



# Policy and Regulation in Broadcasting

8 May 2020



## The Challenge of 'Fake News' in the Time of Covid-19



Charley Lewis (PhD, M Comm)





# What is 'Fake News'? And why is it a problem?

**YOU'RE FAKE NEWS AND YOU'RE FAKE NEWS**

**Everyone has the right to their own opinions**

**No-one has the right to their own facts  
Or their own science**

**EVERYBODY IS FAKE NEWS**





# Fake News... In history

- 1835 – New York Sun runs 6 articles claiming that life has been discovered on the moon
- 1917 – British fabricate propaganda about German corpse factory used to make fats, bone meal & pig food
- 1938 – Orson Welles 'War of the Worlds' radio drama
- 2015 - Egyptian TV anchor uses video-game footage as evidence of Russian action in Syria
- 2016 – Russia deploys “paid social media users or ‘trolls’” to influence US presidential election (which Trump won)
- 2017 - Bell Pottinger paid by the Guptas to spread false news & propaganda (#jacobzuma, #wmc, #bankrupt)
- 2018 – ‘Deepfake’ videos targeting independent investigative journalist Rana Ayyub spread in India





# What is 'Fake News'?

- Contentious term, pejorative, often misused



- **Misinformation** - false or inaccurate information
- **Disinformation** - false or misleading information, deliberately spread, with intention to deceive
- **Hoax** - falsehood deliberately fabricated to masquerade as the truth
- **'Fake News'** - deliberate disinformation or hoax spread via news channels or social media
- We also have: errors in observation or judgment, rumours, urban legends, satire (eg The Onion), clickbait stories, April Fool's jokes







# Some types of 'Fake News'

- Many overlapping types and categories
  - Hoaxes (Wuhan lab source, Trump)
  - Scams (KenolKobil, Covid Organics)
  - Cyber-manipulation (Cambridge Analytica, US lab, face-mask sales campaign)
  - Manipulated or out-of-context or repurposed or 'deepfake' images & videos
  - Pseudo-science (5G, chloroquine)
  - Conspiracy theories
  - False statistics
  - Medical misinformation
  - Government misinformation
  - Also: 419 scams, phishing emails, malware





# Categories of 'Fake News'

- Distinguished by:
  - Intention: from rumour-mongering to malicious intent (eg Boris Johnson tweet, contaminated test kits)
  - Author: government, commercial, user-generated social media content
  - Channel: Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, SMS, e-mail
  - Impact: ephemeral & minor vs major damage (eg Iran)





# The Covid-19 Disinfodemic

## Categories of disinformation around Covid-19

1. Origins and spread of the coronavirus disease
2. False and misleading statistics
3. False economic & health impact claims
4. Discrediting journalists & credible news outlets
5. False medical science: symptoms, diagnosis & treatment
6. Impacts on society and the environment
7. Politicisation
8. Content driven by fraudulent financial gain
9. Celebrity-focused disinformation





# Why do we fall prey to 'fake news'?

Monday, December 12, 2016

WAR ON CHRISTMAS: OBAMA ORDERS BAN ON CHRISTMAS CARDS TO MILITARY

- The stories look real!
  - abcnews.com.co
  - buzzfeedusa.com
  - morningnewsusa.com
- Psychological factors
  - Faith in intuition (Pennycook & Rand, 2017)
  - Dissatisfaction with status quo
- Motivated cognition
  - Confirmation bias
  - Desire for "tantalizing" and emotionally-charged stories (Chandra, 2017)
- Political position







# Responding to 'fake news': Principles

- Preserve constitutionality & protection of human rights
  - Freedom of expression, access to information
- Adhere to applicable laws
  - Computer Misuse & Cybercrimes Act
- General principles
  - Protect Internet intermediaries, follow due process
- Consider African Union Declarations
  - AU African Charter on Human & Peoples' Rights (1981)
  - African Declaration on Internet Rights & Freedoms (2016)



African Union





# Responses: ex ante vs ex post

- Shut down the Internet (cost = \$2 bn 2019)
- Criminalise 'fake news' (Rwanda, Singapore - and Kenya)
- Issue take-down & delete notices
- Censor the Internet (eg FPB in SA)
- Co-regulatory codes of conduct (eg Facebook, WhatsApp)
- AI algorithms based on content, sharing patterns, etc
- Fact-checking websites - <https://pesacheck.org/>  
<https://africacheck.org/> <http://www.snopes.com>  
[www.hoax-slayer.com](http://www.hoax-slayer.com)
- Promote confidence in the authorities – be proactive, transparent, accurate - get your news out there first
- Protect public service media
- Counter-propaganda
- Digital skills development

**PESA**   
**CHECK**



**AFRALTI**



# World Press Freedom Index

The Press Freedom Index is composed of a number of indicators, including:



## Pluralism

Measures the degree to which opinions are represented in the media.



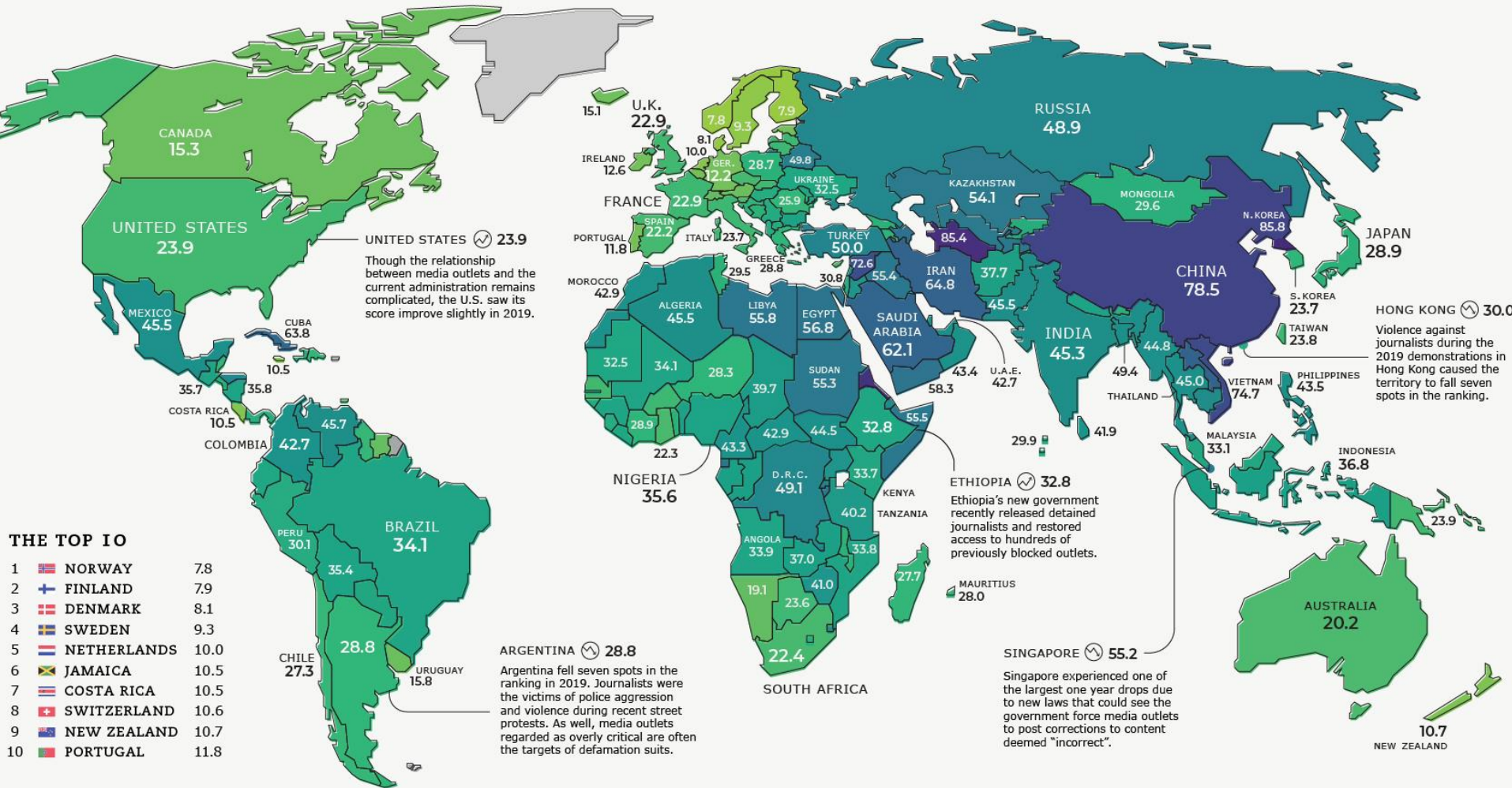
## Abuses

Measures the level of abuses and violence.



## Independence

The degree to which the media is able to function independently of sources of political, governmental, business and religious power and influence.



## WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX SCORE

← Less restrictive → More restrictive →



SOURCE: Global Press Freedom Index, 2020







# Enforcement Problems

- Sheer volume of posts
- Legal definition for 'fake news'
- Vague or over-broad formulations
- Draconian laws
- Use of 'fake news' laws to suppress political opponents
- Impact of fake news on consumer trust in media & authorities







# This is what you're up against!

## 2020 *This Is What Happens In An Internet Minute*



Created By:  
@LoriLewis  
@OfficiallyChadd





# Criminal contortions

- ISPs, OTTs & licensees bear responsibility to remove fake news related to Covid-19 from their platforms immediately after identified as such
- Any person who publishes any statement, through any medium, including social media, with the intention to deceive any other person about Covid-19 commits an offence
- A person who knowingly publishes information that is false in print, broadcast, data or over a computer system, that is calculated or results in panic, chaos, or violence, or which is likely to discredit the reputation of a person commits an offence
- Broadcasters shall ensure no harmful, libelous, threatening, or hate user-generated content (UGC) is aired & avoid obscenity, indecency, and spam in UGC & ensure UGC is accurate and reliable





# How to identify 'fake news'

- Author – Who wrote this?
- Source – Where does this come from?
- Plausibility – Can I verify the facts & information?
- Style – Is the style objective & clear or emotive & poorly-written?
- Images – Are these designed to shock, decontextualised? (Reverse image search)
- Could this be a hoax? Does it ask me to share widely?



## HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS



### CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



### READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?



### CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?



### SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.



### CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.



### IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.



### CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.



### ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

IFLA  
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions







# PesaCheck in action...



PesaCheck

## THE FACT CHECKING PROCESS







# 5G Counter-propaganda



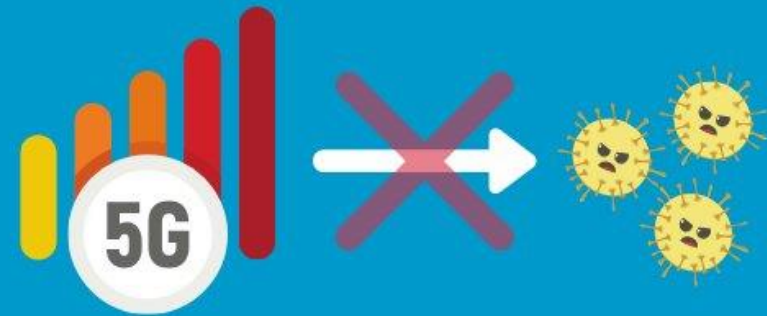
Viruses cannot travel on radio waves/mobile networks.

COVID-19 is spreading in many countries that do not have 5G mobile networks.

COVID-19 is spread through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks.

People can also be infected by touching a contaminated surface and then their eyes, mouth or nose.

**FACT:**  
5G mobile networks  
**DO NOT** spread COVID-19



World Health Organization

#Coronavirus #COVID19

8 April 2020



# Concluding thoughts

- Wide variety of types, forms & formats of misinformation & disinformation
- Impossible to prevent, eradicate
- Wide range of possible responses & interventions
- Balance between ex-ante interventions and ex-post actions
- Trade-off between human rights & enforcement





# Thank you...



[Charley@ICT-Policy.Africa](mailto:Charley@ICT-Policy.Africa)



*Charley Lewis ICT*