challenges while Doing Research

While doing research, journalists may encounter different kinds of challenges which may make them alter their chosen methodologies. For instance, sourcing data on a particular subject may be easy in a particular country but the same may not be the case in other countries. Other challenges may include language barriers, privacy issues, methods adopted for fact checking etc.

There are different methods which journalists may adopt and this may lead to differences between journalists which arise out of discussions. However, this will also lead to creation of deeper understanding on the topic. While the views of different team members may differ on the methods to be adopted, ethics to be practiced etc., journalists need to give time to dialogue and reach a common ground.

8.4.6 Publication

After the research is complete and the story is ready to be published, journalists must proceed for final publication. Freelance journalists also need to reach out to the media houses they have already contacted and have received funding from.

Further, there is no one-size-fits all approach for story publication. Research should be shared among all team members and stories can be tailored to suit the context of a particular region or country. In this context, each team member can suggest what suits best for the country they have taken responsibility for and form a consensus for the story.

Further, fact checking is an important task in cross-border journalism. All team members should take up the work of fact checking and make each other accountable for the work done by the team.

8.4.7 Steps After Publication

Journalists should consider this step as the new step 1. They should actively seek out to share their story in newer groups so that they can make potential new contacts. If stories are being presented at a journalism conference, potential new contacts and new story ideas for a new cross-border investigation must be explored.