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Lessons in Innovation: How International News Organisations Combat Disinformation through Mission-Driven Journalism

Julie Posetti with Felix Simon and Nabeelah Shabbir

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Cover photos of Daily Maverick, Rappler and
The Quint by Leila Dougan and Julie Posetti

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Executive Summary

This report examines how digital-born news media in the Global South have developed innovative reporting and storytelling practices in response to growing disinformation problems. Based on field observation and interviews at Rappler in the Philippines, Daily Maverick in South Africa, and The Quint in India, we show that all three organisations combine a clear sense of mission and a commitment to core journalistic values with an active effort to find new ways of identifying and countering disinformation, based on a combination of investigative journalism fact-checking, data and social network analysis, and sometimes strategic collaboration with both audiences and platform companies. In the process, each of these organisations are developing new capacities and skills, sharing them across the newsroom, differentiating themselves from their competitors, and potentially increasing their long-term sustainability, in ways we believe other news media worldwide could learn from.

All three case organisations we examine here are digital-born, mobile-first (or in the process of becoming so), and at least in part enabled by social media in terms of audience development and reach. While smaller than their most important legacy media competitors, all have built significant online audiences across their websites and social media channels. They represent a strategic sample of leading digital-born commercial news media operating with limited resources in challenging media, political, and press freedom environments in the Global South. All of them face the ‘unintended consequences’ of digital innovation and technology (Posetti 2018) particularly keenly, both in terms of increasing problems of disinformation (Nielsen and Graves 2017; Fletcher 2018) in their countries, and more specifically in terms of direct attacks on them, with social media leveraged by some political actors, orchestrated ‘troll networks’, and members of the public directing abuse and threats at the organisations and their staff.

We document how Rappler, the Daily Maverick, and The Quint have all responded to these challenges through a combination of doubling down on their journalistic mission, strongly linked to the maintenance of the role of the free press in democracies and established journalistic values, along with an active investment in innovative forms of reporting and storytelling applied to combating misinformation and disinformation (Ireton and Posetti 2018). These include intensive, multi-layered approaches to fact-checking, the use of data journalism and network analysis, and in some cases collaboration with platforms and audiences to try to counter disinformation. They do this without access to the revenues or resources that many legacy media have, especially in the West.

Through their constantly evolving response to rapidly developing problems of disinformation, all of the organisations studied are acquiring new knowledge and skills that can power their public interest journalism and community engagement more broadly in the digital age. They do this work by placing their audiences first, with an emphasis on building trust, in the belief that they are helping their communities better understand and navigate the digital media environment, while also developing deeper appreciation for the role of media freedom in open societies. Additionally, they believe that this ‘pivot to defending truth’, as one Rappler manager described their strategic defence against disinformation, might also help build new revenue streams by differentiating them from competitors, giving them a more compelling case for building, for example, membership models, and helping them acquire expertise that can be monetised through consultancy services and other business-to-business channels.

Their innovative reporting and storytelling responses to disinformation are thus not ‘random acts of innovation’, nor are they driven by ‘shiny new things’ (Posetti 2018). Rather, they combine a clear

mission, commitment to core editorial values and foundational journalism practices, audience-centricity, and selective investment in specific new initiatives designed to create public value and impact. These initiatives, they say, set them apart from competitors, and help sustain their organisations. This can be understood as an expression of the 'ingenuity of necessity' associated with development in the Global South (Posetti 2018). In particular, we identify nine key lessons from the ways in which Rappler, the Daily Maverick, and The Quint work with innovative reporting and storytelling responses to disinformation problems.

Key Lessons

1. A clear mission helps focus innovation.
2. Mission-driven journalism may divide audiences, but it is not the same as partisanship.
3. Ability to 'pivot' in response to a crisis is an innovation marker.
4. Audiences can be part of journalism innovation.
5. Reporting can fuel organisational innovation.
6. Innovation requires investment in new skills, tools, techniques, and training (no matter how limited resources are).
7. Innovation can be based on core values but also require constant re-examination of whether a more fundamental shift is necessary.
8. Innovations need to be shared across the whole news organisation to avoid siloing.
9. With a clear mission, it is possible to do important, innovative journalism for a large audience even with limited resources.

1. Introduction

The journalism innovation wheel and technology's 'unintended consequences'

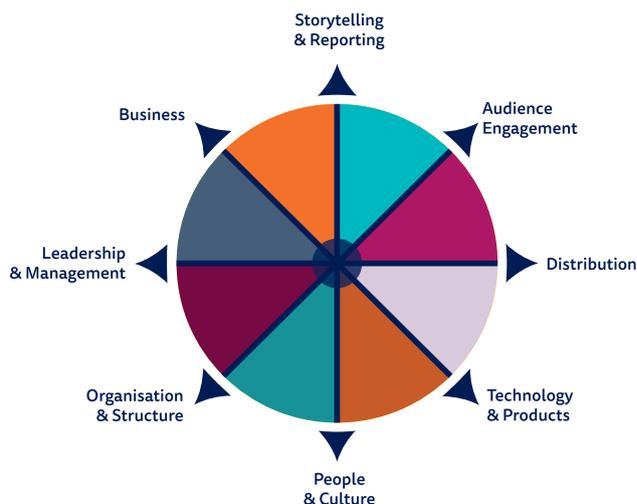
As news organisations struggle to adapt to rapid technological change in the face of difficult economic circumstances, there is growing interest in identifying successful strategies for managing change in the news industry in productive and sustainable ways. Innovation, defined broadly as the development of something new and useful, or a different way of doing things (from the incremental to the transformative) that supports the digital era development of journalism, has been a central focus. For instance, Küng (2015) identifies four traits common to news organisations that have successfully innovated: (1) a clear strategic focus; (2) senior leadership dedicated to change; (3) a pro-digital culture; and (4), a deep integration of editorial, technological, and commercial expertise across the organisation in developing new products and services. When it comes to storytelling innovation, Anderson (2017) has observed that clear editorial goals and the integration of business and technology dimensions are crucial factors for success. Newsrooms must also develop innovation practices that are strategic, research-informed, and that don't contribute to 'innovation fatigue' and burnout (Posetti 2018).

However, existing research has tended to focus on relatively well-resourced news outlets operating in Western democracies. In this report, we shift the lens to consider innovation at three digital-born news organisations operating in more challenging circumstances: Rappler in the Philippines, the Daily Maverick in South Africa, and The Quint in India. They are all commercial, digital-born, audience-led, mobile-focused enterprises, driven by a strong mission to produce independent journalism with the aim of serving the public interest and strengthening destabilised democracies. Additionally, each of these newsrooms reports that it has been targeted – through legal action and via state-linked disinformation campaigns – in retaliation for critical journalism. They are all newsrooms of the Global South, where ingenuity is often born of necessity.

This is the second report of the Journalism Innovation Project, which aims to identify key indicators or markers for 'sustainable' journalism innovation. In the first report (Posetti 2018) we introduced the 'Journalism Innovation Wheel', a conceptual framework designed to support 'sustainable innovation' in news organisations. It demonstrated that journalism innovation can happen along many different dimensions, often concurrently, and with frequent overlapping – for example, combining new approaches to reporting or storytelling with new forms of audience engagement. The eight spokes of this 'wheel' were identified as:

- Reporting and storytelling
- Audience engagement
- Technology and product
- Distribution
- Business
- Leadership and management
- Organisation and structure
- People and culture

Journalism innovation wheel



In this report, we will focus primarily on one segment of the Journalism Innovation Wheel: reporting and storytelling.¹ We examine how the news organisations in focus are countering threats associated with digital era ‘information disorder’ – which Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) define as a combination of misinformation, disinformation, and information shared with malicious intent – through innovative approaches to research, investigation, verification, accountability journalism, and audience-engaged storytelling.

Our approach to the research

This report draws on qualitative fieldwork based on the Participatory Action Research model, meaning it is designed to achieve a practical impact (Niblock 2007; Reason and Bradbury 2008; Wagemans and Witschge 2019). The lead author was ‘embedded’ in each of the three news organisations featured for a week at a time during February and March 2019, invited by their CEOs and editors to join as observer and participant – attending editorial and project meetings, strategy sessions, and contributing to training where requested. Additionally, she was added to internal discussion groups, editorial email lists, and agenda-setting diaries during her attachments to the newsrooms – in Manila, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and New Delhi.

The main data corpus consists of: the lead author’s field notes; content published by the outlets; and 45 in-depth, semi-structured interviews (see list of interviewees at the end of the report) with editors, CEOs, investigative journalists, reporters, product heads, fact-checkers, social media editors, community managers, videographers, innovation and research lab leaders, multimedia producers, and those occupying a range of hybrid or ‘bridge’ roles. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and subjected to thematic analysis.

The result is a comparative study of three distinct international case studies demonstrating shared characteristics indicative of their capacity for innovation.

Three international case studies in mission-driven journalism innovation

In the first report in this series (Posetti 2018), we argued that the experiences of news organisations in the Global South responding to the challenges of innovating in an era of perpetual change would likely be different to those of the developed West. Consequently, in this study, we have examined three international news organisations in developing contexts – where ingenuity is frequently born of necessity – to identify potentially valuable transferable lessons for global newsrooms.

The three Global South news organisations selected for this study were identified on the basis of their distinctive missions (emphasising independent, public interest journalism) and their similarly

¹ We define ‘reporting’ as the processes of news gathering (such as research, fact-checking, interviewing) and the discipline of verification, while ‘storytelling’ is defined for the purposes of this research as the narrative weave of a report (language, style, literary devices, etc.) and the variety of formats and techniques used to convey the information to audiences in engaging ways (e.g. video, interactives, podcasts, memes).

structured business models (commercial, digital-born, audience-engaged, mobile-focused). It is noteworthy that both Rappler and Daily Maverick have recently launched membership portals (Rappler Plus² and Maverick Insider³) designed to leverage that trust for financial sustainability and audience collaboration, while The Quint is exploring the possibilities of membership.

Another common factor that became salient in the course of the research is the experience of press freedom threats and the ‘unintended consequences’ of digital technologies (e.g. viral disinformation, online harassment, and a history of platform-dependent distribution). Each outlet profiled here reports that it has confronted manifestations of orchestrated, state-linked disinformation campaigns dramatically amplified by the platforms in their countries – primarily via Facebook in the Philippines, Twitter in South Africa, and WhatsApp in India.

Finally, at the time of writing, these three news organisations were preparing to cover imminent national elections in their countries, with combating disinformation through reporting and storytelling a primary objective.

The presentation of these case studies follows the timeline of the field research.

RAPPLER, THE PHILIPPINES

The first trait is courage. It takes courage to be honest. Courage to speak truth to power, whether it's in an organisation or whether it's politics or anyone, it's courage. That's what makes great journalists. I think that's the foundation. When we came under attack, courage was a bedrock and all we had to do was be who we are. (Maria Ressa, Rappler CEO and Executive Editor)



Rappler – a portmanteau of ‘rap’ and ‘ripple’ – was founded in 2012 with a mission to leverage social media for ‘social good’ and build a ‘community of action’ to help deliver social change (Posetti 2015). Launched by a group of four investigative journalists and editors – nicknamed by colleagues ‘the manangs’, a Tagalog word for ‘older sisters’ – the site grew out of a Facebook page called MovePh (Move Philippines) and has increasingly focused on investigative and community journalism (Posetti 2015; Anderson 2017).

A turning point came with the 2016 election, which brought what Rappler co-founder Maria Ressa described as the ‘weaponisation’ of social media against independent journalism in the Philippines. ‘They turned the tools of free expression against us’, she said, describing a state-linked orchestrated disinformation campaign that has targeted Rappler and its journalists since they began to expose the large-scale extrajudicial killings associated with Duterte’s ‘drug war’. Prolific, gendered online threats and abuse are an ongoing feature of this campaign (Posetti 2017; Etter 2018; Bradshaw and Howard 2017).

Defending press freedom⁴ and demanding accountability from the platforms are now at the core of Rappler’s mission. ‘You can’t be independent if you can’t survive’,⁵ Maria Ressa said during an interview for this project, a day after an arrest warrant was issued against her in connection with

² See www.rappler.com/plus

³ See www.dailymaverick.co.za/insider

⁴ Rappler has campaigned explicitly on press freedom, using the #DefendPressFreedom hashtag to coordinate action in defence of the outlet and its reporters and to raise funds to support their legal defence. Cf. www.rappler.com/move-ph/223467-list-defend-press-freedom-rallies-after-maria-ressa-arrest

⁵ All quotes contained in this report are sourced from interviews conducted by lead author Julie Posetti in February and March 2019, unless otherwise referenced.

one of the 11 cases pending against her and Rappler. Two days after the lead author concluded her research attachment to Rappler, Ressa was arrested and detained overnight in an action publicly condemned by the UN Special Rapporteur for the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression.⁶ As we went to press, she was re-arrested (BBC 2019) and then forced to post bail for the eighth time, in relation to a new case.⁷ Ressa's global campaign to draw awareness to press freedom crackdowns and state-linked disinformation in the Philippines resulted in a slew of international journalism awards, and she was named a *Time Magazine* Person of the Year in 2018 (Vick 2018).

DAILY MAVERICK, SOUTH AFRICA

The kind of organisation we wanted to build was one that was authentic, one that we would always have integrity in everything that we did and that would always be meaningful. Meaningful is a word we use quite a lot here. We don't just want to do something just for the sake of making money. Like, it really needs to add meaning to our lives, to other people's lives, to the country, to society. (Styli Charalambous, Daily Maverick Co-founder, Publisher and CEO)



Photo: Leila Dougan

South Africa's Daily Maverick was founded in 2009 by Styli Charalambous and Editor-in-Chief Branko Brkic, from the ashes of a failed quality feature magazine called *Maverick*, which Brkic also founded. As one of South Africa's earliest online-only publications, it had a commitment to quality commentary and analysis from the start. It has evolved into one of the country's leading sources of investigative, explanatory, and longform journalism.

Daily Maverick's character reflects its title. It sees itself as fiercely independent, egalitarian, irreverent, and occasionally snarky. The site aims to practice and promote accountability journalism that helps defend South African democracy and its institutions, at a time when South African businesses 'cowered away from supporting free voices and independent voices', as Charalambous said. There is also what Editor-in-Chief Branko Brkic described as a 'deep ethical spine' that supports Daily Maverick journalism, along with an activist spirit reminiscent of anti-apartheid journalism, as articulated with typical passion by Senior Investigative Journalist Marianne Thamm.

Black South Africans have suffered for so long and it doesn't have to fucking be that way. And that's my mission. I've seen change in my own lifetime and it's always come with pain and effort, and sometimes violence and bloodshed, but it comes. And if you give up on it, it won't come. That's my inspiration here.

This approach ultimately contributed to the demise of disgraced former President Jacob Zuma, when the site helped to expose a web of corruption connected to 'state capture'.⁸ This refers to three wealthy Indian brothers, the Guptas, who 'captured' and drained the national treasury for their own interests. This was confirmed by a cache of emails leaked by a whistleblower to Brkic.

⁶ See statement by Professor David Kaye at <https://bit.ly/2FQdWbS>. At the time of writing, several Rappler board members and Managing Editor Glenda Gloria were also issued with a writ, and Ressa was arrested again in connection with a multi-pronged foreign ownership investigation being pursued by the state

⁷ 'Maria Ressa Posts P126,000 Bail for New Case', Rappler Media, 1 Apr., www.rappler.com/nation/227159-maria-ressa-posts-bail-new-case-april-1-2019

⁸ 'State capture' is described in *The Economist* as 'unfamiliar elsewhere in the world, [but] the term is in widespread use in South Africa, especially since the publication in October 2016 of *State of Capture*, a report by Thuli Madonsela, the former public protector' – an ombudsman whose powers are guaranteed by the constitution. <https://econ.st/2FMZDnz>

The collaborative investigative journalism project that followed (Schmidt 2018) became known as #GuptaLeaks. But the scandal also involved an orchestrated disinformation campaign run by the now defunct UK-based PR firm Bell Pottinger, which manipulated and racialised economic debates using ‘sock puppet networks’ and ‘troll armies’ that targeted journalists – especially female journalists – reporting on #GuptaLeaks. Conformation of the Bell Pottinger disinformation campaign was found in the #GuptaLeaks email cache.

THE QUINT, INDIA

The rigours and the honesty of journalism, those basic tenets remain the same. But on top of that, you have to have a clear distinct voice backed by credibility because it's clear that the long-term battle is going to be won on trust ... the currency is going to be credibility. And in India, believe me, it's a precious currency. But when the dust settles, people will turn to the credible people, the media houses or the journalists that they can believe in. ... I think that is important. I think it's the best thing you can do to build a brand. (Ritu Kapur,⁹ CEO, The Quint)



The Quint is the youngest of the three case studies featured, having launched in 2014 as a mobile-journalism-powered and social-first outfit. Like Rappler, it was born as a Facebook page, founded by married veteran media executives CEO Rita Kapur and Editor-in-Chief Raghav Bahl. The operation is heavy on video live-streaming, memes, and interactives; Kapur has described the Millennials-focused start-up as ‘young, scrappy, and dirty’ (Posetti 2018).

Privately funded by Kapur and Bahl, The Quint has grown rapidly to a staff of over 150, with multiple bureaus. It supports gender equality advocacy projects and a ‘citizen journalism’ portal, alongside a vertical dedicated to pop culture. In 2018, it also built a high-traction fact-checking and myth-busting unit called WebQoof¹⁰ which has a dedicated team of reporters, and a very invested audience that collaborates on surfacing and debunking the floods of disinformation and misinformation that find amplification on India’s social web, particularly in the closed environment of WhatsApp (McLaughlin 2018).

The Quint’s style is cheeky and plucky – it delves deeply (but accessibly) into complex issues like gender violence and Islamophobia and it has not cowed from critiquing the populist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, despite charges of ‘anti-nationalism’ and threats being levelled at the outlet and its journalists – especially the women – by ‘troll-armies’.

Defending press freedom is also a feature of The Quint’s mission. The outlet has itself been targeted by the Modi Government with tax raids. Groups and individuals who support the government have also engaged The Quint in a slew of legal cases. Both actions are designed, it is perceived, to chill their reporting in a climate of declining media freedom. Bahl and Kapur’s home, along with The Quint’s New Delhi headquarters, were raided by tax officials in October 2018 in an act that the Editors Guild of India said: ‘could be seen as an intimidation of the government’s critics’ (Committee to Protect Journalists 2018). This approach parallels some of the legal cases being brought against Rappler in the Philippines.

⁹ Ritu Kapur is a member of the RISJ Advisory Board.

¹⁰ The name is derived from the Hindi word for idiot, ‘Bewaqoof’. WebQoof means that you are an idiot if you believe anything on the web without fact-checking first.



Origins

This Manila-based start-up was founded in 2011 (as a Facebook page) by media executive and former CNN bureau chief, Maria Ressa and three editor colleagues. Website (<https://www.rappler.com/>) launched 2012. Brand partnership with Indonesian outlet.

Business model

Commercial, mixed model – advertising, sponsored content and membership (newly launched), research services.

Audience profile

English-speaking Millennials.

Reach and Distribution

8.4 million total unique visitors (Mar. 2019; source: Rappler). Social Media assets: Twitter: 3.06 million; Facebook: 3.8 million; YouTube: 385,046. Social media and newsletter-driven.

Content

Nationally-focused multimedia, video/live video, text, podcasts, newsletters, User Generated Content, social.

Staff

Approximately 80 employees, predominantly female.

Impact

Known for its investigative journalism into the Duterte government's 'drug war', for revealing the orchestrated digital disinformation campaigns destabilising the young democracy, and for its press freedom activism.



Origins

Founded in 2009 by Editor-in-Chief Branko Brkic and Publisher Styli Charalambous, one of South Africa's earliest digital-only news businesses. It has newsrooms in Johannesburg and Cape Town. (<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/>)

Business model

Commercial, mixed model – advertising, membership (newly launched), events, sponsored content, grant funding and donations.

Audience profile

English-speaking, politically engaged.

Reach and Distribution

1.3 million unique monthly users (Google Analytics: supplied); 110k newsletter subscribers. Social media assets: Twitter: 397,600; Facebook: 123,097; YouTube: 2,218. Predominantly newsletter and event driven.

Content

Nationally-focused longform text, multimedia, video, documentary, podcasts, newsletter suite.

Staff

Approximately 40 employees, gender balanced. Recently hired eight new trainee journalists.

Impact

Known for its political analysis and commentary, investigative journalism into corruption (e.g. #GuptaLeaks), and exposing the Bell Pottinger disinformation scandal.



Origins

English and Hindi language national Indian news start-up founded and funded by journalists and media executives Raghav Bahl and Ritu Kapur. The Quint launched in January 2015 on Facebook, and as a website (<https://www.thequint.com/>) in March 2015. Headquartered in New Delhi. Multiple bureaus.

Business model

Commercial, mixed model – advertising, events, sponsored content, grant funding. Distribution is social-media driven.

Audience profile

English- and Hindi-language speaking Millennials.

Reach and Distribution

19,581,000 total unique visitors (Jan. 2019/ComScore, desktop and mobile). Social Media assets: Twitter: 272,000; Facebook: 6.6 million; YouTube: 1,014,275. Distribution is social-media driven.

Content

Multimedia, video/live video, documentary, podcasts, newsletters, graphic journalism, bespoke social and mobile content.

Staff

Approximately 150 employees, gender-balanced.

Impact

Known for its advocacy journalism on gender issues and the fact-checking/anti-disinformation initiative, WebQoof

133
in the
2018 World Press
Freedom Index



RANKING
↓ **-6**
127 in 2017

GLOBAL SCORE
↓ **+1.45**
41.08 in 2017

Ranking since 2013

Source: RSF

THE PHILIPPINES

Political system
Unitary presidential constitutional republic, independence from US on 4 July 1946, current constitution established on 2 February 1987.

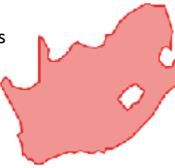
Population
106.5 million.

Internet penetration rate
63% (67,000,000 internet users) (Internet World Stats 2019c). Facebook is the most popular platform, with between 43 and 62 million users according to various sources (Statista 2019).

Media landscape
Powerful commercial interests control or influence much of the media. The Philippines have a strong TV scene, the private press is robust and hundreds of newspaper titles are published around the country. The most popular are Filipino-language tabloids, which can be prone to sensationalism (BBC Philippines profile 2019).

World Press Freedom Ranking 2018
The country currently ranks 133 out of 180 countries (RSF 2018c).

28
in the
2018 World Press
Freedom Index



RANKING
↑ **+3**
31 in 2017

GLOBAL SCORE
↓ **+0.27**
20.12 in 2017

Ranking since 2013

Source: RSF

SOUTH AFRICA

Political system
Unitary dominant-party parliamentary constitutional republic, 1990-4 end of apartheid, current constitution established 4 February 1997.

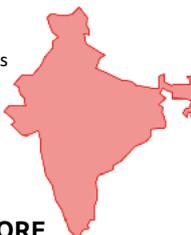
Population
57 million.

Internet penetration rate
54% (31 million internet users) (Internet World Stats 2019b)

Media landscape
South Africa has an established state-owned and private broadcasting scene. The press scene is dominated by a handful of major publishing groups (BBC South Africa profile 2019).

World Press Freedom Ranking 2018
The country currently ranks 28 out of 180 countries (RSF 2018a)

138
in the
2018 World Press
Freedom Index



RANKING
↓ **-2**
136 in 2017

GLOBAL SCORE
↓ **+0.30**
42.94 in 2017

Ranking since 2013

Source: RSF

INDIA

Political system
Federal parliamentary republic, established 26 January 1950.

Population
1.354 billion.

Internet penetration rate
34% (462 million internet users) (Internet World Stats 2019a)

Media landscape
Indian broadcasting is flourishing, the print newspaper industry is large, though advertising and circulation in the English-language newspapers are no longer growing as rapidly as the media market overall.

World Press Freedom Ranking 2018
The country currently ranks 138 out of 180 countries in the 2018 world press freedom rankings (RSF 2018b).

2. The Rappler effect: Rappler, the Philippines

Rappler has made fighting back against what it identifies as state-sponsored disinformation and associated targeting of the organisation, a core business and reporting strategy, seeking to build loyal, supportive audiences around its activist model of accountability journalism. This strategic 'pivot' by a news outlet which remains heavily dependent upon social media (predominantly Facebook) for distribution and audience development was triggered by the election of populist president Rodrigo Duterte in May 2016. According to observers, Duterte nationalised a campaign of extrajudicial killings in what he called a 'war on drugs' (Baldwin et al. 2018). Within weeks, Rappler's Executive Editor Maria Ressa began to note the use of social media to spread disinformation and target Duterte critics, including Rappler journalists, with threats and abuse:

By July 2016, we saw the shift on social media. That was really when it became weaponised that the timing was aligned with the beginning of the 'drug war'. That's when we saw that anyone who questioned his drug war on Facebook was bashed, truly, horribly, nastily so. Because we live on social media, we felt it first.

In the context of these attacks, Duterte used a tactic from US President Donald Trump's playbook (Wendling 2018; Posetti and Matthews 2018), labelling Rappler 'fake news' in a speech, and in his 2017 'State of the Nation' address he wrongly said Rappler was 'fully American owned' in order to discredit the outlet. Shortly afterwards, his government banned Executive Editor Maria Ressa and senior political reporter Pia Ranada from the presidential palace and government precinct (Geddie and Pettie 2019). Even regional Rappler correspondents were banned from Duterte's events, compromising Rappler's capacity to report, according to senior staff.

Disinformation-busting and verification as an engaging new beat

The first step in Rappler's strategy was to attempt to map the new environment. By August of 2016, Rappler was gathering data to try to understand 'how the information ecosystem was being polluted'. Ressa led the project and applied her experiences of mapping digital terrorism networks for her book *From Bin Laden to Facebook* (Ressa 2012), which built on her time as a war correspondent in South East Asia for CNN. This work had informed development of a social media mapping tool called Reach that Rappler built in 2013 to map their communities and their conversations on Twitter. This manual process, which Ressa says was the foundation for Rappler's early growth, allowed them to understand how 'information cascades' work within audiences.

Rappler's next move was to apply their community activism model to the problem, starting a campaign called #NoPlaceForHate to educate audiences about the need for civility online. But 'we were so naïve about it', Ressa said:

I thought 'people just don't realise'. I never realised how systematic this was and how really social media had been weaponised. That was the beginning of an education for us. By the end of August, I gave the data that we got to Facebook and no response, no response ...

This perceived rebuff from Facebook – the platform that Rappler is now collaborating with to try to address the disinformation crisis in an election year – triggered the development of an innovative new beat: mapping and combating state-linked disinformation campaigns and associated attacks

on news organisations and individual journalists (Bueza et al. 2018). Ressa and her colleagues were the subject of threats of sexual violence and other gendered attacks which escalated after President Duterte labelled Rappler 'fake news' in his 2017 national address.

These attacks were documented in a UN-published report on journalism safety (Posetti 2017). In that report, Maria Ressa described a process of turning the tools of investigative journalism back onto the problem.

Rappler's head of Digital Communications and Civic Engagement, Stacy de Jesus, explained how that approach motivated the team:

When we started looking at the numbers, at the data, we realised it was a coordinated attack, that was actually what empowered us for the next decisions that we made and then we had our game faces on, and we started to understand... And I think the simple awareness... that it is not a hopeless case, was actually... what motivated us maybe even more than before. Because now, it's war. Now, the mission is clear, now, the line has been clearly drawn.

The first stage in developing this mission involved documenting what is known inside Rappler as the 'shark tank' – a database which stores over a terabyte of information tracking disinformation networks, and is being augmented with AI technology. Ressa and her co-founders constructed a research team specialising in advanced fact-checking, verification, and network analysis around this 'shark tank'. 'We're the only country that has its own database that shows you how we went from a democracy to a near dictatorship. We can show you how they've done it', Ressa said.

This process eventually led to a fact-checking partnership with Facebook (Stevenson 2018) which has since evolved into a more complex commercial relationship. The workflow now looks like this: Rappler reporters and social media producers surface disinformation (on and offline) which the research team investigates, analysing connections and interactions to map disinformation creation and distribution networks. On 11 January 2019, in its second takedown of 'inauthentic' sites and accounts in the Philippines, Facebook banned a significant chunk of the disinformation ecosystem manipulating Filipinos, which had a link to the Internet Research Agency and the Russian disinformation ecosystem. Rappler had identified the network, and written about it, nearly 13 months earlier (Hapal and Magsambol 2017). At the time of writing, Facebook announced the takedown of 200 pages, groups, and accounts engaged in what it termed 'coordinated, inauthentic behaviour' (Gleicher 2019). In turn, Rappler's editorial team reports on the outcome of Facebook's investigations and takedowns, explaining the impact of 'troll networks' and the importance of their dismantling (Gonzales 2019). 'What we're after is getting them to take down the rest of it, and slowly what they're doing is they're getting closer to the government's propaganda machine. It's like peeling layers of an onion', Ressa said.

That is why we continue to work with Facebook, as one of three fact-checking partners in our country, defining facts and looking at networks that spread lies. I don't think we have a choice. This is transformative technology, and we can use it to push Facebook to understand its true impact – good and evil – in the world. I'm cautiously optimistic that the good can prevail.

Effectively, this translates as Rappler seizing back gatekeeping power via editorial agenda-setting on disinformation through innovative approaches to investigative work, that they believe helps defend democracy, encourages platform accountability, and allows them to work towards monetising research and verification as commodities, while also developing an engaging new beat.

Innovative approaches to reporting and storytelling about disinformation

Rappler's reporting and storytelling about digital propaganda and disinformation networks began with innovative long-form investigative reporting on Duterte's 'drug war' led by investigative journalist Patricia Evangelista.¹¹ She continues to document extrajudicial killings on the ground, facing considerable personal risk:



Rappler takes the flack for me, they're facing the courts. They're facing the government. They're out there making statements that endanger themselves. They, they're the ones who pay the price to let me do my thing in the field. I have a shield.

It was this reporting that led to the online attacks on journalists and citizens who critiqued or questioned the pattern of extrajudicial killings directed by the president. In turn, Ressa's identification of what she described as a 'digital propaganda war' led to a 'big data' investigative series about 'sock puppet networks' and 'troll armies' connected to the government (Ressa 2016). These reports involved the innovative use of eye-catching graphics and explanatory narrative techniques to tell complex stories in ways that helped the audience connect the dots and understand both the context and impact of the research presented. 'The key thing that we constantly have to go back to is, why does it matter?' Maria Ressa said.

This reporting project also introduced the team to innovative data journalism techniques that led to new skills in big data analysis and digital network mapping. To support this type of investigative reporting and storytelling, the Rappler research team traces incivility and propaganda networks in the public sphere as a critical feature of accountability journalism in the context of networked disinformation. This involves examining suspicious pages, groups, and accounts (mostly on Facebook) that draw attention through patterns of attack or incessant promotion that reach a certain activity threshold, for example.

The 'shark tank' at the centre of this work began as a very basic database, Rappler's Head of Research Gemma Bagayaua Mendoza explained:

We literally started with Google Spreadsheets. We started tracking what looked like dubious pages, dubious accounts. And then we realised that, 'Okay, this is not gonna work. Okay. You'll have to have somebody there literally scouring through all of these things.' We started automating the process of monitoring, so that then we could analyse the data. Now, we're looking at 16,000 public pages. There's one born every day.

This process is now being applied to analysis of Facebook page and account takedowns. 'We looked at what they announced versus the networks we were familiar with, and then looked at whether there were entire networks taken down? Or were there holdouts?' Bagayaua Mendoza said.

¹¹ Cf. www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-drug-war-name-of-the-father-impunity

For instance, if we're talking about the network of a hoax site, was this site's ability to keep on circulating hoaxes affected. It doesn't matter if you produce hoaxes if you don't have the capacity to circulate. It's a virus. A hoax is a virus. What we are trying to see is what's the origin, what's patient zero? And then how is the virus spreading?

Often, these 'viruses' have international tentacles and Rappler is now looking beyond the Philippines with an intention to tell geopolitical stories about international impacts and global interests.

Rappler has also developed innovative approaches to fact-checking, which have been 'routinised' within reporting processes, in response to President Duterte's practices of obfuscation and 'rambling' during press conferences and other public engagements. The Rappler political reporter banned by the Palace, Pia Ranada, said fact-checking had become part of reporters' workflow with dedicated story templates: 'Before we would just write an article like "Duterte falsely claims this". But now we have a real format. It says fact-check. Duterte falsely claims, and then we have a graphic that says "false". It [indicates] he's wrong. He's lying. Or he's mistaken.'

This practice draws additional 'flak' and partisan attacks, Ranada said: 'That's where people say, oh, "you're fake news" or "you're so anti-Duterte, you're biased". Because they think that we're somehow attacking his credibility and bringing his reputation down. So that's a source of a lot of hate for us.' But that doesn't deter them – they hope fairness in fact-checking will help protect them. They've also embraced their core journalistic function as fact-checkers and verifiers, internalising Rappler's mission, as Ranada demonstrated.

We've embraced our identity as fact-checkers. So, for us, this is who we are. Fine, we may be alienating people, but then we think that if we take a stand people will admire that and might side with us. Because, for us, if you don't have a side then you don't stand for anything. And that's worse than being the victim of his barrage of supporters. We're embracing our role as journalists.

Additionally, Rappler reporters now avoid stenography reporting (Silverman 2014) of Duterte's comments and speeches to prevent the amplification of inaccuracies and falsehoods without context and challenge.

Another 'accidental innovation' in reporting comes in response to Ranada's reporting ban. 'What the administration didn't realise is when the reporters are freed up [from the daily grind] because they are banned, they become more innovative and persistent in [pursuing] the special reports that they want', Rappler News Editor Miriam Grace Go said. 'It's actually freed them up, to have more time digging for documents, mining data, and actually networking better with other sources, diversifying their pool of sources on that beat.'

In terms of storytelling innovations, Rappler connects this function directly to audience development. Ressa emphasised the importance of humanising narratives and emotionally engaged storytelling: 'Pragmatic storytelling without emotions leaves you in the dust. The key thing that we constantly have to go back to is, why does it matter? It has to matter, which is why we constantly say the things that need to be stated for our public.'

Building trust and audience investment in the 'mission' through credible reporting

'We build communities of action. Integrity builds trust, which in turn builds strong communities', Maria Ressa said. But the president's attacks on Rappler, amplified by 'troll armies' (Bradshaw and

Howard 2017: 37), have damaged Rappler's brand according to Investigations Editor Chay Hofileña. 'They've called us "fake news". They've diminished our value as journalists. It can't be fixed in a matter of months or even a year, because it will require organising.' By that, she means that community engagement and collaboration will be required to help rebuild wider audience trust networks.

One response involves the application of the 'humanisation' process described above to the reporters themselves. Key Rappler journalists are presented to audiences in 'authentic' ways that induce empathy to counter the Duterte 'Rappler is "fake news"' narrative, which is accompanied by populist tropes like 'foreigners' and 'elites'. Managing Editor Glenda Gloria explained: 'Rappler has been criticised by the president. "It's a rich company that's American-owned or whatever." We've got to tell the communities that, "Here is our reporter Patricia Evangelista, who was not born with a golden spoon, who struggled her way through college." We want to reintroduce our reporters as human beings. And Patricia's reporting looks through the lens of ordinary people.'

Collaborative approaches to verification and fact-checking

Another innovative approach to countering disinformation is through a community-based media literacy campaign involving Rappler's journalists, social media producers, and editors. When Rappler's attempt to address incivility and disinformation online via their altruistic #NoPlaceForHate campaign failed, they moved into community and school-based 'social media intelligence' training, which includes instruction in news reporting techniques like verification and fact-checking. Part of the media literacy campaign was empowering people to detect false information at their own level. Sometimes this is taught at 'surface level' through instruction in the use of tools like Google reverse image search, Director of Digital Communications and Civic Engagement Stacy de Jesus said. But at a deeper level, the strategy involves an 'innovation pivot' in community collaboration in pursuit of the journalistic mission of truth.

What we teach mostly is the behaviour of disinformation, to give a bigger picture – it's important for people to know that this is part of a coordinated attack. Only in that sense are we going to encourage people to work together towards the truth. That's really our pivot as a company, our innovation as a company. So now, it's a social media intelligence that empowers people to detect certain propaganda behaviour on their own level.

So Rappler links audience trust to collective investment in the journalistic 'mission' that's tied to the brand and strengthened through community-engaged media literacy development. 'We have an audience now that is more sophisticated. Many in our mass base believe that Rappler is "fake news". Because it's been pounded into them so much. Part of it is being able to reclaim them', Ressa said. In response, Rappler has launched a membership portal called Rappler Plus, which is designed to activate loyal audiences to strengthen the business model as both investors in the brand (financially as well as philosophically) and distributors of their stories. 'The immediate thing is to take our most loyal. Make them more loyal. Make them brand ambassadors. And that's what Rappler Plus is', Ressa said.

Many of these 'loyals' are in fact so invested in Rappler's mission that they donated to a crowdfunding campaign designed to support the legal defence of the organisation and Ressa as the cases and charges against them mounted.¹² This community response to Rappler coming 'under fire' was the inspiration for the development of Rappler Plus, underscoring the outlet's highly innovative approach to dealing with external threats and crises.

¹² Cf. www.rappler.com/crowdfunding

Reporting on gendered online harassment

The decision by Ressa and her management team to respond to prolific, disinformation-fuelled online harassment that made Rappler staff prime targets – both online and offline – through courageous and investigative journalism is also noteworthy as an expression of innovation.

I didn't realise how this new weapon against journalists really worked but it is psychological warfare. It is asymmetric warfare. You don't want to respond to anonymous accounts or trolls and yet the repeated, exponential attacks really do have an impact. It is death by a thousand cuts. It all really erupted when the president named us in the state of the nation address in July 2017. (Maria Ressa)

Their initial defensive strategy involved religiously muting, blocking, deleting, screen-grabbing, and reporting abuse and threats to the platforms and legal authorities. But, according to Rappler management, the platforms frequently told them these attacks didn't violate community standards and the police declined to take action. 'Maybe the way to deal with it is to expose where the attacks are coming from', Stacy de Jesus said. This is their ultimate strategy: publish investigative journalism on the targeting of news organisations and journalists through state-linked disinformation campaigns. This, they decided, was in the public interest because it was designed to chill critical journalism and inhibit the public's right to know. This proactive deployment of reporting and storytelling by Rappler to counter the impacts of disinformation demonstrates the innovative underlying process of responding in an agile and courageous manner to external threats, and the 'unintended consequences' of digital transformation. It is also the strategy pursued by Daily Maverick in South Africa.

Elections ahead: reporting on imminent national polls in the 'disinformation age'

You don't want power to be used to promote advocacy that runs counter to transparency and accountability. (Glenda Gloria)

Elections will be held on 13 May 2019. Rappler will target 'black propaganda' to track how misinformation is spread alongside agenda-setting reporting. It plans to use its data analyses to help official election monitors as a public service. The newsroom 'challenge' is to track real-time campaign spending. Rappler will also be more discerning of tools like Facebook Live, in the absence of mediation.

3. A maverick defence of a young democracy: Daily Maverick, South Africa

In South Africa, Daily Maverick journalists identify as being committed to a form of accountability journalism that defends against disinformation as a service to a democracy with a recent past as a racist totalitarian state. 'My mission has always been quite a simple one because I grew up under apartheid. Freedom is intrinsically and fundamentally important to me. Protecting our democracy is a vital part of my being, what drives me as a journalist,' Associate Editor Ferial Haffajee said. South Africa was woken up to the 'disinformation age' by the Bell Pottinger scandal that directly linked a campaign of state propaganda and social media manipulation to the #GuptaLeaks story of 'state capture' during the dying days of Jacob Zuma's presidency. 'It has shown us that South Africa is not immune from that kind of ... conscious, funded, driven disinformation,' senior political reporter Marianne Merten said. Stoking racism and seeding disunity along racial lines in a country still recovering from apartheid was a notable feature of the Bell Pottinger campaign.

Disinformation-busting and verification as an engaging new beat

I've been an investigative journalist for over 25 years, and living in the 'disinformation age' and trying to do investigations is more difficult than ever before because of how easily disinformation can spread, and because the cyberhate used against us can really push you out of view, and out of the industry. (Daily Maverick Associate Editor, Ferial Haffajee)

Detecting the orchestrated disinformation campaign that caused the collapse of prestigious global PR firm Bell Pottinger (Caesar, 2018) was complicated by the country's apartheid history. According to senior Daily Maverick investigative journalist Marianne Thamm, who broke the story in parallel with #GuptaLeaks, it wasn't until the team dived into the cache of leaked emails implicating disgraced former President Zuma's son that they found proof of a conspiracy of disinformation associated with 'state capture'.

One of the other reasons for a delay in joining-the-dots between Bell Pottinger, the Gupta family, and the Zuma government is the reality that the working life of a South African investigative journalist, in a climate of rampant political corruption and cover-up, is very intense and frequently involves juggling multiple potentially high-impact investigative projects, Thamm said.

You're in the middle of this other trench. On this other flank, not quite sure what the two currents have to do with each other. Because all of this is intricately woven in the end in a bigger project. But there are components of it that you can't quite see.

The Bell Pottinger campaign featured both strategic disinformation dissemination, and targeted attacks on journalists and news organisations reporting critically on Zuma and the Guptas. These attacks were frequently gendered, featuring sexualised abuse and threats of sexual violence designed to both discredit and misdirect journalists. Part of the development of the new disinformation beat at Daily Maverick has involved investigative reporting and storytelling about online harassment of journalists as a feature of disinformation campaigns designed to chill critical journalism. One element of these attacks is the creation of misrepresentation of female journalists as prostitutes, through manipulated images and videos.

Daily Maverick's Associate Editor Ferial Haffajee, who was herself targeted in this manner (Raborife 2017), has responded in part through the development of a reporting specialisation on disinformation-linked online harassment: 'I've turned these experiences into investigations into what trolling armies look like in South Africa, into mapping them, into analysing them with the data scientists.' (Haffajee 2019a). It's a beat that helps reduce the personal 'sting' of the attacks, according to Haffajee. 'It's a new enemy force, it's a form of violence, it's a trend. When you have the time and the support and the money to go study it, it reduces its harm', she said.

Innovative approaches to reporting and storytelling about disinformation

Daily Maverick's Johannesburg-based Managing Editor, Jillian Green described the key lessons she took away from the #GuptaLeaks-Bell Pottinger investigation in terms of the impact on journalistic research and investigation:

The main thing is the reinforcement that everything is not as it seems, particularly where you're dealing with people who have an agenda. And to take that through to all levels of reporting, no matter who it is. Just continuously ask yourself 'What is the agenda at play here?' Open your eyes to the potential that what you're seeing is not the true picture but what someone wants you to see.

Investigative reporter Marianne Thamm's storytelling strategy for waking audiences up to the disinformation campaign involved enabling them to experience something visceral in connection with the impacts of the crisis.

People needed to feel something about what they were reading because... you have an audience of readers who become numbed by the extent and volume of not only disturbing information but having to digest it and work out 'why does it matter?'

This is one of the hallmarks of Thamm's writing: explaining why an issue, event, or detail should matter to a reader in the context of broader political machinations and social development. She described this as: 'Explanatory, challenging, activist, contextual journalism that asks questions and explains why things matter.' So, how did she apply this storytelling strategy to explaining the complexities of the Bell Pottinger story?

I thought 'let me place it where I find it most disturbing and that's the undermining of the government's own sovereignty... Why is Bell Pottinger saying they want to create a 'non-party political narrative' with a 'public face'. It's clearly setting up a massive disinformation campaign.

She also tapped into the audiences' own atavistic tendencies, pointing to Bell Pottinger as a Western influence on the country while they were spinning a narrative that 'white monopoly capital' should be feared. 'This alleged enemy of Africa is actually running the campaign!' Thamm said.

Explanatory journalism that lays out not just what has happened, but what it means and why audiences should be concerned is central to Daily Maverick's storytelling. This both assists with overcoming 'corruption fatigue' and motivates civil society collaboration, according to Marianne Thamm:

You tell South Africans what they've done, but you also show them where this company has managed to gain traction and been able to manipulate. ... Once it had been revealed that they were the hand behind some of the campaign we saw on social media, then civil society

organisations like 'Save South Africa' picked up the issue.. and said: 'For fuck's sake, who are you?'. The anger around foreign interference began to be picked up.

The role of accountability reporting is also 'crucial' and 'fundamental':

That's very much in the tradition of South African journalism and activism – from the 1980s it was exactly the same. So, there's something in our DNA when at specific moments as a country we push back. Then, the global campaign started, charges were laid, and we had to learn in this new democracy how to use the courts to get access to information.

Investigative journalism undertaken by Daily Maverick in collaboration with the non-profit amaBhungane (which means dung beetle in Zulu) Centre for Investigative Journalism¹³ (Schmidt 2018) triggered the commissions of inquiry currently under way in South Africa into 'state capture', which Marianne Thamm said have become popular daily viewing in the country.

We've had to watch judges drill down to get truth in major investigations into corruption and impropriety because – you know, 'Did you lie, or didn't you?' – and that's what I also do in my writing. I say 'if this document isn't classified and it's not really about national security, let's declassify it', you call for it. You ask: 'what is the problem here?' because everyone's obfuscating – blowing smoke, and mirrors, and creating narratives that none of us can understand like who's the good guy and who's the bad guy?

Forensic approaches to interviewing have also been strengthened through interaction with judicial processes targeting Zuma-era corruption and the disinformation campaigns connected with it. Innovative investigative journalism is not all about technology and platforms and network-analysis, basic forensic interviewing is 'the bedrock', Thamm said.

Every epoch has its technology that gets layered and new technology is built on its shoulders but basic journalism is based on people – I love that we can data crunch, and research deeply on the web, but over and above that, the most interesting space to me is the real world where politics really plays out, where people's lives are really affected.

In South Africa, the role of WhatsApp in both orchestrated and organic disinformation campaigns targeting journalists is also cause for concern. Daily Maverick's Managing Editor in Johannesburg, Jillian Green said she had recently observed a pattern of disinformation involving ANC factions – or at least purporting to be attributable to ANC factions – using WhatsApp to distribute messages targeting individual journalists designed to mislead and befuddle. The messages are formatted to sound like media releases from 'official sources sharing official positions'. According to Green, some unwitting journalists re-post these messages within journalists' WhatsApp groups, and they become the basis of published stories by reporters who misidentify the messages as legitimate. 'What the senders are actually doing is trying to create unease within the ANC itself. The language is quite emotive. That's an indicator that this might not be authentic. But people run with it.'

Daily Maverick's defensive strategy against being duped into reporting disinformation as fact involves leveraging the collective knowledge of its very experienced South African political reporters and encouraging open debate within the team as a feature of verification processes. 'When one of those messages comes around, there's an immediate discussion around the veracity of it and the motivation behind it being shared, then you pick up that you're about to be played,' Green said. 'And then you report that fact – the purpose and intent, rather than the content of the message.' So reporting on attempts to misdirect journalists becomes a feature of efforts to

¹³ Motto: 'We shovel dung to fertilise society'. As noted by *The Economist* in 2017: <https://econ.st/2FMZDnz>

counter disinformation at Daily Maverick.

For political reporter Marianne Merten, disinformation is a ‘huge concern, deeply, deeply worrying’. Her response is to go back to scrupulous fact-checking and verification standards: ‘The only way I know as a journalist, as a reporter, to deal with that is to fight back with facts. But it’s all I can do on a regular, daily, mindful level. And not to accept something is so just because somebody says it is.’

Collaborative approaches to verification and fact-checking

The fightback against the #GuptaLeaks-Bell Pottinger disinformation campaign in South Africa ultimately involved collaboration with other journalists, news organisations, civil society groups, and audiences (Fraser 2017), as described by Daily Maverick Senior Investigative Reporter, Marianne Thamm:

South Africans took control of the narrative themselves, not the journalists or Bell Pottinger or anyone else. We had marches, but there was also this pushback against Zuma and state capture which was a physical demonstration of anger and FFS! But it took some time before it all resulted in Zuma stepping down.

In the post-Zuma South Africa, Daily Maverick audiences have begun to collaborate with journalists to surface and debunk misinformation and disinformation and assist with verification. As Thamm observes:

So, people themselves, an army of social media activists, patrol Twitter – they took up this work and then we could get on with doing our work – this became a kind of collaborative attempt at ‘troll-weeding’

Collaborative training

‘2019 is the year of training at Daily Maverick,’ Jillian Green said. This is particularly important in an election year, and one in which eight young trainee journalists have been hired. In the lead up to South Africa’s national elections in May, the outlet is collaborating with the South African National Editors Forum (a collective of editors and journalism academics) to deliver training on ‘rights and skills’ essential to election reporting, including new methods



Photo: Leila Dougan

of verification applied to digital content. Training in this area has also been undertaken with Facebook and other specialists in fact-checking and disinformation defence, like Code for Africa.

Part of this knowledge-sharing approach to countering the impacts of disinformation on Daily Maverick’s journalism involves ensuring that the journalists who attend training feed their learning back to the newsroom – formally and organically. ‘The younger reporters are very open and very digitally savvy. They’re constantly picking up new tools. So, the thing is to spread it all around the newsroom so everyone is aware’, Cape Town Managing Editor Janet Heard said.

Reporting on gendered online harassment

In the midst of the #GuptaLeaks scandal, journalists – in particular female journalists – were targeted through disinformation-fuelled online harassment which led to threats of violence. One of the common attacks involved the accusation that critical journalists were ‘StratCom journalists’. This pejorative label, which comes with the risk of physical attack and other real-life consequences in contemporary South Africa, harks back to the apartheid-era when the government’s Strategic Communications division recruited sympathetic journalists to do their bidding. Marianne Thamm explained the the impacts:

... it became very ugly and so we rallied around the journalists who were falsely accused – we know who those ‘stratcom’ journalists were! This is exactly what the security branch did with ANC operatives that they so-called ‘turned’ – you place people in a moral no-man’s land, nobody trusts you anymore, nobody believes you anymore and they’ve fabricated that world around you. A lot of these journalists had to fight for themselves and their colleagues fought for them and then eventually people were vindicated. This became a component of the story.

The populist South African political party, the Economic Freedom Front (EFF), sought to discredit journalists through spreading disinformation designed to undermine trust in them, having learned from the Bell Pottinger deception, according to Green. ‘The reaction wasn’t based on the content of the articles but rather on the individual and was very targeted to personal attacks’, Green said. The attacks were both gendered and racially charged.

Pauli Van Wyk is one of Daily Maverick’s leading investigative reporters, attached to the outlet’s ‘Scorpio’ investigations team. She led coverage of #GuptaLeaks with Daily Maverick’s Editor-in-Chief Branko Brkic, and she has since broken major corruption stories involving the EFF, making her the target of some of the worst gendered online harassment endured by South African journalists. In addition to targeting her for sexist trolling, the disinformation campaign allegedly orchestrated by the EFF also attacked her in connection with her Afrikaner heritage, and called her a ‘stratcom journalist’. Jillian Green explained: ‘Whenever the EFF is critiqued, then they target that particular journalist – especially the women.’ These attacks have resulted in credible threats of violence and some targeted journalists losing their jobs (Petersen 2018).

One of the defensive strategies deployed is a manifestation of journalism activism using the courts to demand redress. As a result, Daily Maverick has collaborated with the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) to lodge a case against the EFF and its leader Julius Malema in the national Equality Court in reference to the orchestrated campaign of harassment against female journalists. In turn, this action has been the subject of reports (Haffajee 2019b) and editorials (Brkic 2018) seeking to explain the reasons for the action. The case was proceeding at the time of writing.

Ultimately, the disinformation-driven attacks on Daily Maverick’s journalists have served to strengthen the resolve of journalists to dig deeper into those issues, while being aware of some of the pitfalls, according to Jillian Green.

And we, as managers, while those stories are being pursued, we’re now a bit more aware of the potential ramifications of asking the relevant questions and trying to speak to the reporters as they pursue the story. we just constantly remind reporters that what we do is going to upset people; that they will say horrible and nasty things to you, but you are highlighting truth.

Staying alert to the risks of burnout and ‘shiny things’

It is not surprising, in the context of dramatic political upheaval, external threats, and ongoing challenges of economic sustainability facing a 10-year-old digital-born public interest journalism outlet, that the risk of burnout among staff is a concern at Daily Maverick. This was an issue associated with the impacts of perpetual ‘pivoting’ in pursuit of innovative solutions for journalism highlighted by experts who participated in early research for this project (Posetti 2018). Daily Maverick’s Cape Town Managing Editor, Janet Heard related to this:

It worries me sometimes we [are] going too fast, and growing too fast. I think ‘No, no, no, this is ridiculous. We can’t produce so much content in one day with so few people.’ It’s easy to get caught up in this frenzy. We’re trying to do things differently. It’s very impulsive, very spontaneous. So, you’ve got to have someone pulling back and saying ‘hey’ – you do need to sometimes pause.

Heard said that she and her Johannesburg counterpart Jillian Green try to provide a foil for the overdrive with checks and balances on impacts. ‘The other thing is just too many ‘bright shiny things’. You know you can get distracted. So, I think we do have to be very careful that we stay focused but Daily Maverick is growing and as long as we keep the cool, then it’ll be fine.’

Elections ahead: reporting on imminent national polls in the ‘disinformation age’

This election should really be driven by the voter and their concerns about South Africa – the position the country’s in and the problems it faces. (Jillian Green)

Elections will be held on 8 May 2019 in South Africa. Daily Maverick’s election Coverage will be shaped according to a ‘citizen’s agenda’, with an emphasis on being embedded in communities, as a partial defence against disinformation. This strategy is based on the belief that proximity and empathy help build trust and credibility in public interest journalism which should serve as a bulwark against disinformation.

(Gillmor 2004). Deep dives into community-identified issues like violence against women, employment, housing, and sex workers’ rights will sit alongside ‘sanity checks’ on candidate manifestos, led by Senior Reporter Rebecca Davis. Open editorial debate and ethics are crucial, she said: ‘We had a big debate about the amount of airtime we should be giving to fringe political movements ... And it’s not an easy discussion. A lot of other media outlets will publish that stuff unthinkingly for clicks and it does get you clicks. We ... do grapple with issues of ethics and representation in a much more thoughtful way than elsewhere.’



Photo: Leila Dougan

Additionally, journalists are training with the South African National Editors Forum on ‘rights and skills’ essential to election reporting, including new methods of verification for digital content.

4. Navigating a 'post-truth' world: The Quint, India

In India, populist Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP party have been associated with disinformation campaigns targeting news organisations and journalists critical of Hindu nationalism. But this has served to strengthen The Quint's commitment to combating organic and orchestrated disinformation campaigns as an expression of a democratic mission to provide audiences with accurate, reliable information. This is what Editor-in-Chief Raghav Bahl described as a 'public service journalism' approach. Executive Editor Rohit Khanna said 'Irrespective of what kind of pressure may be coming, we are going to put out fact-driven, data-driven, document-driven stories as often as we can'.



The Quint's journalists see themselves as truth tellers, fact-checkers, myth-busters and disinformation combatants, in contrast to the onslaught of disinformation in India's digital communities (Goel and Frenkel 2019). While acknowledging low levels of trust in news media, in part caused by concerns about misinformation (Aneez et al. 2019), they expressed a belief that The Quint was seeking to address a void. 'Many people don't trust mainstream media. That is when they come back to us. We're filling that gap,' WebQoof editor Malavika Balasubramanian said. But there is a deeper disinformation challenge being taken up by The Quint in the service of a democratically-connected journalism mission, described by Senior News Editor Jaskirat Singh Bawa as India's 'biggest challenge'. It's the reality that many people don't want to believe the truth:

Unfortunately, we are in a post-truth world. A substantial number of people are not comfortable enough to know what the facts are. They just want the narrative to be based on what they already believe in. That's been a very tough issue to counter. Do you take them head on? Do you tell them, 'No, you're wrong.'? Or do you try and involve them in a dialogue, and try and make it more participative, and try to explain how damaging that can be to the social fabric, to the welfare of society in general?

Disinformation-busting and verification as an engaging new beat

India's disinformation problem stems in part from stories peddled by certain outlets that are completely made up for political or commercial reasons, to try to discredit rivals or make money from clickbait (Nielsen 2019). The second reason is social media and digital platforms, where disinformation is shared in good and bad faith (Agrawal, 2018). While many outlets either rely on external, independent fact-checkers or have stories fact-checked on a case-to-case basis by different in-house desks, The Quint has found a new way to innovate when faced with the wave of disinformation: WebQoof, a project solely dedicated to disinformation-busting, fuelled by readers' submissions.

According to The Quint's CEO Ritu Kapur, WebQoof was partially born out of a personal realisation of how much disinformation was swirling around online. And while there was initial disagreement

within the outlet whether more oxygen should be given to something that is not correct by covering it, Kapur ultimately decided that countering these stories should be part of The Quint's mission: 'It's important to say that the story is not correct. Won't it make a difference if at least 10,000 people, 20,000 people realise that the story is not true?', she asked.

Jaskirat Singh Bawa, Senior News Editor at The Quint, also stresses the importance of a changed media environment for the decision to take action against disinformation, noting the potential for virality.

The traditional media response to such stories was, 'It's fake, so why do we have to touch it?' ... With online media, we have come to realise that we have to report it because it's fake.

The Quint's position as a younger media start-up made it possible to quickly and effectively become active in this field: 'Not having strict roles and strict rules, or siloes, allowed us to get into that space very quickly, and make an impact.'

WebQoof started as a collaboration with established, niche fact-checkers as part of a content sharing agreement between both sides. After additional editorial checks and balances The Quint would republish content from these independent fact-checkers. According to Bawa, the collaboration also involved an implicit training component. The Quint staff learned skills – for example, digital forensics – that would later be useful in fully establishing WebQoof as an independent beat.

As such, WebQoof began as a single-person desk with rotating staff. As current WebQoof editor, Malavika Balasubramanian, explained, in the beginning it was:

... more of a freewheeling desk where for two weeks, each of us from the news desk would take charge of WebQoof and put out anti-'fake news', like bust 'fake new' stories dedicatedly.

Kapur and her team quickly decided to establish a permanent team dedicated to identifying and debunking stories that they came across, or which had reached them from readers and supporters. The rotating shifts were maintained to ensure cross-pollination of knowledge and skills across The Quint's operation, preventing the formation of knowledge silos.

With 12 to 15 stories published a week, WebQoof's work extends to breaking news fact-checking. The Quint's fact-checking remains deliberately broad to reach as many readers as possible and cover as many topics as feasible (such as health, the environment, and housing), because disinformation is not limited to political issues. In this way, The Quint also hopes to reach people across the political spectrum.

The response to WebQoof seems to have been positive, echoing the audience appreciation for Daily Maverick's efforts to counter disinformation in South Africa. As CEO Ritu Kapur observes:

The tone of the people who are writing to us is one of desperation and thankfulness. It's a 'Thank you for doing this.' So there is an appreciation.

There are also positive knock-on effects from WebQoof's fact-checking efforts – every correction triggers a wave of new, unsolicited submissions. The Quint's work on this front also occasionally makes it into the mainstream press, with benefits Balasubramanian acknowledged.

It's healthy competition in the sense that you're trying to debunk something that is wider and fake, and you're trying to see who was doing it first ... when multiple organisations do it, then their audiences get fed with the fact-checks.

According to Raghav Bahl, WebQoof has acquired a character and brand that reflects positively on the whole outlet, slowly transforming The Quint's identity to one built on credibility and trust, rather than just on insightful and entertaining journalism. It all connects to The Quint's hope of building trust and audience investment in their 'mission' through credible reporting. This will be critical if they advance their plans to introduce a membership pillar to their business model.

Innovative approaches to reporting and storytelling about disinformation

Setting up WebQoof was not the only innovation to throw at the Indian disinformation crisis, according to several members of staff. The approaches in reporting and storytelling had to change, too.

One lesson was not to react too quickly to something that was trending on social media, as Raghav Bahl explained:

The amount of disinformation or slanted information or planted information is epic on social media. ... If it's trending, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's a genuine trend. It can be boosted. It can be fixed, it can be planted.

And the lessons The Quint has learned in this context, he said, are clear: 'When something breaks, let's not be fastest fingers first ... Let's figure out whether this is correct news. So we've become much more circumspect about doing that.'

The Quint's defensive strategy against being duped into reporting too quickly on artificial trends and disinformation also involves recourse to traditional methods of 'good journalism', supplemented by the use of new tools and technology. This process reflects a definition of journalism innovation that recognises the importance of integrating new ways of doing things with foundational practices and core values (Posetti 2018).

Another problem that required an adaptation of The Quint's reporting behaviour were the numerous attempts to deceive their journalists with misinformation. Poonam Agarwal, Associate Editor for Investigations, said that attempts to feed journalists false information happen frequently, with people sending false documents or data. For this reason, she said: 'I crosscheck everything. I cannot take it at face value. It's a big, big problem.'

The outlet has taken an innovative approach to packaging stories in order to maximise engagement. They add the unique WebQoof stamp to inform readers that this is a post which WebQoof has established as fake. The outlet has even coined its own verb for this process of debunking and publishing: 'WebQoofing'. The WebQoof stamp combined with the term 'fact-check' at the beginning of the headline helps in disseminating fact-check articles, often resulting in higher engagement with the story. This 'fighting fire with fire' strategy is justified when it comes to debunking information, said Bawa:

We really, really want people to know what the truth is. So, it's okay to do click-baiting with regards to those kind of messages ... We try and make the headlines very straightforward. No wordplay or

anything ... We call it 'fake news' in the headline itself. We understand that that is going to cause certain people not to click on the story, but that's okay.

There is also a delicate balance when calling out dis- and misinformation for what it is and winning people over to believe the fact-check rather than the original (fake) story. The Quint had to develop new strategies to deal with this. Bawa: 'All the stories that were being done in the initial days of fact-checking journalism in India, a lot of the messages were kind of negative.' The Quint changed editorial practices to avoid fatiguing readers with fact-checks. This included avoiding condescendingly toned storytelling.

No less important in this context, according to Tushar Banerjee, Head of Product and Growth at The Quint, has been to write in approachable language which people will find appealing, without dumbing down the content.

We are putting out credible content in a different way. Our language is cheeky. We are writing in approachable language which our millennial audiences understand. And that language resonates. Viral news websites like BuzzFeed have all normalised a certain lingo which the millennial audience understands. Now, if you use the same lingo and produce credible news content, it can really do well.

Finally, a key lesson according to The Quint's team is to avoid appearing partisan, which can lead to 'fact-checks' being rejected outright. One way to achieve this, Bawa said, is to be apolitical and to keep track of all political actors.

While The Quint publishes fact-checking and debunking stories as more traditional, text-based stories, many of their storytelling efforts around disinformation have also involved videos, memes, and multimedia material designed to engage millennial audiences. For example, after the terrorist attack in Pulwama¹⁴ when disinformation was widespread (Nielsen 2019), The Quint debunked around 15 stories, which they then compiled into one video featuring easily discernible false/true graphics. This was well-received by audiences, according to WebQoof editor Malavika Balasubramanian. She further notes that such myth-busting videos have in the past gone viral and contributed to WebQoof's reputation and brand recognition.

Another example of the use of video in storytelling about disinformation involves stories about the kidnapping of children which surfaced around India without discernible language or geographic connection. The Quint pulled together people from its various bureaus, and created 'awareness videos' in six to eight different regional languages. Since English is still the language of the educated middle class and elite, this was a good way to make an impact beyond this circle, according to Bawa.

Yet, at The Quint videos are employed to make the outlet's method of working comprehensible and transparent for audiences, a strategy that harks back to the outlet's mission of building a brand identity based on trust and credibility. 'Often when there's a lot of criticism coming our way we actually sit together and we do a piece on how we did the reporting,' said Senior News Editor Bawa.

Another example of innovative video content to engage The Quint's millennial audiences while educating them about myths, stereotypes, and disinformation is a series of innovative immersive

¹⁴ On 14 Feb. 2019, a convoy of vehicles carrying Indian security personnel on the Jammu Srinagar National Highway was attacked by a vehicle-borne suicide bomber at Lethpora in the Pulwama district, Jammu and Kashmir, India. The attack resulted in the deaths of 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel and the attacker.

videos which The Quint produces in order to tackle xenophobia. In one of them, part of The Quint's 360 degree video series called 'Spaces', viewers get to see for themselves how narrow the spaces are in a Rohingya camp in India. An additional 'gamified' component involves the audience deciding which of their possessions they would be willing to sacrifice.

Crowded, Hot & Sparse: a 360 View of Life in Rohingya Refugee Camp



(<https://www.thequint.com/videos/360-vr>). Still from a video edited by Mohd Irshad Alam, The Quint

Collaborative approaches to verification and fact-checking

The Quint has taken a proactive approach to the role of audiences in combating disinformation. Instead of merely relying on sharing its stories via the usual channels – the website and social media – they also engage in 'direct combat' where necessary. For example, if The Quint comes across particularly powerful instances of political dis- or misinformation on someone's social media, especially if the person sharing it has a wide reach, The Quint will sometimes 'march into their space' in order to protect other 'innocent bystanders' Jaskirat Singh Bawa said. 'We will comment under their Twitter posts, or Facebook post with something like "Hi. We fact-checked this for you".'

One of the reasons that disinformation spreads so easily in India is the prevalence of WhatsApp as a means of communicating (Agrawal 2018, Aneez et al. 2019). In addition to myriad benign applications, the messaging service has been harnessed for spreading disinformation and propaganda. Unlike on Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, communication on WhatsApp takes place in closed, end-to-end encrypted groups which makes it difficult for journalists and researchers to discover instances of disinformation going viral.

As a solution to this problem, and in keeping with its mission, The Quint has turned to its audience to ask for help. Bawa explained:

There's no transparency. So the only way out was activism. Citizen journalism, activism, perhaps in your own family group. Let's say if your uncle, your aunt, your grandparents, or somebody else is

sharing some information which you think is not authentic, then they cut that out and send it to us for fact-checking.

In pursuit of myth-busting, The Quint initially turned to its existing network of contributors and supporters which it had established via their citizen journalism initiative 'MyReport', where citizens report on issues which directly affect them. 'We put out one Call to Action and we were inundated', Kapur recalled. She estimates that about 50% of the material they check comes from the audience.

The volume of tip-offs they receive is so great that The Quint only puts out a Call to Action about once a month: 'It can be a little overwhelming, because there's such a lot of "fake news" going on over there. So, it does take a lot of human hours to sift through the posts that are shared with us. ... Sometimes we have to prioritise', Bawa said.¹⁵

The WebQoof community now consists of 700 to 800 people, organised through email and WhatsApp, with the members' information stored in a database to allow for later contact and curation. This community's eyes and ears are specifically targeting disinformation and they're seen as an early warning system for The Quint, WebQoof's editor Balasubramanian said.

They forward whatever they get on their private groups to us, for us to cross-verify and check. That is why we believe that we have access to something that could have the potential to go viral, even before it can reach that stage, translate onto Facebook, or Twitter, or open groups like that.

The Quint's team stresses that community-building is a key strategic element of their fact-checking efforts. Links to community members are actively fostered to increase efficiency in future. One aspect of this is that editors will always get back to someone who has flagged a suspicious story or trend and inform them about the result of The Quint's investigation and share the piece with them. 'That is how we build the audience engagement there. So, because we get back to them, they get back to us again with another piece of information', Balasubramanian said. The WebQoof community is then actively encouraged to share the fact-checked stories back into their own WhatsApp communities, according to Bawa: 'One of the main lessons that we've learned [is that] Facebook and Twitter can be moderated, but WhatsApp can't, which is where we need the active participation of our readers.'

Apart from educating readers and community members about the 'greater good' of fact-checking, it's equally important for the fact-checkers to identify community members who have proved to be particularly reliable in the past, Balasubramanian said: 'So, when we see something fake on Twitter, we check the comments because there are also these good Samaritans. ... They act as good kickers for us to dig further.'

While these sources of 'disinformation-watching' are not yet organised in a specific sub-file where they can be more easily recognised, editors and journalists are aware of who has been particularly active and they will receive preferential treatment insofar as their emails and messages will be dealt with more urgently than those of others.

When it comes to fact-checking and verification processes, cooperation and collaboration, again, play a key role. The Quint loosely cooperates with other fact-checkers, experts, and academics, especially if they hit a roadblock in a case. The outlet has also been able to take advantage of its bureaus and stringers around India to verify and debunk stories. This resource-intensive tactic of dispatching its own journalists to check hoaxes in-person whenever possible has demonstrated

¹⁵ A month later The Quint had changed this practice, in the lead up to the election, putting out a CTA with every story.

merit. For example, a reporter from The Quint visited a Hindu temple near Kathua in April 2018, where an 8-year-old Muslim girl had been brutally gang-raped and murdered a few weeks before the visit, in order to debunk claims that cast doubt on the events.¹⁶ 'If necessary, we do deploy reporters on the ground, to help our fact-checking team, to make sure that the information we're getting is first-hand and authentic', Bawa said.

Reporting and gendered online harassment

Gendered online harassment of journalists in India has become a major journalism safety concern. It frequently involves the targeting of female journalists using disinformation tactics including 'deep fakes' (Harwell, 2018). The Quint's reporters regularly face a lot of online harassment in their day-to-day work, especially in response to fact-checking and disinformation stories. One source is Hindu nationalist supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who accuse journalists of being anti-nationalist. However, there are also instances where the Modi-supporting nationalistic press goes against The Quint and its reporters.

Elections ahead: reporting on imminent national polls in the 'disinformation age'

Everyone and their uncles have an opinion, and they do not need to pay to put it out there. You're just a Facebook status or a tweet away from reaching out to people you may not even know personally. 2019 elections are critical and crucial for us – we have a whole team set up for busting election-related 'fake news' stories. (Sohini Guharoy, Head of Audience Growth and Social Media)

Elections will be held between 11 April and 23 May. Journalists are used to covering several elections a year. The Quint uses WhatsApp – where misinformation is most widespread locally – to get reader tip-offs, so much so that there has been an increase in fact-checked stories. Inbuilt tools track social media as well as 'social media sentiment', and the WebQoof fact-checking team has been expanded.

¹⁶ The Quint. 2018. 'Kathua Rape Horror', 20 Apr., www.thequint.com/big-story/kathua-rape-murder

5. Lessons in journalism innovation from the Global South

One of the key objectives of research underpinning the Journalism Innovation Project is to support the development of a set of Journalism Innovation Indicators that can serve as markers for news organisations seeking to build frameworks to support sustainable innovation.

To that end, we have identified and extracted nine key learnings from how Rappler in the Philippines, Daily Maverick in South Africa, and The Quint in India are responding to disinformation by developing new and innovative reporting and storytelling techniques when faced with the ‘unintended consequences’ of digital transformation and external pressures and threats.

All of the case organisations are committed to continuous change, in terms of their journalism, their organisation, and their distribution strategies, including how they report on disinformation. They are conscious that as the challenges continue to evolve, they will have to continue to develop. Part of this is about audience behaviour and technology – ‘We are still wrapping our heads around how to bust [“fake news”] on Instagram and TikTok’, said Jaskirat Singh Bawa from The Quint – and part of it is about how information operations and propaganda techniques constantly change.

The lessons identified here help understand how they will drive that process of continuous change.

They draw from the specific experience of digital-born, commercial, mobile-focused, and audience-led news media operating in the Global South in often very difficult circumstances and with limited resources. The lessons reflect a specific set of (unfortunately globally widespread) challenges, and are accompanied by a firm conviction among our interviewees that, in their contexts, ignoring media freedom threats and attacks on journalists is not an option if audiences are to understand the broader implications for democracy.

The cases of Rappler, the Daily Maverick, and The Quint demonstrate how a combination of a clear sense of mission and a commitment to core journalistic values can go hand in hand with the constant development of new reporting and storytelling techniques, powered by the use of new tools and technologies and accompanied by new commercial opportunities.

These lessons are potentially instructive for all news organisations – no matter where they’re located, or what political and media systems they operate within – as journalism seeks to survive convergent and shared challenges.

1. A CLEAR MISSION HELPS FOCUS INNOVATION

A clear mission creates a climate in which journalists can adapt more quickly and independently to new circumstances, and where innovation can focus on initiatives that might support the mission. As Rappler’s Maria Ressa explained: ‘We kept doing the things we, as journalists, obsessed about. Follow what you’re passionate about; for everyone you hire, they better know what they’re passionate about.’

2. MISSION-DRIVEN JOURNALISM MAY DIVIDE AUDIENCES, BUT IS NOT THE SAME AS PARTISANSHIP

Daily Maverick senior investigative reporter, Marianne Thamm described how she balances democratic advocacy and human rights activism with fair, independent reporting: ‘I think

people know when a story has an agenda – propaganda is visible for miles off. I don't write from a particular political perspective. My view of South Africa being able to reach its potential with what we have is what people enjoy reading. And also, I ask questions – what does this mean if this happened and that happened?'

3. ABILITY TO 'PIVOT' IN RESPONSE TO A CRISIS IS AN INNOVATION MARKER

The capacity to respond at speed, with determination and resilience, to threats is an innovation marker common to the three outlets studied here. In the context of addressing the disinformation crisis, Rappler's Stacy de Jesus described this as an innovation 'pivot' to empower audiences to work with journalists in pursuit of the truth.

4. AUDIENCES CAN BE PART OF JOURNALISM INNOVATION

In all three cases, a willingness to both listen to, and respond to, the 'citizens' agenda' (Rosen 2018), and investing in community-based reporting, are being prioritised as a pillar of a strategic defence against disinformation. The Quint sees their readers as eyes and ears, specifically targeting disinformation and some sort of an early warning system. Community-building is a key strategic element of their fact-checking efforts. At Rappler, audiences are supporters – financially and vocally – of the company and its staff in their legal fights with the Duterte government. These people are the solid base of the new Rappler Plus membership.

5. REPORTING CAN FUEL ORGANISATIONAL INNOVATION

Daily Maverick's Ferial Haffajee turned her experience of being brutally trolled online into a new reporting specialisation: 'It's a new enemy force, it's a form of violence, it's a trend. When you have the time and the support and the money to go study it, it takes away its harm.' This is also the approach behind Rappler's 'shark tank' and The Quint's WebQoof where lessons learned from covering disinformation (and from audience development and community engagement for the social media age, e.g. network mapping) are used to power new forms of reporting and storytelling.

6. INNOVATION REQUIRES INVESTMENT IN NEW SKILLS, TOOLS, TECHNIQUES, AND TRAINING (NO MATTER HOW LIMITED RESOURCES ARE)

The three media organisations have, despite their limited resources, invested in developing expertise in advanced fact-checking, digital verification techniques, big data journalism, and network analysis to combat disinformation in the digital age.

7. INNOVATION CAN BE BASED ON CORE VALUES BUT ALSO REQUIRE CONSTANT RE-EXAMINATION OF WHETHER A MORE FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IS NECESSARY

As fact-checking moves into real-time, with the increased input of community or its own editorial branding, Rappler's Managing Editor, Glenda Gloria said: 'We will be and are more aggressive now in fact-checking. Put your traditional mindset behind you and understand that an unanswered lie becomes the truth.'

8. INNOVATIONS NEED TO BE SHARED ACROSS THE WHOLE NEWS ORGANISATION TO AVOID SILOING

As Daily Maverick's Janet Heard outlined, training, learning, and knowledge transfer are critical to ensuring fast-growing newsrooms have capacity to deal with new challenges like disinformation. This can involve reverse mentoring, with digitally savvy younger hires helping to transfer tech skills (as happens at all three outlets) while senior journalists ensure core journalistic skills and values are drilled into all staff. The same is true for The Quint where permanent rotation at the fact-checking desk of WebQoof ensures that knowledge spreads throughout the organisation.

9. WITH A CLEAR MISSION, IT IS POSSIBLE TO DO IMPORTANT, INNOVATIVE JOURNALISM FOR A LARGE AUDIENCE EVEN WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

The 'ingenuity of necessity' approach to innovation in the Global South newsrooms studied is instructive internationally, particularly in the case of combating disinformation as a threat to journalism, but also in underlining how it is possible, with a clear mission, to do important, innovative journalism for a large audience even where resources are scarce and the external pressures severe.

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Appendix: List of interviewees

All designations were correct at the time of participation

Rappler, The Philippines	
Gemma Bagayau-Mendoza	Head of Research and Strategy
Marga Deona	Platform Strategist
Patricia Evangelista	Investigative Journalist
Lilibeth Frondoso	Head of Video
Glenda Gloria	Managing Editor
Miriam Grace Go	News Editor
Chay Hofileña	Investigations Editor
Stacy de Jesus	Head of Digital Communications
Nam Le	Director of Technology
Pia Ranada	Political Reporter
Maria Ressa	Founder, CEO, and Executive Editor
Carla Yap-Sy Su	Head of Strategy and Connections
Daily Maverick, South Africa	
Francesca Beighton	Communities Manager
Branko Brkic	Co-founder and Editor-in-Chief
Styli Charalambous	Co-founder, Publisher, and CEO
Rebecca Davis	Senior Reporter
Leila Dougan	Multimedia Journalist
Jillian Green	Johannesburg Managing Editor
Ferial Haffajee	Associate Editor
Janet Heard	Cape Town Managing Editor
Nkateko Mabasa	Junior Reporter
Marianne Merten	Senior Political Reporter
Ayanda Mthethwa	Trainee Journalist
Greg Nicholson	Reporter
Chanel Retief	Trainee Journalist
Yanga Sibembe	Trainee Journalist
Bheki C. Simelane	Junior Reporter
John Stupart	Newsletter Editor
Marianne Thamm	Senior Investigative Journalist
Lelethu Tonisi	Trainee Journalist
Pauli van Wyk	Senior Investigative Journalist
The Quint, India	
Poonam Agarwal	Associate Editor for Investigations
Raghav Bahl	Co-founder and Editor-in-Chief
Malavika Balasubramanian	Editor, WebQoof
Urmi Bhattacheryya	Gender Editor
Amrita Ghandi	Editor, Neon
Sunil Goswami	Head, News Video
Sohini Guharoy	Head of Audience Growth and Social Media
Namita Handa	Associate Editor
Ritu Kapur	Co-founder and CEO
Aaqib Raza Khan	Associate Editor, Innovation
Rohit Khanna	Executive Editor
Maanvi	Senior Correspondent
Jaskirat Singh Bawa	Senior News Editor
Shelly Walia	Senior News Editor

Selected RISJ Publications

BOOKS

NGOs as Newsmakers: The Changing Landscape of International News

Matthew Powers (published with Columbia University Press)

Global Teamwork: The Rise of Collaboration in Investigative Journalism

Richard Sambrook (ed)

Something Old, Something New: Digital Media and the Coverage of Climate Change

James Painter et al

Journalism in an Age of Terror

John Lloyd (published with I.B.Tauris)

The Right to Be Forgotten: Privacy and the Media in the Digital Age

George Brock (published with I.B.Tauris)

The Kidnapping of Journalists: Reporting from High-Risk Conflict Zones

Robert G. Picard and Hannah Storm (published with I.B.Tauris)

Innovators in Digital News

Lucy Kueng (published with I.B.Tauris)

Local Journalism: The Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (ed) (published with I.B.Tauris)

Journalism and PR: News Media and Public Relations in the Digital Age

John Lloyd and Laura Toogood (published with I.B.Tauris)

Reporting the EU: News, Media and the European Institutions

John Lloyd and Cristina Marconi (published with I.B.Tauris)

SELECTED RISJ REPORTS AND FACTSHEETS

India Digital News Report

Zeenab Aneez, Taberez Ahmed Neyazi, Antonis Kalogeropoulos, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

What Do News Readers Really Want To Read About? How Relevance Works For News Audiences

Kim Christian Schrøder

More Important, But Less Robust? Five Things Everybody Needs to Know about the Future of Journalism

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Meera Selva

GLASNOST! Nine ways Facebook can make itself a better forum for free speech and democracy

Timothy Garton Ash, Robert Gorwa, and Danaë Metaxa

Time to Step Away From the 'Bright, Shiny Things'? Towards A Sustainable Model of Journalism Innovation in an Era of Perpetual Change

Julie Posetti

Interested but not Engaged: How Europe's Media Cover Brexit

Alexandra Borchardt, Felix M. Simon, and Diego Bironzo

Gauging the Global Impacts of the 'Panama Papers' Three Years Later

Lucas Graves and Nabeelah Shabbir (Factsheet)

An Industry-Led Debate: How UK Media Cover Artificial Intelligence

J. Scott Brennen, Philip N. Howard, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Factsheet)

'News You Don't Believe': Audience Perspectives on 'Fake News'

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Lucas Graves (Factsheet)

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